The Governor
The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor
The Honourable KEN LAY, AO, APM

The ministry

Premier. ................................................................. The Hon. DM Andrews, MP
Deputy Premier and Minister for Education. ....................... The Hon. JA Merlino, MP
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Industrial Relations. ......................... The Hon. TH Pallas, MP
Minister for Transport Infrastructure. ............................... The Hon. JM Allan, MP
Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support .................. The Hon. BA Carroll, MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and Minister for Solar Homes ............................... The Hon. L D’Ambrosio, MP
Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers ........................................... The Hon. LA Donnellan, MP
Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Equality and Minister for Creative Industries .................................. The Hon. MP Foley, MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Workplace Safety .................. The Hon. J Hennessy, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Ports and Freight .... The Hon. MM Horne, MP
Special Minister of State, Minister for Priority Precincts and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs .......................... The Hon. GW Jennings, MLC
Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and Minister for Suburban Development ............ The Hon. M Kairouz, MP
Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services. ........ The Hon. J Mikakos, MLC
Minister for Water and Minister for Police and Emergency Services ... The Hon. LM Neville, MP
Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and Minister for Racing ............... The Hon. MP Pakula, MP
Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, and Minister for Fishing and Boating ......................... The Hon. JL Pulford, MLC
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Veterans .......................... The Hon. RD Scott, MP
Minister for Local Government and Minister for Small Business The Hon. A Somyurek, MLC
Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Resources ............................. The Hon. J Symes, MLC
Minister for Training and Skills, and Minister for Higher Education ... The Hon. GA Tierney, MLC
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Youth .............................. The Hon. G Williams, MP
Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs ........................................ The Hon. RW Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary .......................................................... Ms M Thomas, MP
Legislative Council committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee
Mr Barton, Mr Elasmar, Mr Erdogan, Mr Finn, Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur and Mr Quilty.
Participating members: Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Davis, Mr Limbrick, Mr Meddick, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Rich-Phillips and Ms Wooldridge.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee
Mr Atkinson, Ms Bath, Mr Bourman, Mr Hayes, Mr Limbrick, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Dr Ratnam, Ms Taylor and Ms Terpstra.
Participating members: Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Davis, Mrs McArthur and Mr Quilty.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee
Ms Garrett, Dr Kieu, Ms Lovell, Ms Maxwell, Mr Ondarchie, Dr Ratnam and Ms Vaghela.
Participating members: Mr Barton, Ms Bath, Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Erdogan, Mr Grimley, Mr Limbrick, Mr O’Donohue and Mr Quilty.

Privileges Committee
Mr Atkinson, Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Elasmar, Mr Grimley, Mr Jennings, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing and Ms Tierney.

Procedure Committee
The President, the Deputy President, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Dr Kieu, Ms Patten, Ms Pulford and Ms Symes.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee
Council: Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Jennings, Ms Symes and Ms Wooldridge.
Assembly: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.

Electoral Matters Committee
Council: Mr Atkinson, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell and Mr Quilty.
Assembly: Ms Blandthorn, Ms Hall, Dr Read and Ms Spence.

House Committee
Council: The President (ex officio), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Ms Pulford and Ms Stitt.
Assembly: The Speaker (ex officio), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell and Ms Staley.

Integrity and Oversight Committee
Council: Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.
Assembly: Mr Halse, Mr McGhie, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor and Mr Wells.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee
Council: Ms Stitt.
Assembly: Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr D O’Brien, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Riordan and Ms Vallence.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee
Council: Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur, Ms Patten and Ms Taylor.
Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Ms Kilkenny.

Heads of parliamentary departments
Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan
Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young
Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Mr P Lochert
MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

President
The Hon. SL LEANE

Deputy President
The Hon. WA LOVELL

Acting Presidents
Mr Bourman, Mr Elasmar, Mr Gepp, Mr Melhem, Ms Patten

Leader of the Government
The Hon. GW JENNINGS

Deputy Leader of the Government
The Hon. J SYMES

Leader of the Opposition
The Hon. DM DAVIES

Deputy Leader of the Opposition
Ms G CROZIER

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¹ Resigned 17 June 2019
² Appointed 15 August 2019

Party abbreviations

AJP—Animal Justice Party; ALP—Labor Party; DHJP—Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party; FPRP—Fiona Patten’s Reason Party; Greens—Australian Greens; Ind—Independent; LDP—Liberal Democratic Party; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals; SA—Sustainable Australia; SFFP—Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party; TMP—Transport Matters Party
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Wednesday, 19 February 2020

The PRESIDENT (Hon. SL Leane) took the chair at 9.34 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The PRESIDENT (09:35): On behalf of the Victorian state Parliament I acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of this land which has served as a significant meeting place of the First People of Victoria. I acknowledge and pay respect to the elders of the Aboriginal nations in Victoria past, present and emerging and welcome any elders and members of the Aboriginal communities who may visit or participate in the events or proceedings of the Parliament.

Petitions

Following petitions presented to house:

WIRE ROPE BARRIERS

TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the proposal by VicRoads to install wire rope barriers on the Princes Highway, from Panmure to Deakin University, Warrnambool Campus.

The Transport Accident Commission has recently informed property owners that wire-rope barriers will be installed on the Princes Highway over two sections: in the centre of a dual-lane section between Deakin University and Allansford; and in the centre of a single-lane section between Allansford and Panmure.

We totally oppose this wire-rope installation and know that primary producers, transport and logistics operators, have made known their concerns about the questionable safety aspect and justification for the proposed installation. In 1972, good farming land was compulsorily acquired and unwillingly sold to enable the construction of a dual carriageway in this area. We believe this remains the obvious and only solution to any road safety concerns in this section of the Princes Highway.

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Minister for Roads, to abandon this proposed barrier installation, and instead duplicate the highway in accordance with the justification provided in the 1972 compulsory land acquisition.

By Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (4309 signatures).

Laid on table.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT LAWS

Legislative Council Electronic Petition

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that trees are crucial for keeping urban areas cool, but in some of Melbourne’s development hot-spots, we are increasingly surrounded by concrete surfaces. We believe that green streets are crucial if Melbourne’s neighbourhoods are going to remain liveable, especially in summer heat waves.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council pass new laws on urban development so that all new building developments in the metropolitan regions of Melbourne are accompanied by tree-planting to green our streets.

By Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (32 signatures).

Laid on table.
PAPERS

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 19 February 2020

Papers

PAPERS

Tabled by Clerk:


Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notices given.

NOTICES OF INTENTION TO MAKE STATEMENTS

Notices given.

Members statements

GIPPSLAND RANGES ROLLER DERBY

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (09:39): It was an absolute joy to join the Gippsland Ranges Roller Derby team along with supporters and friends from the Latrobe Valley Authority and the Traralgon & Districts Agricultural Society to officially open the new facilities at Traralgon, formerly a chook shed. There has been so much work that has gone into making this the new home of the Gippsland Ranges Roller Derby team. Unfortunately, however, despite the fact that this grant was in fact at the very top of the list as assessed by Sports Australia on merit—receiving 98 out of 100 points—it was knocked back from receiving a grant, and in fact others that were not eligible and did not demonstrate merit but fell within marginal seats were the ones which scooped the pool for commonwealth funding. What an absolute disgrace from the now-ousted minister Bridget McKenzie, who was only too happy to meddle at the expense of clubs like the Gippsland Ranges Roller Derby, who were at the top of the list for assessment.

Merit is something that those in the coalition are allergic to. It is something which, despite the fact that they rely on quotas to secure the deputy prime ministership, they are only too happy to make sure that hardworking volunteers in our communities miss out on all the time. I am looking forward to Darren Chester stepping up within cabinet to deliver the money to actually provide these female-friendly and gender-neutral toilets to this facility, as they so richly deserve.

BUSHFIRES

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (09:41): I would like to acknowledge the wonderful, wonderful acts of kindness and generosity in response to the shocking fires in the eastern part of our state. There have been acts small and large, and no act should go unnoticed. Today the response from the Heyfield Lions Club deserves special mention. The Heyfield Lions Club are just an amazing group of people. They are helping out Gippsland farmers—our food suppliers and the backbone of our community. For many years they have been assisting Gippsland farmers through the drought that has sadly impacted our region. The face of Heyfield Lions Club’s Supporting Gippsland Farmers project is the hardworking and much-respected Ray Akers. This project allows farmers to feed and provide fodder for animals, provide vouchers for their farmers and, importantly, an opportunity to sit down and have a conversation with people who really understand the needs of those farmers on the ground.

Throughout the fires the Heyfield Lions have stepped up and supported Gippsland farmers. They have worked alongside other great organisations such as Gippsland Farmer Relief, spearheaded by Melissa Ferguson; St Vinnies; the CWA; Lifeline; Rural Aid; the Victorian Farmers Federation; and Need for Feed. When I was in Orbost at the height of the fires the Need for Feed trucks came through there. They were a magnificent sight, and I congratulate them. Congratulations to Ray and the Heyfield Lions Club.
CHINESE NEW YEAR

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:43): I was very proud to represent the Minister for Multicultural Affairs at the 24th annual Chinese New Year charity gala ball, hosted by the Australian Chinese Events Committee. This is their signature event, which brings together 500 of the leading members of the community in celebration and in support of a charitable cause. This year they were raising money for a hospice bed for Very Special Kids and a blanket warmer for the Royal Melbourne Hospital, which is really what this organisation is all about. The members of this organisation are the Australia Chinese Friendship Association, the Chinese Fellowship of Victoria Inc., the Chinese Association of Victoria, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Victoria Inc., the Chinese Professional and Business Association, the Chinese Youth Society of Melbourne, the Elderly Chinese Home Inc., the Hong De Lion Dance Association and the North Eastern Melbourne Chinese Association. Not only was it a really beautiful event—and I must also acknowledge David Wong, the president, and Alice Lai, the honourable secretary, and also other members of Parliament from the Liberals represented there as well—it was really, at this very critical time when we are unfortunately seeing such sadness in the Chinese community, with people walking away in droves from the restaurants, wonderful. Everyone turned up. There were 500 people eating a beautiful Chinese meal together and remembering we are all one.

SCOTTY JAMES

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (09:44): My members statement today is about a young man called Scotty James. I am very pleased to extend my congratulations to this young Warrandyte snowboarder, who has just completed an incredible feat of 10 consecutive wins at half-pipe snowboarding championships around the world. At the end of last month, while his family was battling scorching days and golf-ball-sized hailstones, Scotty won the World Cup half-pipe competition in Switzerland and then went on to his 10th consecutive win in a major competition by taking the prize at the X Games in Colorado.

Scotty is a three-time Winter Olympian and attended his first winter Olympics at just 15 years of age, making him Australia’s youngest male Olympian in 50 years and the youngest male competitor at the 2010 Vancouver games. He won the bronze medal in the men’s half-pipe competition at the 2018 Winter Olympics, and given his current form we will be watching closely for more gold at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

SUNSHINE SKILLS HUB

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan) (09:45): What a joy it was to attend the opening of the Sunshine Skills Hub with the Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education, the Honourable Gayle Tierny, and my colleagues from the western suburbs the member for St Albans, Natalie Suleyman, and Western Metropolitan MP Cesar Melhem.

The 11th of February is the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, celebrating full and equal access to and participation in science for women and girls. The Sunshine Skills Hub is complete thanks to the investment of the Andrews Labor government, and will be used by students from the first semester this year. It offers health and community service courses and will include a centre for health and wellbeing, an innovation centre and a tech shop facility. Features of the new campus include a student hub, a centre for wellbeing, an innovation centre and tech shop facility to focus on working with industry in Melbourne’s west. It is a very impressive facility. It is about investing in the future of young people in Melbourne’s west and giving them access to world-class education to give them the skills they will need for the jobs of the future. I could not be prouder.

MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:46): I want to speak about the hypocrisy of the Andrews Labor government. What a bunch of hypocrites they are, especially the Premier, Daniel Andrews, and his Minister for Health and strong factional ally, Jenny Mikakos. What a shame it was
yesterday that we were shut down in this place for wanting to ask legitimate questions about the health minister. I just want to remind people about the hypocrisy that comes from the government in relation to what the Premier has previously said in relation to people that have had concerns about enjoying themselves. The Premier called on Denis Napthine and Kim Wells, a then minister, on 9 May 2017— and he continued to say this:

Did you call them in to apologise that while they were out on the fireground, you were at the tennis?

He said Mr Wells was enjoying himself as emergency services workers put their lives on the line in January 2014. Ms Mikakos said:

It was Mary Wooldridge’s job to manage the emergency response and support the community in Morwell …

She put out a press release in 2014. Surely it is the health minister’s responsibility to manage the health services in those bushfire-affected areas. It is completely hypocritical of this government to go out and criticise, and I would say she was missing in action. It is a habit of hers, with Peter Marshall saying these people have got a habit of being missing in action, like when the mass escape from Malmmsbury happened when she was youth justice minister. The hypocrisy of this government is astounding. \(\text{Time expired}\)

AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

Dr KIEU (South Eastern Metropolitan) (09:48): On Australia Day this year Melbourne’s south-east boasted eight new OAM recipients and one new AM recipient. Everything from veterans affairs to health, education, food services and even waterskiing saw deserving recipients receive nods for their hard work. Congratulations to all the awardees. Victoria’s community relies on many aspects to be successful, and one that is often overlooked is the vital importance of volunteers. Without the work and effort that generous people, and these awardees, have put in to helping their fellow Victorians thousands of those in need would not receive adequate support.

THI TRANG NGUYEN

Dr KIEU: On another matter and further to these milestones, I want to congratulate Mrs Thi Trang Nguyen on recently celebrating her 103rd birthday. Mrs Nguyen was born in Vietnam in February 1917. To put that in perspective, World War I was still a year and a half away from ending, Russia was still a monarchy and Australia was headed by Prime Minister Billy Hughes. This is such a wonderful achievement and furthermore a testament to Melbourne’s world-class healthcare system. Congratulations to Mrs Nguyen; I look forward to welcoming many more birthdays.

POPULATION GROWTH

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (09:50): I recently received a letter and a booklet from respected Australian entrepreneur and environmentalist Dick Smith. Much like the Sustainable Australia party, he is very concerned about Australia’s booming population numbers and the pursuit by the major political parties of never-ending growth. The booklet, called *Climate Change Is Not the Biggest Threat to the World’s Environment …*, is written by Kevin Casey, a wildlife and environment writer of some repute. According to Kevin the biggest threat to the world’s environment is overpopulation, and I agree with him.

As Mr Casey states, in two decades the earth’s oceans will contain more plastic than fish. This is not caused by climate change; this is caused by way too many people consuming way too many resources. Climate change is a legitimate and deeply concerning crisis, but it is often bewildering how people can finger-point at corporations, motorists or litterers and yet somehow miss the 7.7 billion elephants in the room. I am a firm believer in combating climate change and pollution, but it is futile and unrealistic to think that we are going to make any difference while we support our current rate of global population growth. Climate change is a function of population growth. Global population growth needs to be addressed. And closer to home, Australia’s contribution to stabilising our population growth and to combating climate change must urgently be addressed.
MEMBERS STATEMENTS
Wednesday, 19 February 2020
Legislative Council

NORTH MELBOURNE CHILDREN’S CENTRE

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) (09:51): On 13 February 2020 I was proud to represent the Minister for Education, the Honourable James Merlino. It was my pleasure to attend on his behalf the launch of the early childhood Mandarin language program at the North Melbourne Children’s Centre, located in Howard Street. Interestingly most of the children attending the centre eventually transition to North Melbourne Primary School. The early childhood centre in North Melbourne is the oldest childhood centre in Melbourne, having started its life as a creche in 1903. The children, all aged four, are utterly delightful. It was my pleasure to meet the dedicated teachers and staff, and of course the centre’s coordinator, Ms Maree Rabach.

AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

Mr ELASMAR: On another matter, I would like to congratulate all the recipients of the 2020 New Year’s honours awards. There were several in my own electorate who received medals for their outstanding service to the community. I know that many of them did not seek out this recognition of their humanitarian activities, but it is good to see the government’s encouragement and appreciation of these good works by ordinary Australians.

KE DESIGN

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (09:53): I had the pleasure of touring the Brunswick workshop of KE Design last week. KE is a business making a real difference in my community, providing 14 jobs for people living with a disability. They make brilliant tea towels and homewares; however, it was their range of beach towels that were my favourite. They tell me that they are sand repellent, but I have not had the opportunity to test that yet. I would like to thank the director, Michael Krutsch, and his team of fabulous workers for their warm reception.

RELEAF CLINICS

Ms PATTEN: I was also excited to be at the opening of Melbourne’s first standalone medicinal cannabis clinic and dispensary in St Kilda last week with founder Gary Mackenzie. The Releaf clinic is a dispensary that will be complete with doctors who specialise in prescribing medicinal cannabis and other complementary medicine services. They will also sell a range of sustainable hemp products.

MELBOURNE QUEER FILM FESTIVAL

Ms PATTEN: Very briefly, I also attended the launch of the Melbourne Queer Film Festival program. Head honcho Maxwell Gratton and his team have put together a cracker of a program with a lot of local content. This is their 30th year, so I really encourage all of you to get along to see some of the wonderful programs that the Melbourne Queer Film Festival has brought to us. It is the largest in Australia; in fact it is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. Well done to Maxwell Gratton and his team.

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Ms VAGHELA (Western Metropolitan) (09:54): I had the pleasure of attending the great Lunar New Year celebrations organised by the Point Cook Cultural Community. I was joined by many distinguished guests and the multicultural community of Point Cook. Point Cook is one of the fastest growing suburbs, and it is now the home to many people of Chinese descent. The lunar festival featured lion dances, a dragon dance and beautiful performances of traditional dance and music. The Lunar New Year celebration was an outstanding way to highlight the contributions of Chinese people, including in the arenas of arts, sciences and education. I wish to thank Bob Fairclough and the Point Cook Cultural Community for organising the amazing celebration. It was the fourth celebration of the Lunar New Year, and I hope to join the community for the festival in the coming years.
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BUSHFIRES

Ms VAGHELA: On another note, I visited the Virgin Mary Mosque in Hoppers Crossing with Sarah Connolly, the member for Tarneit. The event was organised to raise funds for the bushfire-affected communities. The community showed generosity and showed us that the Victorian community, regardless of their faith or cultural background, is together. Through working together we will be able to make a quick and robust recovery. Thanks to Imam Abdulla Hawari and his team for organising the event. I thank the community for its commitment.

ST JEROME’S LANEWAY FESTIVAL

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (09:56): St Jerome’s Laneway Festival is one of the most anticipated events in the Victorian festival calendar, providing a platform for local talent and international acts. Founded by Jerome Borazio and Danny Rogers in 2005, the festival has continued to grow. From its humble beginnings in the backstreets of Melbourne to moving to Footscray Park in 2019, it is now attended by 18,000 visitors. With the attendance age lowered to 16, it has also become a place for our youth to enjoy with their families. Footscray Park is one of the largest and most intact examples of an Edwardian park in Australia. The 15-hectare park is located on the southern bank of the Maribyrnong River in its namesake, Footscray. It feels the perfect home. We witnessed an inspiring welcome to country from Uncle Larry Walsh, a local Aboriginal cultural leader. His opening speech encouraged us to start the conversation about our future. As the sun and music bounced off the Maribyrnong River, I felt how lucky we are to have such a fabulous festival in our own backyard.

I hope that at Laneway and many other festivals in Victoria we will see better support for waste management systems, especially discouraging single-use plastics. Co-founder Jerome Borazio assures me they are working towards a better waste solution for their future festivals. I thank the Laneway Festival, Maribyrnong City Council, local businesses and volunteers for working together and choosing the west as their home.

JJ McMAHON MEMORIAL KINDERGARTEN

Mr ERDOGAN (Southern Metropolitan) (09:57): Last week I had the privilege of visiting JJ McMahon Memorial Kindergarten in Kew with my colleague in the other place the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education, Sonya Kilkenny. We were very pleased to be able to announce $99,440 of funding to enhance the capabilities of these fantastic facilities. This community kindergarten consistently exceeds the national quality standard and has been serving the local community for over 70 years. It is named for John ‘JJ’ McMahon, whose wife, Margaret McMahon, was a trailblazer in early childhood development as a founding member of the nursery school movement. The funding provided by the Andrews government will increase capacity for classes, allow for extended hours and generally provide a more flexible and inclusive learning space that teachers, parents and children will benefit from in the years to come. I would like to particularly thank the kindergarten’s president, Rebecca Stambanis; Michelle Borg, who prepared the grant application; educational director Catherine Waters; and all the parents and children who joined us at the announcement for making us feel so welcome.

BUCHAN CUP

Ms GARRETT (Eastern Victoria) (09:59): It is always great to back a winner at the races, but it is even more special to back the winner of the Buchan Cup, which is exactly what I did on Saturday. But I must say it was the Minister for Racing’s tip that got me home. It was terrific to attend the day with my colleague the Minister for Racing, and Mr Bull and Ms Staley in the other place.

Of course there was always going to be something special about the 133rd Buchan Cup in that it was run with a backdrop of devastating bushfires. As we know, this area was hit hard by the recent devastation. Many homes were lost and many farms were damaged. We also remember Mick Roberts, who tragically lost his life in the blaze. But after all this devastation and tragedy the amazing people
of Buchan and surrounds turned out for their event of the year, and the rest of Victoria turned out with them. It was the largest ever crowd at the cup.

Big congratulations to the Buchan and Gelantipy Racing Club and thanks to everybody who made the trip there to support the community. Biggest thanks should go to the Sandy family, who saved the race track from the fires. Peter Sandy and his son, Michael, along with Mitchell Hynes, went to the racetrack at the height of the fires and managed to beat back the flames to save the jockeys rooms, the stalls and the bar. They are the ones that deserve the credit for the success of Saturday, and I thank them one and all.

SHEILA DRUMMOND

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (10:00): I rise to pay tribute to one of Woodend’s most active and committed residents, Sheila Drummond, who sadly passed away over the weekend. Sheila was a driving force behind the Woodend Winter Arts Festival. Her contacts in the literary world were impeccable and contributed greatly to the programming each year. It is no surprise that anyone who has been associated with the festival has taken the news of Sheila’s passing very hard. The festival is a huge drawcard for the region, generating scores of visitors, and it will forever be a legacy of Sheila and her dedication to the arts and to Woodend.

Again, her work for and membership of the Friends of Macedon Ranges Libraries was fuelled by a commitment to learning, to the arts and to maintaining the quality of local libraries, which in the Macedon Ranges especially are such a key component of the local community for young and old alike. And of course there was Sheila’s absolute dedication to the Woodend branch of the ALP, from holding executive positions to volunteering and fundraising.

Sheila was a regular visitor to my office for the various functions we hold, and she was always up for a chat. Sheila was always vibrant and gracious, with a sharp wit. She was both positive and encouraging to those that she met as well as having a deep connection to the Woodend community. My deepest condolences to her family and friends, especially to her beloved husband and former Woodend ALP branch president, Don. Comrade, we stand with you at this very difficult time. Vale, Sheila Drummond.

MELBOURNE AIRPORT RAIL LINK

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (10:02): (By leave) I want to draw the house’s attention to the need for the Melbourne Airport rail link. This is a crucial piece of infrastructure. It is something the coalition funded in 2014–15 but was zapped by the new government that came to power. Now we face a very important set of historic decisions. The risk is the state government goes with a half-baked airport link that either forces changes at Sunshine or steals capacity from the western region—from Ballarat, from Geelong, from the Bendigo line, from the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines as they will be—and uses Melbourne Metro 1 capacity. It will already be over capacity when it is built finally, and much over budget. In 2025–26 or whenever it opens—after time and over budget—it will already be over capacity. And they want to twist some of those lines towards the airport rather than building new infrastructure.

The tunnels are important. The focus on actually getting new, fast infrastructure is important. It means not only a fast trip to the airport, a dedicated rail line to the airport, but also capacity for regional rail lines to enable fast regional rail to the regions—to Geelong, to Ballarat, to Bendigo and ultimately to Shepparton too. This is the way we have got to go, not a half-baked, stripped-down approach by Labor to cover up its budget problems.
NOTICES OF INTENTION TO MAKE STATEMENTS

The PRESIDENT (10:04): Members, I did not follow my usual practice to check in speaking items if there were any further speakers, and when we went to notices of intention to make a statement I duded Mrs McArthur. So I seek leave to go back to notices of intention to make a statement, and I call Mrs McArthur.

Notice given.

Rulings by the Chair

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AMENDMENT (OUT OF HOME CARE AGE) BILL 2020

The PRESIDENT (10:04): Before I call Mr O'Donohue for the first item of general business, I appreciate I did have a query from a member on Monday regarding Ms Patten’s item—one of her items—in general business in terms of a concern that it could be considered a money bill. So I just want to make the following ruling on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Out of Home Care Age) Bill 2020, Ms Patten’s private members bill, which is listed as order of the day 3 on the notice paper. I do not know if that is correct.

Some members have raised concerns that the bill’s intention to extend eligibility for out-of-home care may have implications on the Consolidated Fund and therefore it cannot be introduced into the Legislative Council pursuant to the Constitution Act 1975. In consultation with the clerks I have formed the view that Ms Patten’s bill does not directly appropriate the Consolidated Fund.

The bill is to extend out-of-home care for young people under care of the state up to the age of 21 years. Although this may cause an increased cost to the agency in providing out-of-home care services, this is simply a potential budgetary issue that agencies continuously confront when accommodating shifting priorities and increases in demand for services.

It is important to note that the out-of-home care scheme already exists. This bill merely increases the potential cohort of people who may choose to access this service.

The fact that a bill would have the potential effect of increasing the workload of a department does not mean that an appropriation from the Consolidated Fund is legally required. Ms Patten’s bill does not expressly appropriate the Consolidated Fund.

Many amending bills that work around the edges of policy in a principal act and which are considered by this house fit into this category, and previous rulings by the President in the 57th Parliament are consistent with this view. Previous examples of instances where such rulings were made in the 57th Parliament include the Residential Tenancies Amendment (Housing Standards) Bill 2013; proposed amendments to the Courts Legislation Miscellaneous Amendments Bill 2014; and the Sentencing Amendment (Historical Homosexual Convictions Expungement) Bill 2014.

I also consider that strictly ruling against a bill with a potential cost issue for a department or agency in relation to an existing program would be an undue restraint on the ability of members to bring legislation and amendments into this house. So I, accordingly, consider Ms Patten’s bill in order.
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Bills

SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT (MOVE-ON LAWS) BILL 2019

Statement of compatibility

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) (10:08): I am pleased, in accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, to table a statement of compatibility for the Summary Offences Amendment (Move-on Laws) Bill 2019:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Summary Offences Amendment (Move-on Laws) Bill 2019 (Bill).

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

Overview

The Bill is a Bill for an Act to amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 to provide for certain move-on powers and related exclusion orders and for other purposes.

Changes to move-on powers and the related exclusion orders

The bill expands the grounds on which the move-on powers may be used. A person who is directed to move on from a public place by police officers or PSOs must leave that public place and is prohibited from returning to it for up to 24 hours. The related exclusion orders also prohibit a person from entering a particular public place but for up to 12 months.

Human Rights Issues

These amendments do impose a limitation on an individual’s right to move freely within Victoria and in certain circumstances, limit the rights to freedom of expression (section 15), and peaceful assembly and freedom of association (section 16). However, these limitations are consistent with explicit or implicit internal limits on the rights or are reasonable and justified under section 7(2) of the charter act, as all of these charter act rights can be subject to restrictions, including to protect public order, public safety and the rights and freedoms of others.

This bill strikes a fair balance between the rights of individuals to protest and the rights of the broader community to go about their daily lives free of undue harassment, fear or intimidation.

I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, the limitation is reasonable.

Hon Edward O’Donohue MLC
Member for Eastern Victoria Region
Shadow Attorney-General

Second reading

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) (10:08): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Today, the Victorian Liberal-Nationals are proud to be introducing the Summary Offences Amendment (Move-on Laws) Bill 2019, a private members bill which will not only reintroduce but further strengthen the move-on laws which were first introduced under the former Napthine government and repealed by the Andrews government in 2015.

In 2014, the former Napthine coalition government passed new legislation strengthening Victoria’s existing move-on laws, providing Victoria Police with wideranging powers to break up disruptive protests and order individuals to leave an area to ensure the safety of the community.

In one of their first actions after taking office, the Andrews Labor government repealed the coalition’s changes to Victoria’s move-on laws and in doing so has left Victoria with weak and ineffective move-on laws and removed a key tool for Victoria Police to manage disruptive individuals and protests that threaten the good order and safety of the community.
In recent times, Victorians have seen a number of highly disruptive and dangerous protests which have held our CBD to ransom. Such protests have included:

- the ‘Extinction Rebellion’ protests, a week-long series of protests occurring throughout the Melbourne CBD where protesters deliberately blocked traffic and key intersections causing significant delays to commuters. These protests left taxpayers with a $3 million bill for Victoria Police’s time and resources and diverted hundreds of officers away from general duties;

- the International Mining and Resources Conference (IMARC) protest, a four-day-long protest outside the IMARC event at the Melbourne Convention Centre. Protesters used swarming tactics, violence, threats and intimidation on convention attendees and the general public.

It has been reported that Victoria Police has confirmed that of the more than 70 individuals arrested at the IMARC conference, three were subsequently rearrested after returning to the protest.

It is simply unacceptable that Victoria has a situation of revolving-door protests whereby an offender can be arrested in the morning, bailed by midday and then back on the street, at the very same protest again in the afternoon—and that is what these reintroduced move-on provisions are intended to deal with.

Specifically, this bill will reintroduce the elements of Victoria’s move-on laws repealed by the Andrews Labor government in 2015, including:

1. reintroducing the below reasons why a move-on order may be given by Victoria Police or PSOs:
   - the person has or persons have committed, within the last 12 hours, an offence in the public place; or
   - the conduct of the person or persons is causing a reasonable apprehension of violence in another person; or
   - the person is or the persons are causing, or likely to cause, an undue obstruction to another person or persons or traffic; or
   - the person is or persons are present for the purpose of unlawfully procuring or supplying, or intending to unlawfully procure or supply, a drug of dependence within the meaning of section 4 of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981; or
   - the person is or persons are impeding or attempting to impede another person from lawfully entering or leaving premises or part of premises;

2. empower police and PSOs to arrest a person who is in contravention of a move-on order without a warrant;

3. require a recipient of a move-on order to provide their name and address if requested;

4. remove the exemption to move-on orders relating to:
   - demonstrating or protesting about a particular issue;
   - speaking, bearing or otherwise identifying with a banner, placard or sign or otherwise behaving in a way that is apparently intended to publicise the person’s view about a particular issue;
5. reintroduce strengthened exclusion orders, which will feature:
   • where the move-on arrest was made in relation to a known, ongoing protest or demonstration:
     the exclusion order must be sought for a period no shorter than the duration of an ongoing known protest or demonstration;

6. reinstate the penalty of up to two years imprisonment for breaches of an exclusion order.

This bill is an important measure for the community safety of all Victorians by providing Victoria Police once again with the powers they need to break up disruptive and dangerous protests and keep the worst offenders away from protests in the future.

I commend the bill to the house.

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan) (10:13): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Committees

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Reference

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (10:13): I wish to acknowledge that I am standing upon the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present. I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that air pollution:
   (a) is a national environmental and public health issue;
   (b) costs up to $22 billion each year and contributes to 4880 deaths nationwide each year;
   (c) contributes to many preventable respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological diseases;
   (d) effects are more pronounced in vulnerable groups, including children and the elderly;

(2) further notes that:
   (a) Victoria is positioned to take progressive, practical actions in minimising the impact of air pollution on all Victorians’ health and wellbeing;
   (b) empowering Victorians to reduce air pollution is possible with minimal economic cost or significant amendment to current legislation;

(3) recognises:
   (a) the development of the Victorian air quality strategy;
   (b) that new environment protection legislation will enable the Victorian Environment Protection Authority (EPA) a broader reach in tackling air pollution;
   (c) the collaboration of leading medical and health researchers;

(4) requires the Environment and Planning Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 29 October 2020, on actions to minimise the health impacts of air pollution, including but not limited to:
   (a) statewide practical, real-time, cost-effective mitigation strategies;
   (b) ensuring that Victorian air quality continues to track towards meeting or exceeding current international best practice standards and is enforced;
   (c) the impact of economic and population growth on air pollution and health outcomes;
   (d) strengthening commitments across all Victorian government portfolios to reduce air pollution and minimise the impact on health; and
   (e) any other related matters.
Air pollution is a national, environmental and public health issue. It has taken some of Australia’s darkest days over this summer for many of us just to begin to recognise the dangers and the cost of air pollution to the environment, the economy and our health and wellbeing. Air pollution limits visibility, it degrades the soil and water quality, it harms plants and wildlife and it even degrades historic stone buildings like the one we sit in today.

As extensive research has shown, air pollution negatively affects short-term and long-term human health. The health researchers from around Victoria I have consulted with are quite understandably worried, and today I will share a small part of their research-based concerns. I also stand before you representing the concerns of my community within Western Metropolitan Region and other community members from around the state who also have contacted me. Today I call for an inquiry seeking achievable and practical solutions together with long-term future planning in relation to air pollution.

I recognise air pollution is a national concern, but we are far behind international standards and we cannot wait for the federal government to be ready. Victoria is in a position to take progressive, immediate and practical actions to minimise the impact of air pollution on the health and wellbeing of all Victorians. To vote in support of this inquiry means you would be voting for outcomes that allow Victoria to catch up to international standards for reducing air pollution, for improving the health of our state and for minimising the impacts on our economy. The gains of acting on air pollution far outweigh the cost of not acting.

This summer we witnessed catastrophic fires causing devastating loss to human and animal life and our natural environment as well as billions of dollars of damage to property. For those of us living in areas unaffected directly by fire, the experience of bushfire smoke was intense—indeed a small thing to experience in comparison. However, it led many Victorians to question the quality of the air we breathe, unsure about whether it is safe to go outside and wondering if Australians wearing face masks would become the new norm. The more vulnerable members of our community—pregnant women, children, the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions—were adversely affected. Most Victorians are likely to believe that it was a temporary state, related only to this terrible event. After all, the smoke will eventually clear, and what we hear most often—or what the headlines actually say—is that air quality in Australia is of a high standard. Whilst this is not exactly wrong, it is certainly not true for all.

To fully appreciate the impact of what we are breathing and how it is affecting your health, it is misleading to take a look at the air quality of the whole country; you need to look at what you are breathing where you actually live, play and work. While Australia scores high in air quality as a country, according to Yale University’s 2018 environmental performance index and the World Bank’s What a Waste database 24 per cent of the Australian population are exposed to unacceptable levels of air pollution. How does this compare to countries with a similar GDP? Well, for New Zealand and Canada, zero per cent of the population are exposed to unsafe levels of air pollution, and in the USA 3.3 per cent of the population. So perhaps you can see that if we focus on the air quality of the whole country rather than the real problem—pollution where people live, work and play—it is possible to misunderstand how serious the problem really is.

A lot of what is most harmful to us in terms of air pollution is invisible and is described within the literature as ‘air pollution particles’. Particles are classified based on their size, ranging from ultrafine at 0.1 micrometres to coarse particles at 10 micrometres. In the middle are fine particles at 2.5 micrometres. For comparison the diameter of a human hair is 70 micrometres—seven times the diameter of course particles.

PM10—coarse particles—are found in plumes of truck smoke. They are unpleasant and will affect vision and breathing, but it is the fine and ultrafine particles that are most hazardous and causing the greatest concern. Tiny particles are found in any source of carbon combustion. They are found in motor vehicle exhausts, petrol and metal refineries, coal-fired power stations for generating electricity,
manufacturing industries, food processing plants, domestic woodfire heaters and of course bushfires. These sources also produce a range of other pollutants and air toxins, including the current gases under federal review: nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and ozone.

Particles mix, and secondary particles are formed from the toxic mix, causing a range of impacts that can differ according to their composition. When particles enter your body through your nose and mouth they penetrate your lungs and the tiny ones enter your bloodstream. Here they cause inflammation of organs, disrupt hormones and alter normal activity of the nervous system, causing damage to nervous tissue. Research clearly links exposure of particle pollution to a number of what are otherwise potentially preventable health problems, including asthma, bronchitis, dementia, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s, obesity and heart disease.

Some particles, particularly those from combustion products, have been shown to cause cancer. One of these is lung adenocarcinoma. It is occurring in an increasing number of young people with no smoking history. This type of lung cancer was very rarely seen in this group until now.

The most recent research is also revealing how air pollution is having the largest negative effect on vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women, the very young and the elderly. In children and unborn babies, air pollution has been shown to reduce lung growth, leading to lifelong implications to their health. In this vulnerable group air pollution causes asthma, is linked to allergic diseases and is associated with poor outcomes such as premature birth and low birth weight. The poor health outcomes for children and babies exposed to air pollution are similar to the effects of smoking cigarettes.

For my inner-west community, as well as me, air pollution is not new and not a temporary thing that will pass in a few days. Every day we breathe it and it is costing us our health and wellbeing. Fifteen years ago Maribyrnong City Council, within Western Metropolitan Region, set up the Maribyrnong emissions group, following a concern related to transport-related emissions. I co-chaired this group, motivated by the West Footscray-Tottenham rail yards—20 railway lines deep, diesel engines idling 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The group was also concerned with truck emissions, especially those travelling along Francis Street in Yarraville. The rail yards moved due to a workplace accident, effectively resolving this source of those emissions by default. Residents have continued to fight the reduction of truck emissions with little success. Meanwhile the population’s health within this region is seriously declining.

Moving forward to the present, the City of Maribyrnong has close to 22 000 trucks travelling through the residential streets each day, and about half of these trucks have no pollution controls. I want to say that again, no pollution controls—yes, old dirty trucks that are banned in the UK and other OECD countries. I was alarmed to learn that the area also has the highest number of hospital admissions for respiratory ailments in Victoria for young people aged three to 19. The rate is 70 per cent above the state average and up to 171 per cent above the Australian average.

I have also been given access to unpublished research, soon be released, showing that across metropolitan Melbourne, the City of Maribyrnong has some of highest hospital admissions for respiratory disease, stroke, hypertension and heart failure—diseases that research strongly links to air pollution. Perhaps most surprisingly, Maribyrnong is populated mainly by young families, and these are diseases that usually present later in life. For example, the City of Maribyrnong has low obesity rates, a higher socioeconomic status and actually lower smoking rates than the national average.

We cannot continue to ignore these vulnerable hotspots. They do not just exist in my region. They also exist anywhere there is traffic or industry. As I said, a staggering 24 per cent of our population is exposed to unacceptable levels of air pollution.

Part of the call for this inquiry is to strengthen commitments across all Victorian government portfolios to reduce air pollution and minimise the impact on health. But the recommendations extend beyond environmental policy to other portfolios such health and planning—and wherever the inquiry recommends. For example, researchers, academics and community members have expressed concern
over the lack of consideration given to the exposure of vulnerable groups to air pollution in relation to the placement of their childcare centres, schools or elderly care homes. In my area, health experts and community members are calling on the government to ensure a new childcare facility does not go ahead on the corner of Francis Street and Williamstown Road, one of the biggest hotspots. Children are particularly vulnerable to air pollution, as I discussed earlier, as their little lungs are still developing and they spend more time outside playing.

We need a unified approach. Current practice for conducting air-pollution impact studies happens under a particular project—the building of the West Gate Tunnel or that of a coal-powered station, as an example. In reality, none of these projects exists in isolation; they co-exist with other causes of pollution and health and environmental impacts, and looking at them in isolation is ineffectual. The links of air pollution to unusually high rates of diseases have understandably alarmed our Victorian health experts—and we must take heed. It is time for government ministers across all portfolios to show their unity and leadership by championing health-based standards and strong pollution limits for industry and continuing the move to clean, renewable energies.

On hearing all of this it may come as no surprise that the cost of air pollution to the nation is staggering. It contributes to 4880 deaths nationwide per year—4880 deaths in one year is four times our yearly national road toll. In addition, the national economic burden of air pollution is up to $22 billion each year. Where are our warnings, and what actions are being taken? I hear regularly from my constituents, particularly those that have children, who are moving from my region away from the pollution. Now, is that the best solution—move away? By all accounts this is unlikely to protect us in the long term.

It would seem also that most Victorians are unaware of the problem. A 2007 review of air quality education suggested that Australians are largely lacking in knowledge relating to the health impacts of poor air quality. I recognise that the Victorian government has commenced the development of the Victorian air quality strategy, due in 2019—that is last year—but not yet released for reasons that are unclear. I recognise that Environment Protection Authority Victoria are implementing a number of improvements, including leading a review of national standards for ozone, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide on behalf of the commonwealth, states and territories. And I note that these have not been revised since 1998.

While these initiatives are good to hear, they do not go far enough. There is evidence demonstrating Australia is well behind other countries in terms of initiatives to improve the quality of the air that we breathe and the monitoring of pollution. And we are also behind in enforcement and the consequences of breaching the standards that we already have. The good news is that Victoria is in a position to take progressive, immediate and practical actions to minimise the impact of air pollution on the health and wellbeing of all Victorians by improving the quality of the air that we breathe. An inquiry would allow us to do this properly. An inquiry would measure where we are in relation to international best practice standards and allow experts to offer the government practical, real-time, cost-effective mitigation strategies to meet or indeed exceed international standards. It would also allow us to assess and plan for the impact of economic and population growth on air pollution and health outcomes, to strengthen commitments across all Victorian government portfolios to reduce air pollution and to minimise the impact on health.

The Andrews government has made a promise to put the health of all Victorians above everything else, but a review and a strategy are not enough. We need collective actions that would have a major impact across the state, with an initial focus on the already vulnerable areas. I am not an idealist; I believe in real, practical initiatives that can be implemented now, and it is with this background I approached this debate. It is one that is close to my heart and draws on the best available evidence. Today I ask you to be on the right side of history. I ask for you to consider what we can actually achieve for all Victorians and how this plan would continue to create Victoria’s position as a progressive government that gets things done for the public good. Today I ask you to support this motion calling for an inquiry that is crucial to the health and wellbeing of all Victorians wherever they live, work and play.
Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) (10:35): I also rise to speak on the motion moved by Dr Cumming in relation to her reference to the Environment and Planning Committee which relates to the air pollution issue. That is something I will be supporting, as the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. The only news I have for Dr Cumming is I think the October 2020 deadline might be a bit difficult somewhat because of other inquiries or references already before the committee, but should the house agree to this referral, that is something I am sure will be discussed at the next committee meeting to decide whether or not the 2020 deadline can be met.

As a general principle I am happy to support—and I believe the government is supportive of—the reference by Dr Cumming, because we all know that as a basic human right we are all entitled to clean air. It is vital; that is the only way we can survive in a healthy manner. If you do not have clear air, then you are in trouble. We see this from time to time, like in the recent bushfires where the people of Victoria—not just Victoria but New South Wales, South Australia and part of Queensland—actually went through a very difficult period when we had to put up with unclean air: pollution, smoke. It was horrendous for a lot of people, especially people who suffer from asthma, elderly people and young people. It was a very difficult period. I am not sure what we can put in place to avoid that when we have a disaster like this. We can obviously put some mitigating things in place like staying indoors and putting masks on or prevent the fires from occurring in the first place. Is that going to really happen? Are we going to eliminate bushfires in this state or this country? I do not think we have the power to do that, but we certainly can help to reduce the occurrence of these bushfires and their impact by talking about climate change and looking at how we can do things differently to mitigate against that and reduce the frequency or the severity of bushfires in the state. But the fact remains that we will have bushfires.

We will have warehouse fires like we did in Footscray not long ago and Campbellfield, but we can do more to prevent these things from happening again because they are to a large extent dependent on human error or not error—some of it is probably by design. People are not doing what they are supposed to be doing. People are storing chemicals in residential areas or storing chemicals they are not supposed to have—or at least they are not supposed to have the volume—in their warehouses. To me that is just driven by greed. They are just getting stuff in and storing it there and they do not do it in a safe manner.

The Environment and Planning Committee, when we were doing the waste and recycling inquiry, heard a fair bit of evidence in relation to these fires and in relation to waste, and the message from the community is very clear and the government is responding. We need to deal with these rogue operators, and for one of them in my electorate, in Footscray, we are still doing the clean-up as we speak. We need to deal with these people harshly to make sure these things do not occur again.

The government has done a fair bit in relation to dealing with these sort of operators. I want to spend a bit of time on this because you can all have all the rules you want but if you have not got enforcement mechanisms in place to enforce a particular piece of legislation or rules, you might as well not have those rules. That is why I want to commend the government and Minister D’Ambrosio in relation to the work that has been done in the last few years in relation to reforming the Environment Protection Authority Victoria. We have committed nearly $200 million to actually reform the EPA.

The EPA had a reputation over the years of not having enough resources and being a toothless tiger—they are not able to do much, you cannot get onto them—but let us look at the work that has been done in the last few years. We have got a new team at the EPA. They have been getting new powers which were passed in this house I think in the last Parliament, and we have got to recognise that they are doing far more than they were doing years ago. That is like everything else with restructuring and things changing over time and evolving. The EPA, like other organisations, have suffered over the years from a lack of resources and expertise; even paying people the right amount of money to be able to attract the right scientists and the right specialists to work there was a real issue. Funding I believe is not the problem anymore. They are able to attract the right people so when they go out to a workplace
or they go out to a factory they are able to deal with these sorts of issues in a very professional manner and they have got the expertise so they are able to do it. That is why I am pleased that the EPA is actually now stepping up to the mark and trying to address these issues.

What else can we do about air pollution? Transport I think was one issue in talking about the inner west in relation to trucks. Yes, it is a big issue. The west, for example, in my electorate, is transforming. The population has doubled and it will be tripled. People can say of areas like Yarraville and Newport and some of these areas close to the port that you do not need to live there because there are trucks there all the time. That is not the answer, and we all know that. But there has been a fair bit of improvement over the years to make sure that trucks are not driving through residential streets, and there is a fair bit of work to be done to further improve that to make sure we move away from it. We are not going to stop trucks going into the ports, not in the short term. That is why freight and rail programs have already been put in place to actually have more stuff put on rail to go to the port instead of using trucks.

The next one is, and I want to give the industry a bit of stick here as well, they are moving towards cleaner trucks. There is no reason why we cannot start using cleaner trucks and start phasing out older trucks: just get them off the road and use cleaner trucks. That is happening but I am not sure it is happening at the right rate. We need to fast-track that and make sure we do more of it. That is why we are talking about electric vehicles—the state government is pushing toward encouraging that. We are talking about renewable energy, and we are criticised about renewable energy targets. We are looking for a 50 per cent target by 2030 I believe.

These are all things this government is doing to make sure we reduce the impact on climate change and try to improve air quality. When we have these fire events from time to time they are unfortunately events we have to deal with, and in order to deal with that we need to make sure we have got the right legislation, the right resources put in place to make sure organisations like the EPA are able to enforce that.

Dr Cumming made mention of the air quality statement. My understanding is that it is due to be released shortly. A fair bit of work has been done in that space to put out a Victorian air quality statement. We want to lead the way in Victoria, and on Dr Cumming’s resolution that Victoria can be a progressive state and lead the country, I think we are. We can do better though, and we can be the leaders in Australia—even in the world. I think the credentials of the Andrews Labor government in relation to environmental issues are second to none in the commonwealth of Australia. We are leading the country in relation to addressing issues like climate change, of which air quality is one.

Going back to the EPA, as I said earlier, you have got to have the right regulations and an enforcement system put in place to make sure you enforce them. That is why when the independent inquiry into the EPA was carried out by this government and nearly $200 million invested to make sure we have a modern EPA, I think it was welcome, and all that will start to pay some dividends shortly.

Another review was done by the Victorian Auditor-General in relation to air quality. One of the case studies that the Auditor-General picked up on was the poor air quality arising from the Brooklyn industrial precinct, which he said:

… presents a good example of the complex issues involved in air quality management. It demonstrates how EPA needs to continue developing a close working relationship with councils and other government agencies to address harmful air emissions.

He recognised that there had been some improvement but also made reference to the fact that further improvements could be made. That is the point about various agencies and governments working at various levels to make sure we achieve that outcome.
COMMITTEES

Wednesday, 19 February 2020

The Auditor-General put out five recommendations for the EPA to implement, and my understanding is that the EPA and the Department of Water, Land, Environment and Planning have agreed to actually implement the five recommendations. They are that the EPA:

1. expand its air monitoring network by:
   • reviewing and updating its current Monitoring Plan to reflect its risk-based approach to environmental regulation …
   • in addition to its ambient air quality monitoring for purposes of the NEPM AAQ, designing and implementing …

air quality monitoring et cetera. That has been accepted. Also:

2. improve its reporting on air quality …

3. expand and update its knowledge of Victoria’s air quality—

and I think that is very important; we need to make sure that we have got the data so we can compare apples with apples, not apples with oranges—

   by:
   • completing a comprehensive Victorian air emissions inventory to identify current major point and diffuse sources of air pollution …

Recommendation 4 is to:

work with all relevant councils to address air quality issues at the Brooklyn Industrial Precinct …

And 5 is to:

clarify the roles and responsibilities of relevant Victorian Government agencies with respect to air quality management, and develop protocols to ensure accountabilities are understood and coordination is achieved …

So they are some of the recommendations from the Auditor-General, and they have been accepted by the EPA.

In conclusion, in the last minute I have, I think it is an issue where we can all agree that we can do better in improving our air quality in Victoria. But I think it is important to note that we do have good air quality in comparison—we are not behind the rest of the world. We are doing reasonably well, but we can do heaps better. If we want to be a First World country, then we need to have First World standards, and that is what I think should be driven. It is not about, ‘Let’s go and criticise. There’s a problem here, there’s a problem there. We are doing enough, and that should be good enough’. To me, if we want to be a First World country and a First World state, yes, we should provide our citizens with First World-quality air to breathe and make sure that people do not fall ill and we do not have 4800 people in Australia dying because of respiratory problems. So with these few words I commend the motion to the house.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (10:50): Before commenting on the comments by Dr Cumming I just want to commend Mr Melhem. I did not realise that he had such a tremendous sense of humour. To be congratulating Minister D’Ambrosio on anything would have to be one of the greatest jokes we have ever heard in our lives. It is obvious that the Melbourne comedy festival is not far away, and Mr Melhem is clearly perfecting his act. He has done a good job here today, because if ever there were a minister who should not be on the front bench, who should not be in cabinet, it is Lily D’Ambrosio, because she has stuffed up everything she has touched, and that includes very much the environment portfolio. I think it is very, very sad indeed.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr FINN: We know why she is there; we all know why she is there. She is the right gender and she is the right faction, and that is the only reason that she is there, because she has certainly got no ability.
I want to commend the author of Dr Cumming’s speech. I think it was a very well constructed speech. It covered a lot of areas, but I have to say that I was somewhat disappointed that Dr Cumming continued a pattern which she has well established now, and that pattern is one of ignoring a number of very serious environmental issues in the west of Melbourne. Dr Cumming may well laugh at this, but I can assure her that the people of Werribee, the people of Wyndham, the people of Ravenhall and Caroline Springs and Deer Park are not laughing, and neither are the people of Brooklyn laughing.

I refer specifically to the big issue that of course is causing outrage in the Wyndham community as we speak, and one that will impact on the quality of air for people in Wyndham and surrounds—and of course that is the plan by the government to dump millions of tonnes of toxic soil near schools, near homes, near playgrounds in Wyndham. That is something that I am surprised about, I have to say, that Dr Cumming has not only failed to mention in this motion but indeed failed to mention at all in this house. As a result of the member for Werribee, the Treasurer of the state, sticking his hand up and saying, ‘We’ll take your toxic soil’, it seems the government have decided that that is exactly what they will do, that is exactly the action they will take—they will dump these millions of tonnes of toxic soil, carcinogens, asbestos. It is just an appalling situation.

I have to say the many people who have contacted me, particularly since I put out a phone call on Friday night alerting people to what the government had in mind, have expressed total outrage as to the government’s plan, and not just outrage. They have expressed to me that they feel totally and absolutely betrayed, because many of these people have been Labor voters all their lives. Werribee is a traditional Labor area, as they like to say. In fact Labor like to think that they own Werribee. In fact they like to think that they own the west and, as a result, they can do whatever they like to the people in the west and the people in the west will just roll up and vote for them again next time.

Well, as we know, that did not quite happen at the last election as a result of Mr Pallas’s involvement in attempting to get the youth detention centre. I notice that Minister Mikakos is in the chamber at the moment—she will know all about that. As a result of Mr Pallas’s involvement in that youth training centre debacle, he is now down to a margin of around about 4 per cent. It is one that obviously he thinks he can ride through, because he stuck his hand up and said, ‘Well, we’ll take your waste. We will take all that waste from the West Gate Tunnel Project and we’ll dump it in Wyndham Vale’, as I said, near houses, near schools.

That soil contains some pretty vile stuff, some pretty dreadful stuff, I am told, and it is something that is a direct and immediate threat—or if it is dumped, it will be—to the health of people in Wyndham. And it is not just the people in Wyndham Vale but the people along the route that the trucks will take to dump this soil, because what we are going to see is that this soil obviously will become dust, this dust will come off the trucks and people will be breathing in this stuff.

I asked the Minister for Health—as if I would expect to get an answer from the Minister for Health on this—because this of course is a health matter. Why would the Minister for Health be even mildly interested in a health matter? Why would she be even mildly interested in answering a question on a health matter? Why would she care? Why would she care about the health of the people of Wyndham? That is not something that she is even mildly concerned about, and she displayed that in question time yesterday when I asked her about the impact of this toxic dust that people in Wyndham and surrounds will be inhaling if the government goes ahead with its plan. The minister battened it off. ‘No, look, silly Lily can answer that one,’ she said. She did not want to know. Then I went on to ask if she will provide extra resources to protect the people in Wyndham from the health threat that this toxic soil will pose, and again she did not want to know about it and refused to answer. We know where she is coming from, we know where Tim Pallas is coming from, we know where the Premier is coming from, and the people of Wyndham are a very, very distant last as far as they are concerned. On the list of priorities the people of Wyndham are way, way down the bottom somewhere.

I have to say to you that the many, many people I have spoken to over the last week are infuriated over what the government is proposing. In the last sitting week of this place I did invite other members in...
the west, including Dr Cumming, including Mr Melhem, to join me in opposing this big dump by the government. None—not even one—have contacted me with a desire to fight this plan. It is just incredible, extraordinary, that members of Parliament, supposedly representing the western suburbs of Melbourne, will not stand up for the people of the west of Melbourne on this issue or, it seems, on a number of others. That, I think, is a disgrace. It is a disgrace, and those members who are sitting idly by and not involving themselves in this issue and not wanting to know about it should be ashamed of themselves. They should go into the hall of mirrors and have a good hard look at themselves, because their attitude leaves much to be desired. And let me tell you, it is not lost on the people in Wyndham. They will remember who stood by them at this particular time and they will remember those who turned their backs and walked away. They will remember those who did not want to know, those who said, ‘You can have your toxic soil; we’re not going to help you’. That is something you can be absolutely sure of; that is something you can take to the bank. The people of Wyndham will well remember that. It is I think just beyond understanding that members of Parliament would not stand up for their community; it is beyond understanding.

As I said, I have been approached by many, many hundreds over the last week or so who have expressed their anger over this. It is a very multicultural community in the west, particularly in Wyndham. I have been approached by many of the leaders of multicultural groups in the west who have expressed their concern, because believe it or not it is not just Anglo Celts who are affected by this stuff; it is people of Chinese heritage, it is people of Indian heritage, it is people of a whole range of heritages who will be breathing this stuff, whose health will be affected, and that is something that we all should remember—that every man, woman and child is under threat from this stuff, and these people over here, and Dr Cumming I include, are not interested. She has put up this motion today, but she does not want to know about the Wyndham solution. She can come up and stand in front of me as much as she likes. That is not going to impact me; that is not going to worry me, I can assure you.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmar): Order!

Mr FINN: I was a bit worried she was getting too close there, Acting President, and that is not something that I would encourage. The other issue that Dr Cumming has been completely silent on is the issue of the Ravenhall tip. Now, I have spoken about this on numerous occasions. If you are talking about air pollution, I would have thought the first place you would go would be to talk about what the people in Deer Park, the people in Caroline Springs, the people in Taylors Hill and all that area right through there have been putting up with for years as a result of the Ravenhall tip—the fact that these people cannot open their windows on a warm night because of the stench, because of the smell that they are subjected to from this tip. It astounds me that this would not have been mentioned in Dr Cumming’s moving of this motion, because this is a major issue, not just for the west, I might say, but for all of Melbourne, because this tip, as planned by the government, is to be expanded, and this will be the main dumping ground for all rubbish in Melbourne—all Melbourne’s rubbish.

Ravenhall is going to be the dumping ground for Melbourne, and that is something that is going to impact a lot of people, because that rubbish is going to be coming from everywhere. Those trucks carrying Melbourne’s rubbish to Ravenhall will be travelling and trundling through streets in the eastern suburbs, the northern suburbs, the southern suburbs, all coming to Ravenhall. This is something that does affect every Melburnian and I think really needs to be addressed. I think it is most unfortunate that Dr Cumming has ignored it in this particular motion.

As I said before, I have raised this issue in the house now on a number of occasions. I have spoken at a number of very large public meetings, and I am talking about thousands of people attending these public meetings. I have spoken to councillors; I have spoken to colleagues in both the houses and indeed both parties. Indeed I will give Mr Melhem a pat on the back as at least he shows up, occasionally, to one or two of the public meetings, so I say good on him for that.

But it is a great pity that nonetheless the government is showing that it does not give a stuff about the people of the western suburbs. It cares not for the people of the western suburbs, because it thinks it
owns the western suburbs and the people of the western suburbs do not matter. They do not matter, because these people are just going to rock up and they are going to re-elect their Labor members. Well, let me tell you: that time is fast coming to an end because people have had a gutful of this. When you get to the stage where you are nauseous in your own home because of the smell of the tip in Ravenhall, when that happens, well then that is something that is intolerable. That affects how people live on a day-to-day basis. On a day-to-day basis that is how it affects people. It is something that should be addressed, and I am just absolutely gobsmacked that Dr Cumming did not even mention it in putting up this motion today and indeed has not gone into bat for her constituents in the west of Melbourne on this particular issue, because this is going to impact many, many people—well, it already impacts many, many thousands of people but it is going to impact many, many more thousands—as the west continues to grow.

Dr Cumming interjected.

Mr FINN: Hello, cocky! Now, Mr Acting President, you might like to get the cockatoo in the corner to calm down because she is carrying on like a two-bob watch just at the minute. But I—

Mr Meddick: On a point of order, Acting President, despite the fact that Mr Finn clearly feels very passionately about what is going on in the western suburbs, one could be forgiven for thinking that he is arguing against a government motion here. I believe that Dr Cumming has covered all of this in the motion itself, and I would like Mr Finn to return to speaking to the motion itself rather than admonishing the government and personally admonishing Dr Cumming.

Mr FINN: On the point of order, Acting President, I am a little bit confused by Mr Meddick’s point of order, because he says that the matters that I am raising are covered in the motion and then he is asking me to come back to the motion, so I am not sure exactly what the point of order is. It is just a tad confusing.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmar): Thank you, Mr Finn. I know there were some interjections from Dr Cumming, but I ask you to come back to the motion.

Mr FINN: I am happy to continue to speak on the motion. The situation in Ravenhall is one that is appalling. I invite Mr Meddick to visit Ravenhall, to visit Caroline Springs and some of those areas around there on a day when that stench is absolutely putrid. It is nauseating. I have experienced it myself and it is just appalling. Caroline Springs, for example, is a very, very nice place. You drive through Caroline Springs and you say, ‘God, I could live here without a worry in the world. This is just a delightful spot’. But then this stench from the tip has destroyed the lives of many, many people who live there, and it does not matter whether this motion is moved by Dr Cumming, moved by the government or indeed moved by the opposition, this is a matter that should be included in this debate because we cannot turn our back on the plight of people in the western suburbs, as many in this house like to do. I regret that that is the case, but it is the case and it is something that I certainly will not allow to happen.

We are talking about a government planning to extend the Ravenhall tip to make it one of the biggest tips, one of the biggest landfills, in the Southern Hemisphere—indeed one of the biggest in the world. This thing is going to be so big that you will be able to see it from the moon. This thing will be just huge, and it is something that people in the western suburbs should not have to put up with. They should not have to put up with it just because they live in Melbourne’s west.

I tell you what: one of the things that this motion might include, and indeed any inquiry might include, would be the waste-to-energy proposal that has been put forward by Mr O’Brien, the Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party. That is a proposal that is very, very worthwhile because it is something that gets waste, which we have an enormous amount of, and turns it into energy, which we do not have a lot of, and that seems to me to be a win-win situation either way. So that is something that I think is a matter that should be examined by any committee that is inquiring into air pollution, because clearly the removal of waste and conversion of waste into energy is something that is certainly going to benefit
my constituents in and around the Ravenhall area and in Caroline Springs, Deer Park and surrounds. And I have to say Mr O’Brien’s plan has caused a great deal of excitement in that part of the world because they for the first time have seen a positive answer to the problem that they face. There has been a lot of umming and ahhing over the years, but here is a positive plan that will end their misery, and that is something that they are very happy and very, very excited about. I certainly look forward to the election of the O’Brien government to ensure that happens. Bring it on—a very good thing indeed.

Another issue that it surprised me that Dr Cumming did not mention is the issue in Brooklyn. I have spoken, again, at a number of public meetings in Brooklyn—usually outdoors because it is the only place you can actually fit everybody in—on the quality of the air in the inner west, in Brooklyn and surrounds, with the trucks and so forth. The people in those areas have been suffering for quite some years. I note that Dr Cumming did mention Francis Street and did mention Yarraville, and that is a very good thing—I am glad that she did mention that—but she did not mention Brooklyn, which has an issue that has been going on for a long time. The quality of the air in Brooklyn is something that has been a major issue for a very long time, and I think that any representative of the western suburbs who speaks on this subject and does not mention the suffering of the people of Brooklyn is not doing their job, and that I think is very unfortunate indeed.

One of the issues that Dr Cumming made brief reference to was the issue of diesel. Now, as we find out more about diesel I must make, I suppose, some sort of interest declaration here because I have recently been driving a car that is a diesel car. I have never had a diesel car before, but I am now driving a diesel car. We are finding out more and more every day about the dangers of diesel in the air and the fact that it is more than likely carcinogenic and that it does pose a major threat to people’s health. And it is something that we should all be very concerned about. I know Mr Davis, the Leader of the Opposition in this place, is someone who has taken a great deal of interest in this particular matter. It is something that has piqued his curiosity, and it is a great pity that he has not spoken on this at some length at some stage, because he is a fount of wisdom when it comes to the dangers of diesel and diesel engines in creating an atmosphere which is dangerous for people to breathe. That is something that I think we should, at any inquiry, most certainly look at. That is a very far-reaching thing because there are many vehicles in Australia, and it seems to me that increasingly vehicles that are driven by mums and dads are now using diesel. We are not talking about semitrailers. We are talking about SUVs. We are talking about cars which indeed are very, very common in the suburbs, and the fact that they are now diesel is obviously going to increase the danger of diesel in the air. The fact that we are breathing that is something that I am concerned about and something that any inquiry, I would hope, would respond to as a matter of urgency.

I am very pleased that the motion today, put forward by the good doctor, has put forward that we would look at practical, real-time, cost-effective mitigation strategies. I think that is a very, very good thing indeed, because around environmental issues in this day and age there is a lot of hyperbole—or ‘hyperbowl’, as Julia Gillard once said. There is a lot of hyperbole, there is a lot of nonsense, there is a lot of hysteria about it. We have people in Canberra saying, ‘We’re all going to die’, ‘The end is nigh’, and, ‘We’ve only got a few years left before the’—well, I am not sure what happens. We have had the UN telling us now for about the last 40 years that the end is nigh. They keep crossing off the year and adding another few years, and maybe if we all live long enough, we will see them get it right. But the fact of the matter is there is a lot of nonsense spoken about environmental issues, so it is very good to see that this motion does talk about practical measures to mitigate the foul air in many of our particularly inner suburbs. Although, as I say, when you consider what is probably going to happen in Wyndham very soon, it will be the outer suburbs as well. Already Ravenhall and surrounds are impacted in a very severe manner. That is something that we should do something about as a matter of urgency.

I have to say, I did hear Dr Cumming make a suggestion which I thought was very good and one that I have subscribed to for a very long time. My view, very strongly, is that the greatest enemy of air
pollution is trees. We need to plant more and more trees, and I do that. I am going to have to buy a new house soon with a bigger yard because I do love planting trees. My front yard and my backyard are just about full of trees now, so I might have to get a bigger place to plant those trees. I think that is something that we really should be promoting furiously. Was it Bob Hawke many years ago who said he was going to plant a billion trees by it might have been 1990, the same time as kids were going to be out of poverty or something? That was a promise that unfortunately was not fulfilled, but it is something that indeed we should look at. It is something we should look at because trees are the natural enemy of pollution; that is the fact of the matter. All this talk about the dangers of CO₂ is largely a nonsense because we know that without CO₂ all the trees die. And if all the trees die, we have got no oxygen because they are the ones that provide the oxygen.

As I say, there is a lot of hyperbole, there is a lot of nonsense spoken about in the environmental space. It is something that maybe with the development of a committee inquiry we can get to tintacks with, maybe we can actually get those practical measures that this motion speaks of. I certainly would welcome that very much because the coalition has for many, many years been a very, very strong supporter of the environment. It has been a very, very strong supporter of conservation. It has been a very, very strong supporter of clean air.

Anybody who heads bush, goes out to the country, knows the delight of waking up and filling your lungs with that pure air that people in the country enjoy. Wouldn’t it be nice if everybody could enjoy that quality of air? Wouldn’t it be nice if we could all wake up in the morning, bounce out of bed and smell that magnificent air instead of some of the crap, quite frankly, that people are expected to breathe in this day and age? It is very sad indeed.

The opposition will not oppose this motion. In fact I think it is probably long overdue. I am hoping, as I say, that we will get the practical measures that the motion speaks of, that we will be able to get some recommendations from the committee that we can put into effect—no, not almost—absolutely immediately. I am hopeful that we can get cracking on this, and I am very hopeful that the house will indeed back this motion today.

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (11:20): It is good to hear that the motion is getting widespread acceptance, and I want to thank Dr Cumming for bringing it up. I do share Mr Melhem’s worry about meeting the deadline for the Environment and Planning Committee to report by, 29 October 2020—we have quite a bit to do—but I certainly welcome this coming before us because I am very concerned about air quality in Melbourne.

Just for example, in the week of 13 January Melbourne’s air quality measured PM₂.₅ particles wafting through the air, and on that day it was the worst air quality in the world. Victoria’s air quality was worse than the big cities in China, but, as we know, that poor air quality on that particular day and in that particular week was largely or in the main caused by the disastrous bushfire situation, which really brings us to think about the environment in new ways considering the scale of that disaster. On that day those with respiratory conditions were at significant risk, with the Department of Health and Human Services advising people to stay indoors.

My son has in the last year or so been over to China. He really loved being there, particularly in the countryside, but he said of cities like Shanghai and Beijing that even though he wanted to explore them the air quality was so poor that he did not enjoy his stay there. He just said that the big cities were hard to breathe in and really congested with people as well; he preferred spending his time in the countryside.

But why is a city like Beijing’s air quality so notorious that it is used as a benchmark for measuring a toxic atmosphere? Firstly, I would say Beijing is a city of 22 million people—it is a megacity, like New York. New York has a lovely big park with trees in it in the centre of it, which I am sure helps improve the air quality in Manhattan, but the surrounding suburbs—Brooklyn was mentioned before—do suffer from poor air quality. In Beijing, when pollution exceeds that high measure of PM₂.₅
for four days, school classes get cancelled to prevent kids having to go outside to travel to school and outdoor barbecues are banned—many small street vendors who grill spiced lamb are forbidden to work on such days. Many schools have inflated massive domes over their playing fields so that they can pump purified air into them. It would be terrible to see Melbourne deteriorating to that degree. The ABC China correspondent, Bill Birtles, says air quality has been deteriorating in Beijing for four years in line with the country’s increasing economic growth and population growth. Their exploding population requires more cars, their exploding population requires more industry and their exploding population uses more and more resources.

That is why I welcome Dr Cumming including clause (4)(c) in her motion, which talks about the impact of economic and population growth on air pollution and health outcomes. Here in Melbourne we are planning to build a megacity, to really pump up our population growth. This is something the government welcomes and seems to rely on for its economy. According to environmental scientist Mason Ye, Beijing’s economic growth for the past three decades has been the fastest among major nations, which is why China has extensive air pollution. He went on to state that the cause of Beijing’s widespread air pollution can be attributed to a number of factors: an enormous economic boom, a surge in the number of motorised vehicles, population growth and output from manufacturing. We count all those things as positive for our GDP and our measures of economic wellbeing, but we certainly do not want to follow in their footsteps down the road of pollution.

We have a planning scheme that encourages more and more apartments. In our planning scheme Melbourne 2030 there is a direction towards a more compact city, which is used to override many other considerations in the planning scheme—so our planning scheme encourages concrete pour. We have trees being cut down. We have not a lot of public open spaces in our inner-city areas, but those that are there are under threat of the trees being cut down to make way for increased sporting fields to service our high population growth. We still have a big fight on our hands to convince some people that renewable energy is the way to go and that we should be moving away from coal-fired power, which is of course polluting the air. So we really need to move away from industries that are pouring concrete, cutting down trees and polluting the atmosphere.

There are many ways we can go, but we do not seem to look at them. New, smart industries; artificial intelligence; robots—all this sort of area is something we could be investing in, but we tend to invest in real estate and try to prop up higher and higher real estate prices by encouraging population growth. We could be moving into renewable energy in a big way and selling that energy. We could be using renewable energy as a way of generating hydrogen and exporting that, but we are not doing that. We really must look at the causes of pollution and the population growth behind it in Melbourne and look at ways we can improve our air quality.

So I welcome Dr Cumming’s motion, and I welcome particularly her including clause (4)(c) in the motion, addressing the impact of economic and population growth. We already know there is a detrimental effect, and we know it will only worsen as the government continues its push for rapid population growth in Melbourne. So I support this motion with the concern that Victoria’s air quality will continue to deteriorate if we merely continue on the present course. We need some widespread lateral thinking and some new approaches to our industry and the way it affects our environment.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmar): Before I call Ms Terpstra, there was an issue with the clock before. The lead speaker normally has 30 minutes. Mr Melhem did not have that right, so I will allow Ms Terpstra to speak for 30 minutes if she wants to.

Ms TERPSTRA (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:28): It gives me pleasure to rise to make a contribution on motion 233 on the notice paper as proposed by Dr Cumming in regard to air pollution. The context of this motion is that it also encompasses a referral to the Environment and Planning Committee for an inquiry and a report by 29 October 2020 on actions to minimise the health impacts of air pollution. The committee, which I am a member of, will obviously initiate the inquiry and look at this matter in a very detailed and methodical way.
Whilst sitting in the chamber today I have had the benefit of listening to the contributions of not only Dr Cumming but also Mr Finn previously. Although the motion clearly does talk about air quality and a referral to the committee, I note Mr Finn’s contribution covered a wide range of topics, including a tip, toxic soil and climate scepticism as well, which was very big on the agenda of course. We had a reference to Bob Hawke and, interestingly, a bit of commentary on cars and emissions. I note with great interest and delight that the federal counterparts of those opposite have no support for the manufacturing of cars in Australia of course—we have just seen the exit of Holden. That has happened because of the dislike and the disdain that the federal Liberal Party have for the manufacturing of vehicles in Australia. It is absolutely disgraceful, and I think—

**Mr Finn:** On a point of order, Acting President, I had to laugh, because Ms Terpstra started off her contribution by accusing me of not speaking on the motion, and she starts talking about manufacturing cars and the federal government. I have to say it is drawing a very, very long bow to think that that is in any way related to this motion at all.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Elasmar):** Order! There is no point of order.

**Ms TERPSTRA:** The manufacturing of cars does relate to emissions, which are all about air quality, but of course, Mr Finn, that is lost on you. There has been so much hot air in this chamber today we could certainly power a small wind turbine.

Hopefully the contribution I am going to make today will be more on the point of the motion as proposed by Dr Cumming and talk about an actual issue that people in Victoria care about, which is air quality, rather than the hot air coming from someone on the opposition backbenches about all manner of things that in the context of this motion are completely irrelevant. Of course the sort of thing that this government is committed to is making sure that the inquiry is focused on science rather than the scepticism, hot air, ridiculous rhetoric and bizarre, cobbled-together, ridiculous contributions of those opposite, who know nothing about science. All they want to do is attack this government. Let us talk about the sorts of things this government is actually doing—something those opposite would never be able to contemplate or even understand the importance of—about air quality and how it impacts the citizens of Victoria. For example, the investment in air quality monitoring that the Victorian government has undertaken is $10.8 million over the last five years for key air quality initiatives, including additional air quality monitoring stations and building incident air-monitoring capability. That includes $5.08 million in the 2015–16 budget for portable air-monitoring equipment with data streaming to the EPA AirWatch website. It is evidence-based data which we can rely on to continually monitor air quality and make the appropriate adjustments where necessary. There was $3.8 million in the 2016–17 budget over four years for the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) to increase its monitoring and citizen science activities in the Latrobe Valley, another area that has been impacted by air quality. This is important because we want to make sure that we watch and monitor these situations very carefully so things can be improved for people.

Let us talk about the sorts of things this government is actually doing—something those opposite would never be able to contemplate or even understand the importance of—about air quality and how it impacts the citizens of Victoria. For example, the investment in air quality monitoring that the Victorian government has undertaken is $10.8 million over the last five years for key air quality initiatives, including additional air quality monitoring stations and building incident air-monitoring capability. That includes $5.08 million in the 2015–16 budget for portable air-monitoring equipment with data streaming to the EPA AirWatch website. It is evidence-based data which we can rely on to continually monitor air quality and make the appropriate adjustments where necessary. There was $3.8 million in the 2016–17 budget over four years for the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) to increase its monitoring and citizen science activities in the Latrobe Valley, another area that has been impacted by air quality. This is important because we want to make sure that we watch and monitor these situations very carefully so things can be improved for people.

There was $0.749 million in the 2016–17 budget for smoke detection infrastructure programs to allow faster deployment of monitoring equipment in partnership with the SES, so again it is all evidence based. The collection of data is important and these things need to be monitored in an ongoing way.

We have air quality monitoring during emergencies. Victoria has just suffered some of the worst bushfires in history. Even if people were not previously concerned with air quality, many Victorians and certainly Melburnians became painfully aware of air quality. Of course people who suffer from asthma and other breathing complications or conditions are acutely aware of air quality and how it impacts their quality of life. However, even people who do not suffer from any breathing difficulties became aware. There was a range of initiatives that the Victorian government undertook to alert people to air quality issues. There were even some digital apps that were available so you could check your local area, so there was even localised information that people could access to look at air quality, for example.
These things were very important because they allowed people to determine whether they should even perhaps venture outside or open the windows in their houses to let fresh air in. Of course at some point during the bushfires as well it was more beneficial for people to stay indoors rather than go outside because the air quality was so difficult and was not the best during that period. During the emergencies in the 2019–20 bushfires incident air monitors were deployed to bushfire-affected areas in Bairnsdale, Bright, Cann River, Lakes Entrance, Marlo, Mallacoota, Omeo, Orbost, Swifts Creek and Wodonga. The EPA has an operational agreement with the Victorian emergency services and can deploy three incident monitors within 24 hours of a request. It is really important that there can be quick and swift action taken where people are reporting concerns around air quality, that action can be taken to enhance monitoring.

To ensure coverage across Victoria, two incident air monitors are kept in reserve to enable deployment for additional emergencies should that be required. During emergencies the EPA supports incident response and management at local, regional and state level to ensure air quality advice is given to impacted communities. The EPA makes information about air quality available in real time via the EPA AirWatch website. Also, again, there are a number of phone apps that people can consult, punching in their locations to check on their local air quality and even having recommendations about whether they should go outside or stay indoors, those sorts of things.

These things are becoming more and more important. Certainly in my own region, Eastern Metropolitan Region, I have had a number of constituents reach out and raise concerns around things like air quality even arising from things like open log fires. We all love open log fires, but of course they do impact on air quality. Depending on the weather and depending on the day, whether there is wind blowing or not, sometimes air quality can diminish and can remain local in a particular area. If people are suffering from breathing conditions or have compromised breathing ability, these things can impact people significantly. Constituents have reached out about that, so I am actually pleased to see this referral and the inquiry that will take place because I will then be able to inform these constituents that people will be able to follow the inquiry and also make contributions or submissions to the inquiry and indicate their area of interest.

I was going to speak for much longer on this particular matter, but I might just wind up my contribution here and finalise my comments by making these points. The EPA will continue to work with the Victorian government towards expanding the network of fixed air monitors across Victoria in line with recommendations from the independent inquiry into the EPA and from the Auditor-General. The EPA will further enhance its air-monitoring program through the installation of an additional fixed air quality monitoring site in Campbellfield in February 2020. Again, that is in the west, so we do care about people in the west. Contrary to the contribution of Mr Finn, we are definitely listening to those people in the west who are concerned about air quality.

Installation of an additional fixed monitoring site in Bendigo will occur later in the same year, along with the completion of an inner-Melbourne apportionment study to understand the sources of local air pollution, including community involvement from Melbourne’s inner west, and the launch of a citizens science air quality monitoring project in Melbourne’s inner west and Bendigo. Again it is not just about what happens in the city. We are concerned to make sure that we monitor air quality for all Victorians, and we are taking the appropriate steps to make sure that happens. I will leave my contribution there.

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (11:38): I am very pleased to speak on this committee referral. It is always a pleasure when others in this chamber join the fight for our people and our planet. Air pollution is a climate issue, and the worsening quality of the air we breathe is directly linked to the climate crisis. Nowhere have we seen this more clearly than during the cruel summer our state has just experienced. The catastrophic fires that ravaged our state this summer were unprecedented. Lives were lost, homes were destroyed and hundreds of millions of animals were killed. And 1.4 million hectares of our state were burnt, choking our towns and cities with bushfire smoke.
We began this new decade with air we could not breathe, with skies we could not see, hidden behind the smoke coming from the east of our state on fire. At its worst our air quality was some of the worst in the world. P2 masks were going out of stock across the state. We started checking air quality data as part of our morning routines. Families who were meant to be enjoying their summer holidays were spending them inside away from the hazardous air. It was a vivid reminder of the future we face if we do not begin to take serious action on the climate crisis. Because the bushfires, while unprecedented, were not unexpected. This type of season—starting earlier, lasting longer, burning hotter and more intensely, and covering our state in smoke—is exactly what we have been warned will be our new normal if we fail to do something now to address our climate crisis. I know this is not the new normal that we want, one where for half the year our air is choking with fire smoke and where our children play outside wearing smoke masks.

Last year the theme for World Environment Day was air pollution. I spoke in this place about the effect that air quality has on our health, how air pollution contributes to premature deaths, chronic health conditions and low-birthweight babies, and how across the world air pollution contributes to 7 million deaths each year. We cannot take our clean air for granted. We cannot continue to log the forests that help filter our air. We cannot continue to burn hazardous materials, rely on dirty coal and build mega toll roads that will lock in decades of pollution from trucks and cars.

Any inquiry into air pollution in Victoria must acknowledge the link between increased bushfires and decreased air quality, between continuing to pump toxic mercury and sulphur dioxide into the air from burning coal and decreased air quality, between our continued reliance on motor vehicle transport and air pollution levels, as cars remain one of the worst contributors to air pollution. It must also acknowledge that incinerating our waste will only exacerbate air pollution in Victoria. Waste to energy is not a renewable source of energy; it is burning waste made from virgin resources, mostly crude oil, and producing CO₂ emissions and huge amounts of ash and toxic ash residue.

I welcome the committee referral and I look forward to an inquiry that comes to the conclusion that the most effective mitigation strategy for tackling air pollution is immediate action on the climate crisis. I hope that when the inquiry looks at strong commitments across all government portfolios to reduce air pollution it also looks at improving our active and public transport, reducing our reliance on motor vehicles and improving our local recycling system so that we are not resorting to burning our waste.

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (11:41): I rise to speak on this motion brought forward by Dr Cumming on air pollution. I will start with some good news. According to EPA AirWatch, in the last 48 hours the level of fine particles below 2.5 micrometres was only 20 units per cubic metre of air, which compared to China—their pollution is quite bad. As of 9 this morning the measurement was at 6 units per cubic metre, making our CBD air quality among the best in the world.

Dr Cumming: Thank God for rain.

Mr LIMBRICK: Thank God for rain. But we cannot remain complacent just because we have some days with good air quality. As other speakers have mentioned, there are different types of air quality issues here. We have intermittent issues such as things like the bushfires and, as we have seen on the recent waste inquiry, the chemical fires and e-waste fires and these sorts of things, and these have acute effects. But then there are also air quality issues from ongoing things.

It is my understanding that the majority of particulate air pollution in Melbourne is due to cars and transport in general. There are a number of things that we can look at with regard to this. I note that some speakers brought up the issue of diesel particulates, which are a real issue, but one of the interesting things about cars is that the technology moves forward very rapidly. You will notice that some of the new diesel cars, which have very high-tech diesel particulate filters, are quite clean. Maybe one of things that we could do is make newer cars more affordable. I know that we have had, from
other debates in this house, issues with the fleet in Australia. We have a particularly old fleet of cars in Australia that does not use the latest technology in terms of both safety and pollution controls, and it may be worth looking at some things that might be able to make newer cars more affordable. I note that my colleague Mr Quilty yesterday made an excellent suggestion to use road fines to reduce registration costs, which would lower costs for motorists and presumably make them able to afford a more modern car.

There has also been talk about renewable energy. Renewable energy is very good, but as we have seen throughout everywhere in the world that has implemented more renewable energy, we have also seen more gas, and they have been unable to deeply decarbonise their electricity grid without using a combination of large-scale hydro-electricity and/or nuclear. It is fortuitous that this inquiry will take place after the nuclear inquiry so every committee member will be well informed about the zero-emissions energy technology that we are looking at, and I will very much look forward to applying that knowledge in this inquiry also. I will leave it there.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (11:45): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 204, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

GOLD ROYALTY

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (11:46): I move:


The purpose of this motion is to revoke the government’s imposition of a royalty on gold extraction in Victoria. The mechanism of the motion goes to the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 and the provisions of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990. I will set out at the outset the mechanism that we are using for this purpose and the reason that we are doing this revocation in this way. The background to this motion was an announcement by the government just prior to the state budget last year that it would impose a royalty on gold extraction—a royalty of 2.75 per cent of the market value of extracted gold as a budget announcement. The mechanism for doing so was that, although it was an announcement by the Treasurer as part of the budget, the Minister for Resources subsequently made regulations, which were the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Mineral Industries) Amendment Regulations 2019, which sought to insert a new provision in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Mineral Industries) Amendment Regulations 2019 to provide for the royalty. The mechanism was that new regulations were made last year with respect to mineral resources, as part of the regular review of regulations under the Subordinate Legislation Act, and then in December, to give effect to this policy decision, an amending regulation was made which inserted the provision in relation to the royalty.

Under the principal piece of legislation, which is the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990, section 124 allows either house of Parliament, within the specified period, to revoke a regulation which has been made under that act. The Minister for Resources in December made an amending regulation to the principal regulations to insert the royalty provision. What we are seeking to do today by way of this motion is use the power that is vested in this house under the mineral resources act and under the Subordinate Legislation Act to revoke that amending regulation so the
regulations will stand as they were originally and would not include the royalty. The effect of this legislative process is to revoke the making of that royalty—the regulation for that royalty—which was made by the Minister for Resources on 10 December and ensure that gold extraction in Victoria continues with the existing exemption from a royalty. That is the technical mechanism of this motion, and the background to this matter was an announcement by the government, as I said, just prior to the 2019 budget that it would remove an exemption for gold from royalties. The rationale given by the government in the budget papers in the 2019–20 budget was:

Consistent with other Australian jurisdictions, this initiative will broaden the royalties regime by removing the exemption for gold on 1 January 2020. The royalty rate will be set at 2.75 per cent of the net market value of gold production, consistent with the general royalty rate for minerals.

That was the rationale that was made in the budget at that time. It is important to note that the estimated revenue from this measure, which applies from 1 January—so six months of the current financial year and then obviously the full financial year thereafter—is $8 million for the six months and then $16 million a year ongoing.

The context for this is the budgetary situation the state finds itself in. As I have said previously in this house, we have seen the government be the beneficiary of windfall revenue in GST and windfall revenue in land tax and stamp duty over its first term in office. Every six months there was a budget revision and every six months virtually we saw an increase in budgeted revenues. And the government was able to build that revenue into its expenditure base, so we saw revenue rise and we saw the cost of running the state rise every six months as well.

Of course since the re-election of the government in November 2018, that trend has changed and revenue is no longer rising. We are seeing pressure on GST, we are seeing pressure on stamp duty and pressure on land tax. Of course with the introduction of the annual valuation cycles on land tax we are going to see, if the property market direction continues, revenue from land tax drop away. So we are now in a situation where the government are caught in a pincer movement of their own creation. They built a whole lot of costs into the state’s cost base and now they do not have the revenue to support it. We have a state spending base now of $70.3 billion—a more than $10 billion increase over a term—and the capacity to fund that and the capacity to fund new initiatives is now very restricted.

In framing a budget a government has limitations. Although $70.3 billion is an enormous amount of money to be spending annually, the discretion a government has as to how that is spent is limited because most of that spending is locked in, be it funding hospitals or be it funding education and other government services, and the discretionary element within that $70 billion is actually quite small. So when the government looks to introduce new initiatives—new spending commitments—its capacity within the $70 billion is quite limited and it is often looking for new revenue items. That is why we saw in the budget last year the relatively small amount proposed to be raised through the gold royalty—as I said, $8 million this first year because it is half of a financial year and $16 million each year thereafter. In the context of the state budget it appears small, and it is small, but in terms of the government’s discretionary amount, the government and the Treasurer obviously saw that this opportunity to grab some further revenue at a time when the budget was softening was too tempting to resist. So they saw it, and no doubt Treasury has come forward and said, ‘Treasurer, this is something you can do. We have an exemption on royalties on gold. You can remove the royalty and generate some revenue’, and the Treasurer has obviously rubbed his hands and said, ‘That’s an opportunity’. It is $16 million ongoing to fill what must seem like an endless black hole now, given he announced just last week he needs to find another $4 billion in spending cuts. This opportunity was too tempting. We saw the announcement made just prior to the budget—leaked to the newspaper, as is the government’s wont—and then subsequently announced in the budget that the government would remove the gold royalty. The rationale, as I said, in the budget paper was one of effectively harmonising, in the government’s terms, the royalty rate in Victoria so it is consistent with royalty rates in other Australian jurisdictions.
The policy fallacy of this—and we have seen this not only with this measure with gold royalties but also elsewhere in the taxation regime in Victoria—is that the government seems to think harmonising Victorian taxes, and in this instance royalties, is somehow a good thing. But it only ever does it in terms of raising those royalties and taxes. It seems to ignore the fact that having lower royalty rates in Victoria, lower tax rates in Victoria, is in fact a competitive advantage and something that should be maintained and promoted for Victorian businesses. One of the key reasons we have a state government and that we have state administration rather than just national administration is so that we can exploit the competitive advantages of our local economy, and this government seems oblivious to that. It seems committed to harmonising, as a way of increasing revenue, by raising Victorian taxes and by raising Victorian royalties to what it sees as the national average or consistent with other jurisdictions.

We have seen the consequences of that elsewhere. We saw the introduction of the coal royalty three years ago, which led to the shutdown of the Hazelwood power station. We are still suffering the consequences of that and we will continue to suffer the consequences of that for years to come. That was simply the government saying, ‘We can harmonise our coal royalty with the level elsewhere in Australia with no regard to the impact’, and that led to the loss of that generator, which has had ramifications for the entire Victorian economy and will continue to do so, particularly as we have population growth of more than 100,000 people a year coming into the state and not the capacity to meet it.

In this regard the announcement of the gold royalty last year was a similar measure. It was done as a convenient tax measure for the government to get what, frankly, in a state context, is a little bit of revenue for the government, but it has a significant impact for those gold producers in Victoria. It was convenient for the government and done under the cover of saying, ‘We’re harmonising our royalties with those elsewhere in Victoria’, but done without any regard to the impact it would have on the gold extraction industry in this state.

The reality is that the gold extraction industry in Victoria is relatively small. Although the regulatory impact statement talks about, I think, 18 goldmining licences in this state, the reality is that Victoria only has four operational goldmines at this point in time. They are the Fosterville mine near Bendigo, the Castlemaine goldmine at Ballarat, the Stawell goldmine and the Mandalay goldmine near Heathcote. Of the 18 licences the government has said are in place, in reality only four are being used. There are only four operational goldmines in the state, and collectively they are employing, in the case of Fosterville, over 600 people; in the case of Mandalay’s operations, 200 people; in the case of the Ballarat goldmine, 161 people and 76 contractors—that covers the direct employment; and in the case of Stawell, 200 people, following its reopening on 1 January. The sector is a small sector. There are four principal operators. Collectively they are employing around 1000 people.

In the towns I outlined—Ballarat, Bendigo and those regions of Victoria—that employment is very significant to this state, notwithstanding the fact that there are only the four principal operators. So the government’s announcement that it will harmonise royalties in Victoria by removing the exemption which had existed prior to 1 January here in Victoria is one you would expect the government to have undertaken with a great deal of care and a great deal of diligence. In fact, given there are four and only four operators in this state, you would expect the government to have undertaken detailed consultation.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

**Questions without notice and ministers statements**

**CLEARWAY MANAGEMENT**

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:00): My question is to the Minister for Roads. Minister, I refer to the shambolic system that sees VicRoads impose a bizarre quota on the number of vehicles removed from clearways each week due to a lack of full funding by Treasury. Minister, how much of the $361 fee collected from every vehicle towed from a clearway zone and impounded is returned to VicRoads to pay for the car-towing service?
Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:00): I thank Mr Davis for his question. I think that this current arrangement is completely unacceptable. The current contracts, which are something of a legacy arrangement, have a short number of months to continue. They will come to an end at the end of this financial year, and I can certainly assure the house that any cap on removing vehicles from clearways or any mechanism that disincentivises clearing away vehicles will not be a feature of any future arrangements going forward. I was less than impressed to say the least when I was first made aware of these arrangements some months ago and set my department to work to remedy the situation.

In terms of the payment arrangements, as I understand it the current arrangement is essentially a fee-for-service arrangement and it operates on a cost recovery basis, so the revenue raised is applied to the task of removing the vehicles. It is not that the government or VicRoads or the Department of Transport are making some kind of saving out of this; it is a contract arrangement that needs improvement. It will be expiring soon, and we will be making sure that the future arrangements do not have anything in them that disincentivises removing illegally parked cars.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:02): So, Minister, what you are telling me is that for the next four and a half months the same system will operate, where because of a quota at VicRoads cars will be left in clearways until 30 June.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:03): If an opportunity exists to remedy this sooner, we will absolutely take that opportunity to do that. The contracts have been in place for many years. It is a historical arrangement that creates this situation quite rarely, where the cap or the forecast number of vehicles to be removed quite significantly exceeds expectations. We will certainly be taking every opportunity to improve clearway management within the confines of this existing contractual arrangement, but I have asked my department for some quick advice on this.

AMBULANCE RESPONSE TIMES

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (12:04): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services, Ms Mikakos. It is about the heartbreaking case of Gayl Hubbard, who died in Seymour on 7 October 2019 while awaiting an ambulance crew’s arrival. Gayl’s husband, Tony, who could even see the Seymour ambulance station from his home, was led to believe by an Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) worker that an ambulance’s arrival was imminent. The worker repeatedly said to him, ‘The ambulance is on its way’, but by Tony’s call log its arrival tragically took 43 minutes. Minister, in this 20 January letter to Mr Hubbard, Ambulance Victoria promised to raise with ESTA his suggestion that an estimated arrival time should always be quoted whenever someone requests an ambulance through a 000 call. Has that now been done, and if so, what was the outcome, or if not, could you advise why not?

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:05): I do thank Ms Maxwell for her question. I want to reassure her and the house that I have also written to Ms Hubbard’s family to express my sincere condolences both to her husband and to her entire family on her tragic death. I understand that Ambulance Victoria has also met with Ms Hubbard’s family on several occasions and apologised for the long response time. I know there has been some contention around the exact time, and that is a matter that of course is in dispute. But clearly the response time was unacceptable.

We know that there are still times when ambulances do not arrive as fast as we would like, and this is why it is important that these instances are thoroughly reviewed. I understand that Ambulance Victoria did in fact examine this particular case in thorough detail. So whilst Ambulance Victoria did everything they could with the availability of paramedics not on other jobs at the time, the government will continue working with local communities to ensure ambulances arrive even sooner. It is important to understand that despite the proximity of a case to an ambulance branch our paramedics are often
out on cases or in hospitals and respond to emergencies wherever they are, not only from their home branch.

In cases where a patient is identified as needing an emergency ambulance, the nearest appropriate ambulance is always dispatched. Ambulance Victoria has a sophisticated communications and dispatch system, which provides an accurate picture of emergency ambulance coverage across all Victorian locations at all times. It is simply not reasonable to expect an ambulance will always be waiting at a station when another is on a job. This would take resources away from other areas and may come at the expense of the patients in that region. I point out that, as the member would be aware, Seymour does have a 24-hour ambulance station, and I will continue to take advice from Ambulance Victoria in relation to paramedic resourcing and operational matters.

Since 2015, I do want to advise the member, we have in fact put in place more than 120 new paramedics and other first responders in the Hume region. That is nearly 25 per cent more resources than the previous Liberal-National government provided by the end of their term in office. The latest quarterly performance data shows that paramedics in Hume responded to 4300 emergency cases in the final quarter in 2019, 332 more cases than the same period a year earlier. As a result of our unprecedented investment, in fact the response time is actually 6 minutes faster than what we inherited when Mr Davis and Ms Crozier were in charge.

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (12:08): Thank you, Minister. As indeed you would be aware, the response times, not to mention the resourcing, of ambulances continue to cause significant problems and concerns not only in Seymour but across the electorate of Northern Victoria, and this is unfortunately not an isolated case. Minister, can you explain how it is possible for people these days to be able to track and follow the location of things like ridesharing or pizza delivery vehicles that are on their way to them and yet they are still unable to have any idea of something as critical as how far away an urgently required ambulance is?

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:08): I thank the member for her further question. As I explained previously, Ambulance Victoria have this communications and dispatch system where they themselves can see where their ambulances are at any point in time. ESTA is a separate system. It is a system where they do take the calls and process those calls as they come through on that 000 number.

In terms of the matter that the member raised previously in terms of the correspondence that Ambulance Victoria have provided to Ms Hubbard’s family, the advice that I have is that they are following up those issues with ESTA directly, and I am happy to provide the member with further advice once that issue is resolved. But it is important to understand that the Ambulance Victoria and ESTA systems are separate systems. Ambulance Victoria can see where their ambulances are; ESTA is receiving emergency calls for various emergency services, not just ambulance but police of course and the fire brigade and other services. I am happy to have a further discussion with the member once I receive that advice.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: REGIONAL ROAD MAINTENANCE

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:10): I was delighted to visit Kyneton last week with the member for Macedon—of course she was not visiting; she was already there—and go to Kyneton-Trentham Road to mark the halfway point of our seasonal road maintenance blitz. There have been 750 kilometres of road resurfaced, resealed or rebuilt. It has been a very, very busy few months, and marking the halfway point seemed an appropriate thing to do. Crews have been working day and night to deliver the $425 million program, which has also supported the creation of 1000 jobs in regional Victoria and will improve a total of 1500 kilometres once complete. Already the blitz has seen almost 40 000 potholes filled, 10 000 signs repaired or replaced and roads, including the Calder, Maroondah Highway, Foster-Promontory Road, Camperdown-Lismore Road and the Horsham–Kalgoorlie road, made safer and more durable for locals and visitors to regional Victoria.
With less holiday-makers on the road now that we are into February, the community will see even more projects getting underway as Regional Roads Victoria continues its intensive maintenance program before the winter conditions return. Key routes with work still to come include South Gippsland Highway, Goulburn Valley Highway, Sunraysia Highway, Bells Beach Road and Borung Highway. As more work is done, roadworkers will be out in force to help enforce changed traffic conditions and construction speed limits in place for the safety of the community and our roadworkers, so I would urge all members and indeed all members of the community to be aware of all of this work and to take appropriate care and plan for an extra few minutes here or there.

Regional Roads Victoria’s vegetation management program also continues as well, with more than 22 000 kilometres of grass already cut along regional roadsides to improve sight distance and of course reduce fire risk. RRV prepares for fire danger year-round through roadside maintenance, clean-ups and assessments.

HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:12): My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, Mrs McNamara is an 86-year-old who is unable to walk more than 20 metres without having to rest due to what she describes as, and I quote, ‘excruciating pain due to blockages in both of my legs’. Her local GP referred her to see a vascular surgeon at Box Hill Hospital. In a letter from Eastern Health she was informed that, and I quote:

Your referral was assessed as non-urgent, therefore you have been added to the waiting list as there are no available appointments.

After that knockback she then tried to get into Monash Health but was told:

… your name has been entered on the outpatient appointment waiting list, which currently has an expected wait time of more than 12 months.

Minister, the waitlists are blowing out further under your watch. What do you say to Mrs McNamara, who is in excruciating pain and has no definite time period for when she will be seen in a vascular clinic?

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:13): Thank you for that question. It is interesting that I get these questions from the member essentially asking me to direct clinicians in how they should do their jobs. The member knows full well that it is in fact clinicians who make these assessments about the level of urgency of any specific patient. We never want to see a situation where ministers direct clinicians about who should get prioritised. Maybe that is how you operated, but that is certainly not how a proper health system should operate.

What I would say to the member is that I would encourage her to provide me with details of Mrs McNamara—

Ms Crozier: I did that with Mr Anderson, and you refused respond until yesterday afternoon.

Ms MIKAKOS: I did provide you with the letter. It was in the post, as I explained to you yesterday. President, there is no-one in greater need of a Zorba dance than Ms Crozier—no-one. She needs to chill out and let me give her an answer to her question.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Look, it is very difficult for me. Part of my role is to make a judgement that the minister has actually answered the question. It is very difficult for me to hear the minister’s answer when the people asking the question are yelling into my left ear to the point that my right ear cannot hear. I would ask that the interjections be kept to a minimum and the minister can get back to the question.
Ms MIKAKOS: I was offering to the member that she provide me with further details around Mrs McNamara’s situation. As I have indicated to the member and to other members of the house, I am always prepared to seek further advice about the specific details. If a patient’s situation changes and they get a further referral from their GP, they could be reassessed if their circumstances have changed. This is why it is important to provide the most up-to-date information to the relevant hospitals so that they can make that assessment.

But what I would say to the member is that, as I have explained, there have been 4 million appointments in our hospital specialist clinics annually. We are providing record funding to our hospitals. In every year we have been in government Box Hill, Monash—all these hospitals—have all received more funding. In fact it is 40 per cent more funding than when the coalition were last in office. The only cuts we have seen have been from your mates in Canberra. Have you got on the phone to Greg Hunt to reverse the $305 million? No. A big fat zero from those opposite crying crocodile tears in here every day. They have absolutely no interest in the situation of any patient. I am happy to look into Mrs McNamara’s situation, but the point that I would make to Ms Crozier is that we are providing more funding to our hospitals and the only cuts we are getting are from your Liberal mates in Canberra.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): What a terrible answer. Minister, with the $4 billion cuts to services the Treasurer has indicated, which will include to health, what faith should Mrs McNamara or the tens of thousands of Victorians who are languishing on these waitlists have in your government?

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:17): That is an extraordinary question from Ms Crozier. Firstly, the Treasurer has not said that there will be cuts. You are verballing him; you are absolutely verballing him. I will continue to look at how we can make our health system more efficient to make sure that we can have patients get access to the treatment that they need faster than ever before. In fact during our term of office we have actually seen the median wait time for elective surgery be the best in the nation. The national Productivity Commission data shows that we are the best in the nation—28 days compared to 56 days in New South Wales. Forty-two days is what you had under your watch, Ms Crozier. What I would say to Mrs McNamara is that I am happy to look into her situation, but she and other patients in Victoria will always be better under an Andrews Labor government.

ROADSIDE DRUG TESTS

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:18): My question is for the Minister for Road Safety and the TAC. It will be no surprise to either the minister or anyone else in this house that I have serious concerns about the roadside drug-testing regime and whether it is just and effective. We all know that Victoria Police have the right to pull drivers over at any time and test their saliva for traces of drugs, including cannabis, methamphetamines and ecstasy, to determine the driver’s impairment. Victoria Police use the Securetec 5S device for initial screening, and on the website of the distributor they also show that these devices test for opiates, indeed with a higher sensitivity rating. Presumably some of these tests return a positive reading. My question for the minister is this: are Victoria Police ignoring the readings for opiates on these Securetec devices during roadside testing?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:19): I thank Mr Limbrick for his ongoing interest in the relationship between drug testing and road safety, something Mr Limbrick and I have had a number of conversations about. The element of the question that I will refer to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services really is around your interest in the operational elements of how the drug-testing regime is undertaken. But I will in doing so also just make a number of other comments.

Drug driving is a very significant factor in road trauma in Victoria, and it is an increasingly significant part of our road safety problem. We have expanded the drug-testing regime. It has the best capabilities and is the best system that exists at this point in time. Do I wish we had something that we could roll out on the scale of roadside alcohol testing? Yes, I do. But at the moment what we have is a three-step
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process that is the best that anyone has been able to come up with to date. We do certainly look at every opportunity to improve and continue to improve this.

Mr Limbrick’s question also really goes to the question about other drugs. There are a limited number of drugs that we test for as part of the regime that we have, and of course there are lots of other drugs, legal and illegal, that people have in their system. The way that drugs impact everybody is of course unique as well, and when we are talking about illegal drugs we are also of course talking about things that are hard to measure and impossible to have confidence for users around consistent potency and consistent quality and experience. But the way that a particular drug, even a legal one, affects two different patients or users will vary enormously.

Therein lies our problem. We have a very large percentage of people who are in control of a vehicle, either drivers or riders, who are in fatality and serious injury crashes—a very, very high proportion. This is now a bigger problem for us than drink driving if we look at it purely as a comparative statistical analysis. But the operational matters I will refer to the minister for police. I thank Mr Limbrick, though, for his interest in these matters.

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Therein lies our problem. We have a very large percentage of people who are in control of a vehicle, either drivers or riders, who are in fatality and serious injury crashes—a very, very high proportion. This is now a bigger problem for us than drink driving if we look at it purely as a comparative statistical analysis. But the operational matters I will refer to the minister for police. I thank Mr Limbrick, though, for his interest in these matters.

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:22): The Australian Drug Foundation website warns about the potential risks that taking prescription medication can pose while driving. Our current system seems to have a strange perspective that legality somehow affects ability. While the government and indeed the opposition want to expand a system that is based on these flawed ideas that simply expand the scope of drug prohibition, the Liberal Democrats are interested in measures that are related to impairment and road safety irrespective of the drug that has been consumed. So my question for the minister is this: if we are concerned about drug driving, why aren’t we testing for opiates or, better still, why aren’t we testing for benzodiazepine drugs?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:23): The drugs that we test for are chosen because of their prevalence and because we believe they are the most effective drugs to test for to respond to this growing road trauma problem. In a world of finite resources perhaps we would test for all sorts of other things as well. And of course, as Mr Limbrick knows, the relationship between impairment and presence is an incredibly complex one. I think Mr Limbrick knows the view that we have taken and the approach that we continue to take—the government’s interest in continuing to improve it—but we would like to get to a point where every time everyone gets behind the wheel of a car they know that there is a reasonable chance that they will be drug tested in the way that right now every time every driver in Victoria gets into the car they know, because they see them all the time, that there is a chance that they will be alcohol tested. The fear of getting caught is a very powerful motivator.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: AMBULANCE SERVICES

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:24): I rise to inform the house of the government’s continued investment in Victoria’s ambulance services. Earlier this month the first upgraded dual-crew service commenced in the northern Victorian town of Rochester. It means ambulances in Rochester will now respond to emergencies crewed by two life-saving paramedics. The Labor government is upgrading 15 single-crew stations into dual-crew stations across regional Victoria as part of a $109 million package committed to at the last election and fully funded in our most recent budget. As well as recruiting more paramedics, the investment includes upgrades to equipment and buildings to support locations running the upgraded dual-paramedic crews.

Ambulance community officers in Rochester will continue to play a vital role in their communities by supporting the transport of low-acuity patients to hospital, backing up our paramedics, responding to critical emergencies and assisting when they are unavailable. They will also play an important role in community engagement and education, with a focus on the GoodSAM and Heart Safe Community initiatives.
Thanks to our investment and our hardworking paramedics, ambulances are now arriving at our most critical patients faster than ever before. The latest data shows Victoria’s ambulances transported a massive 78,820 code 1 emergency patients in the three months to the end of December, 4,513 more than a year earlier. Despite this extra demand, paramedics reached 82.5 per cent of code 1 cases within 15 minutes, in an average response time of 11 minutes and 29 seconds. That is nearly 2 minutes faster than under the previous coalition government, when just 74.1 per cent of ambulances arrived in 15 minutes. In Campaspe shire the ambulances are arriving nearly 2 minutes faster.

We know there is more work to do. That is why the Andrews Labor government will always back our ambulance service and paramedics. This contrasts hugely with the time when Ms Crozier was in charge and Mr Davis was in charge, when ambulance response times became the worst on the Australian mainland.

**AGRICULTURE VICTORIA JOBS**

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:26): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Given the importance of soil science research into storing carbon as part of climate change mitigation, will the minister guarantee that no soil science jobs will be lost from AgriBio in Bundoora?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:26): It is delightful to get a question from the National Party member in relation to anything relating to climate change. I welcome a conversation at any time on this topic, Ms Bath. In relation to the research jobs that Agriculture Victoria undertake, they do an amazing job in addressing climate change. We have got mitigation against emissions from cows. We have got sequestration projects under way and a lot of Internet of Things trials going on to make people more efficient and more productive and make farmers’ jobs easier.

Right now we are delivering a $60 million DairyBio bioscience project in relation to the dairy feed space, a $52 million research and innovation project in relation to grains research and a $6 million per annum horticultural research and innovation program to support the quality of fruit and nuts that drive our export growth. We are doing a lot in this space. We have 575 research people that are employed by Agriculture Victoria, which I can say is certainly more than under the previous government. When it comes to some sectors that are shifting away from their interests, such as research into on-farm transition, we are always looking at the most effective research, what industry want us to invest in and the projects that industry want to partner on with us. And when it comes to soil research I am very excited in this space.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:28): And by that you have not given any indication that you will not cut those jobs. Minister, the research staff involved in groundwater and salinity management in Bendigo are critical in assisting farmers to adapt to climate change. Will the minister guarantee no jobs will be lost from salinity and groundwater research and monitoring in Bendigo?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:28): I again welcome reference to climate change. This government is committed to helping farmers, helping industry and helping communities to adapt and respond to climate change, and we will not waver in that dedication.

**FREIGHT INDUSTRY**

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:29): My question is for the Minister for Roads, Minister Pulford. What measures will the government take to initiate the clean-up of the old polluting truck fleet now that the government is not including Millers Road, Williamstown Road and Buckley Street in the suite of curfews? The inner-west community found out in January that the much-anticipated Smart Freight Partnership has fallen apart. Australia has one of the oldest truck fleets in the developed world, and it is estimated that 50 per cent of the trucks in Australian cities have no pollution controls. These curfews were part of the original proposal put together by the Maribyrnong
Truck Action Group and the Victorian Transport Association. They were crucial to the success of the initiatives in incentivising clean air and clean trucks.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:30): I thank Dr Cumming for her question and her interest in the improvements that I think we would all like to see in the emissions from trucks throughout the state, throughout Melbourne and I guess, in the case of the communities on whose behalf Dr Cumming is advocating, in the inner west, where this has been a longstanding matter of some considerable concern.

I met with three different inner-west community groups in December to talk to them about their desire for truck curfews to be put in place on a number of roads. Those discussions each turned into broader discussions around the issues of managing the coexistence—and it is not a happy coexistence—of residential life with an important freight route and an increasing amount of freight activity on all of our roads. I undertook to meet again in the first part of this year with the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group to advance some of these issues. My department has been working on this over the summer and continues to do so, and I look forward to meeting with MTAG in the not-too-distant future and exploring what is possible.

The turnover of vehicle fleet is of course a challenging issue, but I think enforcing current standards, making sure that new standards are appropriate and, wherever possible, hastening the take-up of cleaner vehicles and newer vehicles are things that we all need to commit to and need to support.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:32): I thank the minister for her response. Will the government make a promise to complete the Grieve Parade upgrade as an alternative truck route, as called for by the Hobsons Bay City Council and local residents? The West Gate Tunnel Project will result in around 4500 extra trucks per day travelling down Millers Road, Williamstown Road or Buckley Street. An alternative route could help to reduce the expected additional noise, truck fumes and difficult access for residents. They are having difficulty getting into their own homes and moving around their community due to these additional trucks on Williamstown and Millers roads and Buckley Street.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:33): I thank Dr Cumming for her further question. I certainly will not be taking the opportunity today to announce any significant changes to the way that trucks move through the inner west. Thank you for the invitation to do so.

I would make the point that Melissa Horne, the Minister for Ports and Freight, has recently, with the port of Melbourne, finalised the port rail shuttle project, something that has been talked about for a really long time in the inner west. That is a—

Members interjecting.

Ms PULFORD: ‘La, la, la, la, la’—are you right? I am trying to have a conversation here with Dr Cumming in accordance with the standing orders, and it is like Statler and Waldorf over there.

The PRESIDENT: Over to you, Minister.

Mr O'Donohue interjected.

Ms PULFORD: Melissa Horne does plenty all the time. I know that she is very engaged in these issues, and they are ones we work on closely in her capacity both as the minister for freight and as the local member. But there are a suite of things that we will all need to continue to do and to work on together. So no to the upgrade in terms of anything to announce today, but certainly these are issues that we will continue to work with the community on, both Minister Horne and me.
MINISTERS STATEMENTS: PICK MY PROJECT

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:34): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is empowering communities right across Victoria through the delivery of the Pick My Project initiative, a $30 million budget initiative that puts decision-making in the hands of our local communities.

I had the pleasure of visiting Bacchus Marsh last week alongside the member for Melton, Steve McGhie, to officially open the Masons Lane Reserve playground and seating project, which was made possible through a $120,000 grant from Pick My Project after attracting over 200 votes from the local community as a high priority for them. The new facility will be an essential meeting place for families in the heart of Bacchus Marsh. The Masons Lane Reserve was just one of 14 successful projects from the Pick My Project initiative in the Central Highlands region, with 14,235 votes cast by members of that community. Other projects in this region include upgrading the SES storage and training facility, a local youth-led mental health campaign in Moorabool and a project helping provide a pathway from homelessness in Ballarat.

In my own electorate I had the pleasure of opening the Seymour Art Attack project late last year, which installed street art and lighting uplifting the Seymour railway underpass. Other projects in my electorate include the soon-to-be-completed Big Hill Mountain Bike Park community facilities at Mount Beauty and the Mitta Valley Mountain Bike Park.

Avenel have got a very exciting project that was put up by the Avenel Action Group, of which I have the pleasure of pointing out that many members are in the gallery today. They attracted $99,000 to complete the multi-use activity precinct in town, providing a fantastic space for youth to use skateboards and to hang out.

Pick My Project is putting Victorians first, and I am pleased to see many of the successful projects now reaching completion. The projects are making a true difference from Bacchus Marsh to Mount Beauty and beyond. The innovative initiative has put communities right across Victoria in the driver’s seat and is delivering incredible community-led results.

DEER CONTROL

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:36): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. The release of your deer management strategy is well behind schedule. An advisory group was established in March 2018 and a targeted stakeholder workshop occurred in April 2018, with a public consultation process in October 2018. The time line outlined on the Engage Victoria website indicated the release of this strategy in 2019. My colleague in the other place the member for Eildon raised this on the adjournment for your attention in August 2019, to which you have failed to respond. Will the minister advise when she is going to release the deer management strategy, as deer numbers have greatly escalated?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:37): I thank Ms Lovell for her question and of course her interest in this matter. Particularly members of Northern Victoria and, I know, Eastern Victoria are only too aware of the damage that deer can do to agricultural assets and also our native forests. I have asked for advice following the fires on whether we can have a dedicated eradication of pests like deer, so that advice is coming through. Of course the fires have taken a lot of resources from the department in relation to looking at pest eradication and looking at where we can hunt and where we cannot hunt. In relation to Ms McLeish’s adjournment matter, I am pretty certain I signed that off last week, and the response to her is that this management plan is shortly to be released.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:38): Are you prepared to offer recompense to any of the agricultural producers who have incurred losses because you have failed to manage this escalating deer problem?
Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:38): Just continuing on from my substantive answer, we have a concerted effort in relation to dealing with pest control and animals that are not declared pests that cause damage for our agricultural sector. There is aerial shooting going on, and a lot of this is a joint responsibility between me and the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, but I can assure you there are active eradication methods going on right as we speak.

DUCK HUNTING

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (12:39): My question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. As we wait for a decision on a 2020 duck shooting season, members of Parliament who support the so-called sport have been visiting wetlands calling for a 2020 duck shooting season. Concerningly, as they stood for media beside a man who was charged and convicted for stealing water during the drought, they described duck shooting as a legitimate food-harvesting pursuit. But the very wetland this publicity stunt took place at has an Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) warning on it that no waterfowl from it should be eaten. In fact this warning states that no amount is safe, due to PFAS contamination. It is concerning that the opposition is recommending something so ill advised for human health. Given that birds are a migratory species, meaning that PFAS can travel, if a season was to proceed, what is the government’s plan to prevent Victorians from eating contaminated birds?

Mr JENNINGS (South Eastern Metropolitan—Leader of the Government, Special Minister of State, Minister for Priority Precincts, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) (12:40): I thank Mr Meddick for his question. It is in a very unusual form, this question. I have answered many questions that have been put to me in my career, and this is a very unusual one because Mr Meddick is ultimately expressing a concern for the wellbeing of shooters and their families. We are also concerned about wildlife in terms of the endangerment to species. We are also concerned about the quality of water and the natural environment in the landscape. We are also concerned about public health. So there are many avenues of interest for the government in relation to responding to your question, even though many in the community will believe it is for one purpose and one purpose only. There are a range of matters, and all of them in Mr Meddick’s question, as provocative as it may sound, need to be considered appropriately.

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (12:41): Thank you, Minister, for the answer. Given the EPA warning that, should shooting take place on this and similarly affected wetlands, no birds should be eaten, does the minister recognise that the killing of these waterbirds on these wetlands would be taking place just for fun?

The PRESIDENT: Mr Meddick, I cannot rule in questions that call for an opinion, so I think I just will not call the minister on that.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SMALL BUSINESS LOTE SUPPORT

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Small Business) (12:42): I rise to update the house on a culturally and linguistically diverse business round table that I attended earlier this week with the small business commissioner, Judy O’Connell, and the CEO of WorkSafe, Mr Colin Radford. One of Victoria’s greatest strengths is its vibrant multicultural society. According to the last census there are over 400 000 people who both own and manage their businesses in Victoria, and of those around one in four speaks a language other than English at home. It is vitally important that as a government we assist in the provision of a level playing field for those who have travelled halfway across the world to build a new life for their families and contribute to this great country of ours. One of the many great initiatives to assist multicultural
businesses I was pleased to discuss with those present was the Small Business Commission’s range of translated resource guides available in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Turkish and also Vietnamese. This serves as just one example of the way this government is seeking to make government accessible to those who contribute so much to our economic and cultural fabric.

Ms Crozier: On a point of order, President, in the response that the minister provided to me regarding the concerning issue that I had for Mrs McNamara, the 86-year-old with her health condition, the minister referred to doing the Zorba dance, which is in relation to her recent travels in Bali, as you know, so I am wondering now that the minister has opened up this issue—in terms of referencing Bali and her issues from her recent trip—whether you would provide advice as to whether questions around that trip and the issues of the health minister and her direct responsibility and the trip itself would be able to be conducted through question time.

Ms Shing: On the point of order, President, just in relation to Ms Crozier’s point of order, I very clearly heard interjections from the opposition which went to the subject matter which had absolutely nothing to do with the way in which questions can or cannot be ruled in or out of order according to the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: As far as Ms Crozier’s point of order goes, I do accept that if ministers do introduce certain issues into their answer, those issues could be open for questioning or debate in the future. But I listened intently, and Minister Mikakos did not mention her holiday. I do not want to assume, but I would like to assume Minister Mikakos might dance the Zumba—

Ms Mikakos: Zorba.

The PRESIDENT: Zorba, sorry, and Zumba—on many occasions. She was not referencing it, so I will dispatch that point of order.

WRITTEN RESPONSES

The PRESIDENT (12:46): As far as today is concerned, can I thank Minister Pulford, who is going to get responses from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services for Mr Limbrick, I understand.

Constituency questions

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:47): My constituency question is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and concerns the current condition of the Molka CFA station. The station is located on the Longwood-Shepparton Road, and the brigade has a membership of about 30 volunteers. I recently visited the Molka station with captain Neil Seach and other brigade members to inspect the conditions at the station—and they can only be described as archaic. The station currently has no power, no water, no toilet, no change facilities and no meeting room. Brigade members were informed about 10 years ago that they were near the top of the list for a new station to be built, but no upgrades have occurred. Despite the station’s isolation there is a power source about 30 metres away, and brigade members believe the CFA did actually acquire additional land to build the new station. Will the minister provide a commitment to allocate funding to construct a new station that includes the necessary amenities for the dedicated volunteers of the Molka CFA brigade?

SOUTH EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. A new station has just reopened—the Carrum railway station—though the finished product looks a little different from its originally proposed design. The initial graphic representations and community consultations promised screens would be installed along the elevated rail line in order to mitigate light and noise pollution from the station. Currently 24 light towers blast bright light into the surrounding residential homes. Noise generated by the station, including noisy
freight trains that run throughout the night, is causing many of my constituents unrest. So my question for the minister is: what is the government doing to mitigate light and noise pollution from the new Carrum station for residents within the area?

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:49): My constituency question is for the Treasurer. Last week we learned that the Treasurer wants to cut $4 billion from public expenditure to save his budget blowout. Well, I have got an idea for you, Mr Treasurer: you could start by cutting $1.2 million from Parks Victoria, where they are spending it on cultural heritage surveys of rock climbing sites in the Grampians. In fact, Mr Treasurer, I am sure there are countless cuts you could make from this department, which seems intent on impeding the lives of individuals across the state. Parks Victoria falsely accused rock climbers of damaging Aboriginal rock art and posted it on their website, when in fact the department itself was the culprit. They laid 1080 poison baits in Belfast Coastal Reserve, and they have been spending $2000 an hour to cull deer numbers when deer hunters could do it more effectively. The question to the Treasurer is: will he at least end Parks Victoria’s $1.2 million waste of taxpayer dollars to rectify his disastrous budget blowout?

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (12:50): My constituency question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. A CFA volunteer in my electorate recently met with my office in regard to funding the new fire station at Aireys Inlet. The land for the new station has been bought, so the argument for necessity has already been recognised by the CFA. This constituent has stated that a new station is desperately needed based on the inadequacy of the current station, the high summer population and the fire risk to the area. This was proven by recent bushfires in the Otways, which is very close to Aireys Inlet, and the Christmas Day fires just a handful of years ago. The Aireys Inlet volunteer brigade plays a critical role in the community and also services neighbouring and wider regions. The station’s current location means that the brigade cannot meet its target for turnout and response to emergencies as it is situated in an area where many brigade members are unable to arrive within their prescribed times. Simply put, Aireys Inlet needs a new station, especially with our ever-growing bushfire seasons. My question is: can the minister explain if funding has been assigned to the build of the new station, and if so, when will this build begin and be completed?

NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) (12:51): My constituency question is for the Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education, the Honourable Gayle Tierney. Women are currently under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics in vocational education and universities. In 2016 women comprised less than 15 per cent of all domestic engineering and related technologies undergraduate course completions and less than 11 per cent of vocational education course completions. The Andrews Labor government has a proud record of supporting women to participate in education and training, with free TAFE opening the door for more women to get the skills needed for a good job. My question for the minister is: what initiatives does the Andrews Labor government have in place to support and encourage more women to study STEM courses in Northern Metropolitan Region?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:52): My question is for the Minister for Health. Last year I asked Minister Mikakos about poor ambulance response times in Indigo shire. In reply the minister told the house that the Andrews government had spent more than ever on ambulances and paramedics. Results for the October to December quarter are in, and only 28.4 per cent of ambulances responding to code 1 calls in Indigo shire reached their patients in under 15 minutes—once again the worst in the state. This is significantly worse than the previous quarter. The minister noted that the geography of Indigo shire makes a rapid response challenging, but comparable shires, such as Alpine, have posted
much better results, with almost twice as many ambulances reaching patients on time. You cannot stand up and tell us what a great job you are doing with ambulance services when Indigo shire continues to get third-rate service. Minister, why has the government’s record spend on ambulances and paramedics failed to improve outcomes for Indigo?

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (12:53): My constituency question today is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Truganina is a fast-growing community of well over 20,000 within the City of Wyndham. Despite the fact that the Truganina CFA was promised a new station some three years ago, it is astonishing that the government has yet to acquire the land necessary to actually build this new station. This particularly confuses locals, as the minister previously promised the new station would be up and running by June last year, coming up on 12 months ago. Putting aside the government’s disdain for Wyndham and its residents, the time for action is well past. Minister, when will the—to quote your words—‘permanent, modern’ station be opened in Truganina?

EASTERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:54): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Quality, salvageable timber is lying on the Princes Highway and arterial roads throughout East Gippsland. East Gippsland native timber harvesters who felled the hazardous trees to ensure public safety and clear road access have had a force majeure forced upon their contracts. They are desperate to go back to work. They have crippling costs—fixed costs and bank charges that are crippling them—in excess of $40,000 per month. Will the minister provide VicForests with the required funds to enable the salvage operations to occur and allow these unemployed contractors to go back to work, feed their families and support their crews?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (12:55): My question is to the Minister for Roads, and it is again about safety improvements to the Black Spur road in Murrindindi. It follows our interactions in question time in June, August and October last year over the condition and improvement of the road. Recently my constituents have increasingly been raising concerns with me about the progress of these upgrades, including views that the works so far have been negligible and quick fixes such as cheap sealing are being used. Accordingly I ask the minister if she could make available an itemised list of both the completed upgrades and planned works and their time lines and costs.

SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:55): My constituency question today is for the Minister for Planning, and it relates to commitments the Labor government gave before the state election in 2018 to the people of Glen Eira, particularly the Carnegie and Murrumbeena townships or structure plan areas, where commitments were made for mandatory height limits. The government has now stepped back; the Minister for Planning has stepped back from mandatory height limits and now is talking about discretionary height limits. What we have seen is a huge increase in density in Murrumbeena and in Carnegie, loss of tree canopy, loss of open space—direct impacts on amenity. My question is: why has the government reversed the policy that was stated before the election, in effect lying to the people of Glen Eira, in particular Carnegie and Murrumbeena, about mandatory heights when now it is pushing discretionary heights?

Sitting suspended 12.57 pm until 2.04 pm.
MOTIONS
Legislative Council
Wednesday, 19 February 2020

Motions
GOLD ROYALTY

Debate resumed.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (14:04): Before we broke for question time I was making the point that there are four active goldmines in Victoria and that the government failed to consult them before it announced this imposition of a royalty. In fact in one of the submissions that was made by one of the companies to the regulatory impact statement (RIS) process, which started and concluded very quickly at the end of last year before the minister gazetted the royalty, the point was made that the government had argued that—and I will quote the submission:

The reason given to not consult with any of the gold producers on the basis that they are publicly traded entities prior to the budget announcement is complete and utter nonsense.

And I agree. This is a government which is in the pocket of Transurban, as we have seen time and time again. We have seen around issues like the West Gate Tunnel extension that Transurban is making disclosures to the stock exchange, as it is obliged to do, of information the government is withholding from the people of Victoria, so the suggestion that the government did not want to talk to publicly listed entities for some reason and therefore could not have proper consultation is an absolute nonsense and flies in the face of what it has done in its dealing with Transurban, where it has been very happy to have secretive deals, secretive negotiations, without informing the public, many of which come into the public’s view because of the disclosure obligations to the market that Transurban has. That argument from the government is absolute nonsense. The reality is this royalty was struck for budgetary convenience and the impact it has on the goldmining sector was of secondary importance to the government.

We saw the government launch, as it was obliged to do, a regulatory impact statement process late last year. Under the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994, with the minister changing regulations, she had to provide a regulatory impact statement, but it was a foregone conclusion what the government was going to do, and the regulatory impact statement was nothing but window-dressing. We saw in September and October the Minerals Council of Australia, as well as the affected parties, make submissions to the government highlighting the shortcomings of introducing the royalty, which is set at 2.75 per cent of the market value of gold extracted. It does not have any relationship to the profitability of any of the mines; it purely relates to the volume of gold extracted and the market price on the day, with no regard to the capital cost of operations for those mines, with no regard to the operating costs of those mines, with no regard to the exploration costs of those mines. It applies at that rate across all activity in Victoria, with the exception of the carve-out for the first 2500 ounces.

Of course, as the sector has noted, all the operating mines exceed the 2500-ounce threshold and will be paying this royalty, so it has been struck effectively as a tax on output with no regard to profitability. That means that with this extra cost on production, fewer resources will be viable. There will be less capability of the four operating mines to exploit and extract existing resources, because their cost base has effectively increased with no regard to their profitability. This rate of levy is set at a higher level than that which is imposed in Western Australia, which of course is the largest gold-producing state in the country and which produces the bulk of Australia’s gold. Therefore gold produced in Victoria will now be at a competitive disadvantage in its cost base compared to that produced in Western Australia.

In responding to the submissions made to the regulatory impact statement the government was at best disingenuous and at worst outright dishonest in the responses the minister provided. In relation to the question of the royalty rate, which was set at 2.75 per cent, the government in its response basically said, ‘We couldn’t set any other rate. We couldn’t agree to any other rate as was made by way of submission from the industry because we are removing an exemption’. Of course that is an absolutely disingenuous misrepresentation of the situation. The way in which these regulations are structured do
not simply remove an exemption, they actually put in place the new rate of 2.75 per cent, and it was open to the government to set that rate at whatever level it wanted to. It was simply for budgetary convenience that it was set at 2.75 per cent, and if it had consulted properly with the sector beforehand, if it had consulted properly through the RIS process, there was no impediment to the government striking a different rate.

The government was also disingenuous in its comments on the question of thresholds and exemptions, saying that because it has put in place the 2500-ounce exemption small producers would not be affected. It quoted that of the 18 licences only four will be affected—the operators of four of those licences would be affected. The reality is that those four are the only ones operating, so of course the dormant licences are not going to be affected. The four producers of gold in this state are all going to be affected by this and are all going to be impacted by the imposition of this royalty in different ways, depending on the nature of their cost base, the structure of their operations and the size of their businesses. So this is not going to have an equal effect across the four mines; it is going to have a differential impact between the four mines depending on their cost structure and their capital structure. It is disingenuous for the government to say most entities are exempt when it knows full well the only operating entities are those four licence-holders that I outlined earlier.

On the issue of a price floor—a minimum price for the imposition of a royalty—the government in its response was again disingenuous, basically saying that it would be too complex a regulatory structure to have a price floor. That highlights the government’s failure to consult on these regulations. It had the opportunity before it introduced them. It had the opportunity to consult properly through the RIS process, and it chose not to do that. The RIS process was nothing more than window-dressing obligated by the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 and there was a foregone conclusion before the process started and the minister made the regulations.

This royalty has not been thought through properly. It is simply a revenue grab for the budget without consideration of the consequences for our goldmining sector in Victoria. The four businesses which produce gold in this state are significant employers in regional Victoria. They are significant employers in parts of the state which are, in many respects, economically depressed. This royalty will have a material impact on the profitability of those businesses. It will have a material impact on the viability of future exploration and extraction activity, and in the interests of those businesses and of regional Victorian communities it is important that these amendments, these regulations, be disallowed, that that royalty not proceed as it has already commenced on 1 January and that the government consult properly with the goldmining sector in this state to ensure that if it does introduce a royalty, it is done in such a way that it ensures and protects the viability of the sector in this state.

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) (14:13): I rise to speak on the motion put by Mr Davis to disallow the gold royalty. Mr Davis in particular is very good at putting before this house disallowance motion after disallowance motion, forgetting that he is in opposition. The Parliament will allow him to move motions like this on anything Mr Davis does not like—like the West Gate one, and this one is another one. I cannot believe that people who would like to be the alternative government would put in a disallowance motion in relation to gold when we are the only state in the commonwealth who do not have a royalty tax on gold. We are talking about a time when the price of gold is at its highest ever and the profitability of these mines is actually going through the roof, which is a great thing.

I did represent, in my previous job, goldminers. I have been to a number of these mines—Fosterville in particular. I think it is a great industry. It is a dangerous industry, no question. Some really good people work there, and some mines do well and some do not. But I cannot believe that people who would like to be the alternative government would actually take advantage of being able to get some revenue like other states do. Why should we as Victorians miss out on that tax? Western Australia joined not long ago. Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia—they all have a royalty tax for mining gold. If we want to continue our infrastructure program to deliver for Victorians—to build more roads, provide more public transport, invest more in schools and hospitals—the money has got come from somewhere. The mining industry and the gold industry are doing pretty well, thank you very much.
I have just got a couple of quotes here in relation to, for example, the Fosterville goldmine, which is owned by Kirkland Lake mining and is one of the most profitable goldmines in the world. I quote from *Australian Mining* magazine, which reports:

Kirkland Lake president and chief executive officer Tony Makuch said Fosterville had transformed into one of the world’s highest-grade, most profitable gold mines since November 2016.

That is a quote from *Australian Mining*, 22 February 2019. *Bloomberg* further states:

A thirty minute drive east of Bendigo, a city of elegant Victorian-era civic buildings built with the proceeds of the first gold rush, Kirkland has transformed its underground mine into one of the world’s most profitable gold operations.

The reason I am quoting this is Mr Rich-Phillips said that the 2.7 per cent royalty tax does not take into account profitability and that is going to affect the profitability of the mines we are talking about. It was clearly spelt out earlier that the tax only applies to processors or producers who produce more than 2500 ounces of gold per year, so it does not apply to amateur gold-diggers, people who go out as a hobby or small producers. We are talking about significant operations which produce more than 2500 ounces a year, and I am using the Fosterville mine as an example. I am not picking on them, but that is just such a classic example.

Whatever design we put in place, probably we are not going to get the mining industry to jump up and say, ‘Great. We are going to pay you some more tax because we are making so much money’. You are not going to have that. I remember the Kevin Rudd super-profits tax. That was a super-profits tax after you had made your 10 per cent plus. They even opposed that, so I get it. Some will say it is fair enough; some will say, ‘We don’t want to pay any tax’. I am sure my friends from the Liberal Democrats will have their say, and that is fair enough. That is their position, ‘We don’t want anyone to pay any tax, or maybe not much tax’. You have got to pay some tax. I am looking forward to that contribution.

But the fact is that we have reduced, to the tune of $900 million, payroll tax and stamp duty in the regions. We are not trying to recoup that money back, but I think the goldmining industry is taking off in Victoria again. We can all go back to the 1800s with the gold rush. It was a very successful industry, and looking at a building like this, it was built on the back of the gold rush. Hopefully we will have another gold rush in Victoria, because there are still a lot of unexplored mines and areas where gold mining can flourish, and then we can build another magnificent building like this. You would not build this building today. I think people who made a decision to build a building like this now would probably be hanged. But they were good times back then on the back of the gold rush.

We do not want to just impose tax because we like to do that. There is a reason for it, and the reason is very simple: we want to be able to deliver to Victorians what we said we were going to deliver. Are we going to run a deficit or borrow money? I think the gold industry in Victoria has had it good for so long. They have enjoyed a significant period with no additional tax, unlike in the other states. Therefore I think it is just and fair to basically fall into line with what the other states are doing.

As I said earlier, the gold price has jumped over 25 per cent from $1847 on 27 May 2019 to currently $2363 per ounce. That is a huge jump. As a superannuation investor I would like 25 per cent return on my super; that would be magnificent. If I could get 5 per cent or 10 per cent, I would be happy, and I think most people would be grateful to get that much return on investment. But 25 per cent in the last 12 months is a huge profit, and they should pay 2.75 per cent to the people of Victoria when the gold has been dug out. Pay some of that money back. I do not think it is a bad thing; I think it is a good thing.

As I said earlier, I have not found an employer in my time that volunteers or is happy to pay tax or any wage increases or anything because they want to. Most of the time they are forced to do it. Having said that, if Victoria were putting these companies at a disadvantage by introducing a new tax that does not exist in other jurisdictions, I could see the argument—that you are putting these companies at a
disadvantage and we need to think long and hard about it, think twice about it. But we are simply closing the gap between our jurisdiction and what is happening in the other states.

I mentioned earlier that the same thing occurred back in 2010 when the Liberal Premier Colin Barnett in Western Australia introduced a similar tax, as did a Liberal Premier in New South Wales, Barry O’Farrell, in 2011 and Campbell Newman in Queensland in 2012. So 2010, 2011 and 2012—three Liberal governments—

Mr Finn: Any of them still there?

Mr MELHEM: They have retired, Mr Finn. They have moved on to better things. They saw the benefit of introducing that tax, and what we are simply doing in Victoria is lining up—

Mr Finn: Some think Dan will go the same way.

Mr MELHEM: Don’t worry, mate, he will be there for many, many years to come. You are going to be very disappointed, Mr Finn, and you are going to be sitting on that side of the chamber for many, many years to come. You may even retire there.

As I said earlier in relation to Kirkland Lake Gold, which own the largest mine in Victoria, the Fosterville mine, they increased by 50 per cent in the last three months after the budget, so basically their profit is going up as well. So what is wrong with sharing 2.75 per cent? Production looks like it is going to ramp up, and all the indications so far are that the gold that has been produced and is to be produced in the next three years is estimated to be of the highest grade. They are not digging cheap gold; they are digging top-shelf gold. It is like the Penfold Grange of the gold industry, so what is wrong with paying 2.75 per cent? I would understand it if the industry was really struggling; I would be able to see their arguments. But I cannot see the argument against this proposal.

Half of Victoria’s six largest goldmines have been purchased, with the new owners announcing plans to invest significantly in exploration and expansion. They knew this tax was coming, so it is not like it was a surprise. The government consulted widely with the Minerals Council of Australia and various other players and a lot of submissions were received, so it is not a secret—the Treasurer did not wake up on 2 January 2020 and decide he was going to impose the tax. We have still got some strong interest from the industry to invest in Victoria.

It is pleasing to note that the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that Victorian mining employment rose 41 per cent in 2018–19, so that is another positive indication, and it is really pleasing that that is already occurring. There has been some talk about, ‘Should we phase that in? When do we implement it?’ I think we should be getting that implemented forthwith, as per the regulation, to get some of that income in while the time is good for the industry so we are not really impacting on their bottom line, on their profitability.

Also I make no apology that this government is bringing the money in—and I am repeating now what I said earlier—because we can invest that in better schools and hospitals, the airport link and various projects like the railway crossing removal program. We have got a lot of things to do, a lot of things to implement, so I think asking the goldmining industry to actually chip in is a good thing. As I said, the consultation process occurred through September and October last year, and there has also been engagement on the Engage Victoria website. You always have various opinions about people liking tax—not many people probably do—but I think if you ask Victorians whether that tax should be implemented, I think you will find most Victorians would say yes, because it is going to go to a good cause.

I have got a quote here from Hugh Morgan, who is a significant mining investor and a Liberal Party stalwart. He is very well known in the Liberal Party. He said of the royalty announcement that in the current boom:

It is almost impossible for a government not to do something.
That is a very well respected mining investor and Liberal man supporting what we are trying to do here, and I think we should pay some attention and listen to Hugh Morgan. He knows what he is talking about. He is in the money-making business. He is a good investor. He is actually investing his money in the industry and does not mind paying the 2.75 per cent, so I do not know why the opposition here are hell-bent on trying to pass a disallowance motion—probably so some of their mates can keep that money in their pocket instead of that money transferring to the Victorian taxpayers and Victorians generally to benefit from that tax. Also there is prominent gold exporter Geoff McDermott of Navarre Minerals, who was quoted as saying of the royalty that it is ‘not a big deal’. So we have a mining magnate saying, ‘That’s not a big deal. I don’t know what the fuss is about’, but obviously it is a big deal for the Liberal Party, for the opposition.

As I said earlier, this is about taxation and royalty revenue per capita in Victoria. It is still below New South Wales, still below Western Australia and still below Queensland. So going back to the point I made earlier, if we were going to put these companies at a disadvantage if they would otherwise have had the same goldmine in other jurisdictions—in Western Australia, Queensland or New South Wales—I could see the merit of the argument. But that is not the case, because we are still going to fall below these states. The other mining state is Tasmania in relation to goldmining, but obviously Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales have significant goldmining operations and their royalty tax is much higher than in Victoria.

It is not like we are going to make squillions out of this; it would be nice if we did, but we will not. Victoria raises very little revenue from royalties. It is less than $20 per person per year, and we raise less royalty revenue per person than any other state. That is another thing I want to get into, because a lot of taxes are federally based taxes and we always have this argument—we have been having it since 2014—about what our fair share of tax or income or distribution of wealth collected by the commonwealth and put back into Victoria is. We always have that argument about what our fair share is, and we always struggle to convince. We had a problem with the Abbott government and the Turnbull government, and now we have a problem with the Morrison government, even though the current Prime Minister is making slightly different noises than his predecessors in relation to giving Victoria a fair share, a fair slice, of the federal thing. For Queensland, WA and New South Wales, in relation to the mining industry, the only tax they can raise to increase their revenue so they can deliver on their commitments to their people is the royalty tax. Victoria has been missing out on that for decades. So I think now that is another way to fill the gap that exists between us and the commonwealth. That is why I think it is a wise move by the Treasurer, and I support the levy being struck and implemented forthwith.

Now, there is an argument about how that is going to be adjusted. Over the four-year period to 2021–22, Victoria’s ratio of tax and royalty revenue to gross state product will average 5.1 per cent. As I said, that is lower than New South Wales, which is 5.2 per cent, and it is lineball with WA and Queensland at 5.1 per cent. So I urge members to reconsider their view, to think long and hard about why this royalty tax is being implemented—what is the reason for it; what is the logic behind it?—and to vote against the disallowance motion moved by Mr Davis or by the opposition. That simply puts us at the same level as the other states, delivering a scarce income. We can then start delivering on these much-needed projects and services in Victoria, because without that every time we are not able to generate income. ‘How are you going to deliver on all these projects?’ Well, I have not heard from Mr Rich-Phillips about the alternative, how we can fund these projects or services, just simply ‘Disallow it’ because someone in the industry said, ‘Oh, well, we don’t want to pay the 2.75 per cent tax, so therefore bad luck’. I have not heard any serious arguments why, apart from I think the comments that it is not based on profitability.

If it was based on a super-profits tax, would that change your view of it? I should take you back to the infamous Kevin Rudd supertax on the mining industry. Maybe he should have done it a bit differently; maybe he should have talked to the industry a bit beforehand, before he made the announcement, and maybe we would have had a super-profits tax. I wish we did, because let tell you: if that super-profits
tax had gone ahead in 2007–08 and had been put in a sovereign fund, like what the Scandinavian countries implemented in the 1970s, we would all be in much better shape than we are today. But we missed the opportunity because the mining boom moved on. But I think at the time it would have been a great idea. With those words, I will be opposing the motion, and I hope the rest of the members will do the same.

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (14:36): I will be brief. Of course the Liberal Democrats support the disallowance of this tax. We hate tax increases and new taxes. We always vote against them. Especially, though, I hate taxes that kill jobs and industries in the regions. I spoke against this toxic, job-killing tax in budget week, and I will speak against this toxic, job-killing tax today. This tax is the Fosterville goldmine tax. They will pay it. They will pay most of it, and when you bankrupt the other mines, they will pay all of it. This will put jobs at risk all over regional Victoria. In my electorate there will be 200 jobs at Costerfield operations, and there will be hundreds of others across Victoria in mines, not to mention smashing the prospectors out there looking for the next Fosterville or the hundreds of small businesses that support the mining industry. It is going to put the brakes on a growing industry. This is an intolerable risk.

A job in a mine is a lifesaver for families struggling in drought- and bushfire-affected regions. The emergence of a gold industry in regional Victoria was a rare bright spot of hope for struggling families who wanted to live in regional Victoria. And sure enough, the government has come out with its wet blanket and snuffed the light out. You want to take money from the regions to spend in Melbourne—again, as always. Putting aside my personal dislike of taxes, this tax is simply poorly planned because you failed to consult with anybody. Victorian goldmines are nothing like the big, open-cut operations in Western Australia. Victorian goldmines are complex, unpredictable underground mines, and yet the payable royalty in Victoria is going to be higher.

There is a famous quote that the art of taxation consists of plucking the goose to get the largest quantity of feathers with the least possible amount of hissing. This gold tax is simply bad policy because it is going to kill the goose. The government is cutting the goose open, looking for the golden eggs, but you will end up with no goose and no gold. For a small mine producing about 40 000 ounces of gold it is not worth the huge risk of even starting a goldmine, because the gold tax amounts to a tax rate of about 50 per cent. Other states have phase-ins, price floors, royalty holidays and reduced rates for startup mines, which reduce the effective rate. Governments in other states do not do that because they are generous; they do it because it makes mines viable and makes them more money.

The Labor Party, the party of the workers, should take a look at the miners up there in the gallery today. I do not know how many of the lawyers sitting on the government benches have been near a goldmine. You might not like the dust. You would not want to get your shoes dirty. You would have to get out of the city and your air-conditioned offices.

The Andrews government continues its war on the regions. When I previously spoke on the gold tax, I invoked the spirit of the Eureka Stockade. That was a tax revolt against the government in Melbourne imposing excessive taxes on miners in the regions. Well, the miners are marching again—and the timber workers and the irrigators and the farmers and the people of the regional towns that you have incinerated. Apparently votes in Melbourne are worth more than the whole rest of the state combined. But make no mistake: Labor are bleeding votes in the regions.

Let me again raise the idea of Rexit—the regional exit—where all of regional Victoria says goodbye to the Melbourne-based politicians, who not only do not care but apparently actively wish us ill. Every time you pour a bucket onto the regions, you bring Rexit one step closer to reality. I support this disallowance because I hate taxes, but also because I take my job title seriously. I am a member for Northern Victoria and for northern Victorians.

During a debate in this chamber last sitting week I was chastised for reminding the government they had betrayed timber workers, irrigators, tourism operators and now miners. I am willing to work out a
deal: if this government can stop betraying country Victorians for a moment, I promise to stop hurting your feelings. So here is your chance. This motion is a test to see those members who are for Northern Victoria and those who are against Northern Victoria—and the other regions. Who are the members for Western Victoria or for Eastern Victoria? Who are the regional members against the regions? It is a test for those who claim to be for regional development and those who are really against it. It is a test you seem to fail every time. I will hold you to account, and when regional families are losing their incomes because of this stupid tax, you should all hang your heads in shame. You have got no right to complain about my criticism if you continue to betray the people of northern Victoria—of all regional Victoria. I challenge the government right now: deliver for regional Victoria or shut up.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:41): It is interesting that we are here debating a gold tax in the Victorian Parliament. As we look around us, the gold of the Victorian goldfields is everywhere to be seen. For those who are not part of this chamber, you need to know that the gold up there is actually 24-carat gold, straight out of Victoria’s goldmines in the 1800s. If we look back to the 1800s, a significant event happened, particularly on 3 December in 1854. A group of miners gathered at the Eureka Stockade. They gathered there to protest against an overtaxing and over-regulating government. They had been sick of the government and its over-regulation for some time, but an increase in taxation and the cost of the miners’ licences sent them to the Eureka Stockade that night in an act that actually defined Victoria.

Mr Melhem told us the reason the government is imposing this tax. He told us that Labor need money so they can deliver what they promised at the election. So the reason for imposing this tax is to prop up the budget bottom line because Labor over-promised. So when Labor run out of money—we all know what Labor governments do best when they run out of money—they come after yours. For the owners and the shareholders of the goldmines in Victoria, they are coming after your profit. For the workers in those mines, they are coming after your jobs, because if the tax is so high that it takes your employer out of existence, there will be no jobs left in mining in Victoria. And for the small businesses who supply the mines, they are coming after your jobs as well. It is death by 1000 cuts to jobs in country Victoria. We have seen this government already attack the timber industry with a phasing out of native timber logging by 2030. That is going to cost hundreds and hundreds of jobs in country Victoria. We have already seen them tax the energy industry—the energy industry in the Latrobe Valley, that is, of course. They taxed the owners of the Hazelwood power generation station out of existence, and that cost hundreds of jobs in the Latrobe Valley. And now we are seeing them impose additional taxes on the gold industry, which will cost jobs.

Labor have said there are 18 licences in this state and only four of them will be affected, and we have heard from many of the speakers today that that is because only four of them are actually operational. But those four goldmines actually do produce a lot of jobs in country Victoria. Two of those goldmines are in my own electorate of Northern Victoria: Kirkland Lake Gold’s mine at Fosterville near Bendigo and the Mandalay goldmine at Costerfield near Heathcote. There is also the Ballarat mine and the Stawell goldmine. Kirkland Lake’s Fosterville goldmine near Bendigo is a significant employer; it employs over 600 people. And the Mandalay Resources mine in Costerfield employs over 200 people.

The Ballarat goldmine employs 161 people, and there are 76 contractors. This mine spends about $55 million in Victoria each year, and there are about 110 Ballarat suppliers who also work for the mine. The Stawell goldmine, which employs around 200 people, is also significant in the Stawell area. The mine’s local procurement policy undertakes about three-quarters of its spending within Victoria every year. That is a significant contribution they are making to our regional economies that is going to be put at risk because of this tax.

The government says, ‘Oh, what’s wrong with taxing people for the profits they make?’ Well, it is very difficult to actually make profit out of gold in Victoria. What we see is that for the Victorian goldmines there is no longer gold just lying around, like when it was easy to actually get. We now
have a level of mining that is quite intensive. It is expensive to operate, and it is difficult to get to that gold. If we put those taxes up too much, this will affect exploration for new mines. It will mean that people will leave mines when the gold becomes difficult to get to and we will see this industry decline in Victoria.

This tax could actually cost us money in Victoria if the industry does decline, because at the moment, in terms of the mining spending in Victoria by those four goldmines, they spend on wages in Victoria around about $122 million, on goods and services and community grants they spend about $175 million and from the other taxes and royalties that they pay there is at least $5 million that comes to the Victorian government. So that is $302 million that is put at risk for this government to actually reap back what they think will actually be around $16 million to $30 million in revenue. That is not good mathematics, and it shows some poor judgement on the part of this particular Treasurer.

This will put the regions at risk because most regional areas where goldmining actually occurs are regions in Victoria which experience of high levels of economic disadvantage. This goldmining industry actually brings jobs to those areas. It also brings them higher paying jobs in the goldmining industry, and that is a great opportunity for regional Victoria because these are the types of jobs we actually need. They are jobs in science, technology, engineering and maths areas—things that bring professionals to our towns who bring leadership and skills with them to the regions. But also it inspires our young people to study in these areas so that they can go off and get qualified and come back and get higher paying jobs in their local area.

This is a very short-sighted move by this government, and I am going to conclude my contribution there. I could go on for much longer, but in the interest of a number of other speakers getting the opportunity to speak I will conclude my contribution there and just say that I support this motion to disallow this gold tax because it is an attack on jobs in country Victoria.

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (14:50): I will be short and sweet because I know there are a number of other speakers who want to speak on this motion as well. I rise to speak to the coalition’s motion, which aims to disallow regulation 5 of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Mineral Industries) Regulations 2019 and by extension revoke the 2.75 per cent gold royalty which will be imposed on nearly every single operating goldmine in Victoria. While I note that there are some obvious arguments about the need for mining companies to pay their fair share of tax, I do have some serious doubts that instead of targeting just big mining companies this gold royalty will eventually be paid for by hardworking families.

I have visited the Ballarat goldmine and have met the people working there, and I welcome some of them to the chamber here today. They are certainly not suit-wearing investors or multinationals; they are incredibly hardworking members of the community, including mums and dads, who rely on an already small industry for a full-time income. I note that Mr Melhem quoted a mining magnate in saying that this tax is no big deal. Maybe ask those in the gallery here that will be directly affected by this tax if it is no big deal; you may get a different answer.

The Ballarat goldmine currently operates at a financial balance and employs around 161 people and 76 contractors, reinvesting around $69 million back into the domestic economy annually. After touring the Ballarat goldmine I requested a meeting with the Minister for Resources to further discuss how a figure of 2.75 per cent was decided by the government and who was consulted in the consideration of this levy. However, this meeting never eventuated, so I questioned the minister on the floor about the gold levy. Through my question I asked the minister if there was any possibility of the gold royalty being progressively indexed in line with the profits of mining companies instead of the annual threshold on ounces mined, which is around 2500. However, the government remained committed to not altering the royalty until it had been fully implemented and eventually reviewed. This delay could come at the cost of hundreds of jobs in the meantime.
Other proposals that the mining community have taken to the government include tax offsets for local investment in exploration, mining holidays in which miners are exempt from paying the flat royalty and even a gradual phasing-in period for the royalty. While the government did have a brief period of formal consultation with the sector, each of these ideas was also rejected.

Finally, I note that this motion only has to pass one house of Parliament. It is not the job of a crossbencher to agitate the government’s agenda, particularly when this government has a clear mandate to govern. However, it is our job as members of this place to ensure that this chamber remains the house of review. No-one argues that mining companies should not pay additional taxes given their reliance on our shared natural resources. However, the inflexible and sudden announcement of this gold royalty makes supporting this particular tax very difficult.

I implore my metropolitan crossbench colleagues to seriously consider their position when voting on this tax. Your decision will potentially affect the employment of rural and regional workers. Those sitting in the gallery and all other mine workers in those mines operating at a financial balance may have their employment terminated. Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party supports rural and regional workers, and we fully support this motion.

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:53): I rise to support the call that this house disallow regulation 5 of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) (Mineral Industries) Regulations 2019, as proposed by Mr Davis and moved by my colleague Mr Rich-Phillips. Clearly our friend Mr Melhem when he was over on that side of the chamber showed he has no idea how high-risk business and investment works.

The other side are addicted to tax and addicted to wealth redistribution, but most on the other side, having never been in the business of creating wealth and taking risks—and mining is a high-risk business and requires massive investment—have no idea what the implications of such a tax are to the small mining companies in this state. Their normal approach is to tax and spend, and when they run out of money they will find another loophole to try and tax the hardworking members of this state.

Like Mr Quilty, I have previously spoken against this tax. It is an inside-the-tram-tracks tax. Outside the West Gate we work hard to provide food and wealth that frequently benefits those in the city. Goldmining is an important employer in western region Victoria. The mine in Ballarat employs 160 people directly and dozens of contractors. The Stawell mine, which reopened last year, has around 190 direct employees and dozens of contractors. These are well-paid regional jobs, and they rely on a viable gold industry. This royalty threatens that. The general manager of Castlemaine Goldfields in Ballarat has called it ‘a very real and present threat to our viability’.

It is important to understand that neither Ballarat nor Stawell are like Fosterville or some of the other large operations which exist across Australia. They cannot simply sit back and watch the money roll in but face a constant need to explore, adapt and invest to maintain their viability. This government clearly does not appreciate that. They see a goldmine and think it is a cash cow.

Some mines, however, are close to the margins of viability, and it is the future of these operations and their employees that the Labor government has threatened. The Stawell mine closed in 2016, with huge consequences for employees and that small local community. Production only resumed last year, while the Ballarat mine reopened in 2011. The government’s one-size-fits-all treatment of the goldmining industry threatens well-paid jobs in regional communities with limited employment opportunities. The tighter the margins, the larger the risk. Even should the market price of gold remain high enough to keep these mines in business in the short term, the nature of their business requires constant investment in exploration to sustain operations. This consideration is completely ignored by the royalty imposed by this government. Everyone will be hit, big or small, profitable or loss-making. As Troy Cole, general manager of Stawell Gold Mines, said:

Those places that are not at that stage should have a different approach applied that encourages investment and encourages the start-up of the industry.
When you have very rich ore bodies generating a lot of wealth, that would be a little bit different, but when you’re in a marginal environment and the business is in start-up and you’ve got heavy capital investment going in, you need special considerations.

It is perhaps unsurprising that we have ended up with this ill-thought-out tax, so blunt an instrument, when we consider the deeply inadequate consultation which preceded its announcement. This really was an ambush of industry, a measure introduced to raise money in a hurry, with no understanding of the damage it will cause to the industry and the threat to its long-term prospects.

It is clear to me that we must vote to disallow this royalty. Should it be considered in the future, it must be done in consultation with industry so that this mistake is not repeated. It is perfectly possible to design a regime which would encourage sustained business through a whole or partial offset against ongoing exploration costs and capital investment in infrastructure. All of these considerations have been ignored by the government in the royalty imposed by these regulations, which fail to understand the variety of the industry and fail to understand our regional economy. They represent a short-term cash grab with damaging long-term consequences for regional Victoria.

I urge members on the other side and the crossbench to please think of the jobs and workers in regional Victoria. We need these jobs desperately and we need to keep these businesses viable. They do not need to be taxed.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (14:59): I rise today knowing that the Victorian goldmining and mining equipment technology and services, METS, industry wrote to me urgently wanting me to support the delay of the government’s proposed gold royalty until a full and proper consultation process could take place within regional Victoria communities, councils and businesses. As we all are aware, the Victorian mining and METS sector are a proud and important part of Victoria’s economic and social fabric, and combined mining and METS employ almost 90,000 Victorians in a high-tech, sophisticated industry, exporting commodities and how-to to the world. They are high-paying and they are good jobs for blue-collar workers, and obviously they look at engineering and a lot of other industries that touch the mining industry.

The mining sector is not against a royalty. They simply ask for a fair process and proper policymaking informed by the community. They believe that there is significant change, and they need proper analysis of this. Unfortunately they feel that the design of the gold royalty was not informed by consultation and does not address the unintended impacts on regional communities that are at risk here. They have concerns, and these concerns are held by regional Victoria and their businesses, they feel, that will be impacted by the sudden gold royalty. They also feel that all miners will pay the royalty regardless of whether they are profitable or not and with no relation to their turnover or their profit. They also feel that it is punitive on small-margin miners and takes no account of start-up mines. They also feel it has been designed for a high gold price environment—and what has been said by the government today is that at the moment we are enjoying high gold prices.

This will actually not stand the test of time due to the volatile gold prices of Victoria’s small miners. They also have said that Ballarat goldmine and Mandalay’s Costerfield mine near Heathcote face pressure from this sudden royalty. They feel that it will cost them about $1 million a year. Obviously this is all in western Victoria, and my Western Metropolitan Region touches that area. They feel that their 200 workers in Stawell will be at risk, as well as obviously at Costerfield—there are 600 people there—and in the Bendigo region also. They also feel that these royalties risk the delicate ecosystem of Victoria’s world-class METS sector, which is a global leader here, employing thousands of Victorians in manufacturing and health and safety products.

Victorian mines are wonderful places that export things to the rest of the world. The industry and the communities learned of this tax in a newspaper on a Saturday morning, and they felt at that time that they had not been given enough time to be consulted. They would—I know from my meetings with them—have actually spoken to the government and tried to find a way forward. The mining industry has attempted to be constructive with the government. They offered three key modest reforms that
would remove the harm to the smaller and marginal mines and the small- and medium-sized METS businesses that rely on Victorian mining sales and innovation. They wanted an exploration offset to remove impacts on reinvesting in exploration, which is the lifeblood of goldmining; a progressive royalty rate structure, like income tax, with a gold price floor to reduce the impact on Victoria’s competitiveness in the global gold investment market; and a staged implementation, which they wanted to be retrospective, to actually help the industry and make sure that people’s jobs were not at risk. These reforms could have been considered in a fair process before the tax was applied, they felt, and this would have allowed the government to introduce a royalty on gold that met the objectives of the industry as well as the objectives of the government. They also brought to me a lot of the myths around what the royalties would actually do.

I would also like to just talk about Victoria’s history, which others have contributed on today. Our history in Victoria is closely connected to goldmining. Victoria’s famous gold rush started in Ballarat in 1851 and peaked in 1852 and 1853. At that time 6000 miners arrived each week seeking their fortune. You can imagine Victoria 200-plus years ago and those miners going through my Western Metropolitan Region and going to those fields in Ballarat and Geelong. That is why we have Ballarat Road and Geelong Road—from them going to those goldmines. Our gold rush brought people to Victoria from all over the world. In one year Bendigo went from a sheep station to a town of 40 000 people, and the economic and cultural impact of that mass migration shaped the future of Victoria. Victoria has produced over 2400 tonnes of gold, which is 32 per cent of all the gold mined in Australia and almost 2 per cent of all of the gold ever mined globally. Victoria also has produced an average of 10 kilograms of gold per square kilometre, which is greater than the other Australian states. Ballarat and Bendigo mines also did wonderful work through the 1920s and the 30s, and we cannot forget why Bendigo is so wonderful—because at that time in 1854 the Chinese people were actually contributing to the gold rush and coming to Australia. The presence of the goldfields of the Bendigo, Beechworth and Bright districts resulted in riots, and we spoke about the Eureka Stockade earlier today.

We also have to remember that currently we also rely on gold and the tourism that gold creates. Everybody has been to Sovereign Hill; everybody takes their children to Sovereign Hill. When we have visitors from all over the world, like my German relatives, we take them to Sovereign Hill and pan for gold. It is such an important part of Victoria, goldmining, and if you have not been to Sovereign Hill, I really struggle to know if you are a Victorian. We were all forced to go there, just like Canberra, in grade 6.

From that you understand that goldmining is very important. Nobody likes to have a tax put on them at very short notice with very little consultation, and I understand why this industry has come to my office and sought my support today.

In my research about mining in Victoria I also found out a lot of other things, especially about mining in the western region of Melbourne. Earlier today we had debate on my motion about air quality, and we spoke about the Ravenhall tip. We might not realise it, but Ravenhall was actually built due to bluestone mining. Bluestone mining in my Western Metropolitan Region was prolific—we had a lot of mining. If it was not for all of the holes that were made in my area, we would not have any of the parks in the Western Metropolitan Region. In the City of Maribyrnong virtually every hole from mining, from bluestone, from slate—you name it—was filled with rubbish and grass was put over the top, and they are the parks of my Western Metropolitan Region today.

When I was investigating this I looked at the work of the Altona Laverton Historical Society. Apparently in 1870 there was a German living in Williamstown. He had been requesting that the government test his theory that vast black coal deposits lay underneath the Werribee plains by sinking a borehole, and as a result his local group formed the Williamstown Coal Prospecting Company. On 29 September 1881 they sank boreholes near the east boundary of Wyndham at Maddox Road between Geelong railway and Koroit Creek Road. They found four streams of brown coal but no black coal, so the company went out of existence. But then in 1891 a syndicate also formed to prospect for
coal at Point Gellibrand in Williamstown, and in 1892 they formed the Williamstown and Newport Coal Prospecting Company. Why I speak of this—talking about coal and talking about bluestone—is that mining in my area has been there since the 1800s, so it would be remiss of me not to talk about the history of mining in my area. That company took out mining options on large areas of Williamstown, Wyndham, Port Melbourne and West Melbourne. After sinking boreholes in 1892 and encountering four small streams of brown coal, a shaft was commenced near the Newport Freezing Works in 1893. In that same year they also found more coal at the SEC coal depot in Altona North—

I think my colleague from Western Metropolitan Region would be interested in this. Meanwhile another group of businessmen leased the Cherry Seaford Estate. They also had plans to bring iron ore from near Bacchus Marsh to Altona and to refine it using Altona coal, but this venture seemed to have failed.

If you keep looking through my Western Metropolitan Region’s history, mining is there continually. Currently we have these holes—we still have these holes—from mining, similar to the Ravenhall tip. The Ravenhall tip was actually a bluestone mine. In the Werribee Plains there are holes, and those holes have actually become tipping sites as well. Hopefully in the future we will actually look at not just throwing things that we can recycle and re-use into holes but look at having proper industries that will be for the betterment of my region and going towards cleaner solutions for the future.

As I brought up earlier today while we were talking about mining during the debate on my motion on air pollution, the one thing that concerns my residents the most is obviously the heavy trucks. You cannot not have industry. Without industry we would grind to a halt; without mining we would grind to a halt. But there needs to be some kind of balance. Some of that balance needs to occur when we look at truck movements going through the west. Some of that balance needs to be had by the government making sure that the trucks that we have going through the west have modifications so they are actually clean trucks going through the west of Melbourne. Otherwise we will actually have what I was talking about earlier in the air pollution debate, and that is particles—those invisible particles that are not great for human health and can cause cancer. Obviously the most vulnerable in my community are affected by those particles.

We need to obviously look at things as a whole. When we look at taxes and when we look at goldmining, we need to look at how it has that ripple effect across the economy, how it affects the miners here in Victoria but also what are some of the flow-on effects. We all should think about the flow-on effects of not only metal and mining—and gold as one of our precious metals—but gaming machines. Gaming machines and pokies are obviously a tax on my community. Last year $2.69 billion was lost in electronic gaming machines across Victoria. That tax equates to about $550 lost per adult, or $7.38 million lost every day across Victoria in gaming machines. Electronic gaming machines are frequently concentrated in low socio-economic, disadvantaged areas. Obviously people put gold coins into these machines and these gold coins are obviously attractive, and so is the noise that they make.

Tax revenue from this source is close to $1.5 billion. Today here we are talking about gold royalties of roughly $3 million in revenue, but we actually lose billions of dollars in gaming machines and that actually affects our local residents. You could speak about each municipality, but the City of Maribyrnong loses $50 million a year. If we talk about Brimbank, they lose $70 million a year. But how that actually affects those communities is staggering.

The Municipal Association of Victoria, the local government organisation, also joined the Alliance for Gambling Reform. They are supporters of the government looking at that tax, the revenue that it gets from poker machines and how it affects my vulnerable community in western Melbourne and how the government should look at reforming that tax and its reliance on taking that money from the most vulnerable areas, the poorest areas, of Victoria and spending it back there—reinvesting the millions of dollars that it takes from gaming machines into the areas it has taken them out of.

Those areas are the areas in western Melbourne, those poor, vulnerable areas that have the highest amount of poker machines that people put gold coins into. We think there is no harm in that, but
respectfully you cannot continue to actually take that amount of revenue out of a particular area and not look at this and find ways that you can reinvest those millions of dollars—$50 million in just the City of Maribyrnong alone, not taking into consideration Brimbank or Hume or Werribee. That amount of money should be reinvested in those communities—that is, the money that is actually taken out through those little gold coins, those $1 coins that go to the government by way of poker machine revenue.

I obviously have been calling on the government to develop services for the emotional support and counselling of people with gaming addiction in my area. I understand that you might wonder why I speak of this when we are talking about goldmining and taxes, but those gold coins that people put into those gaming machines really hurt my area and, respectfully, the government has to look at all the taxes, all the ways that it gains revenue. Are they morally correct? Should they actually address that issue? And should there be other ways that they can actually get that money by way of proper taxes, by people contributing? When you actually put a tax like this onto a small industry such as the goldminers, there is a ripple effect from what it actually does to those families and there is a ripple effect to the economy.

Respectfully, the goldminers who wrote to me and have met with me are greatly concerned about that ripple effect across the economy and how those taxes—that roughly $3 million worth of taxes a year—are going to affect them in the future and their ability to look at other mines in that particular area so they can actually reinvest in mining in that area. They are obviously concerned about the jobs that they have currently, their families who are attached to those jobs, but also the future of mining.

A member interjected.

Dr CUMMING: That is great. They did not give me the opportunity to sum up earlier, so that is wonderful. I understand that when it comes to mining and how we actually look at the taxing of mining, respectfully we need to actually look at it as a whole and that ripple effect. TAFE courses and engineering courses are attached to mining. All the industries and the teaching attached to mining are very important, especially in Western Metropolitan Region where there is high youth unemployment. We need to have investment in actual TAFE courses that are attached to mining. Some of these free TAFE courses that the government is introducing would actually encourage people—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The time has expired. We do not have time for summing up; we just need to put the question.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 16

Atkinson, Mr
Bath, Ms
Crozier, Ms
Davis, Mr
Finn, Mr
Grimley, Mr
Limbrick, Mr
Lovell, Ms
Maxwell, Ms
McArthur, Mrs
Meddick, Mr
O’Donohue, Mr
Patten, Ms (Teller)
Quilty, Mr
Rich-Phillips, Mr (Teller)
Wooldridge, Ms

Noes, 20

Barton, Mr
Elasmar, Mr
Erdogan, Mr
Garrett, Ms
Gepp, Mr
Hayes, Mr
Jennings, Mr
Kieu, Dr
Leane, Mr
Melhem, Mr (Teller)
Mikakos, Ms
Pulford, Ms
Ratnam, Dr
Shing, Ms
Stitt, Ms (Teller)
Symes, Ms
Taylor, Ms
Terpstra, Ms
Tierney, Ms
Vaghela, Ms

Motion negatived.
Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION AND ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (15:29): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day, general business, 2, and notice of motion, general business, 235, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AMENDMENT (OUT OF HOME CARE AGE) BILL 2020

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms PATTEN:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (15:29): I rise today to speak to the motion in relation to out-of-home care and note at the outset that this is a matter which has been canvassed extensively behind closed doors on this side of the benches within the Andrews Labor government and as part of a broader set of community debates around this issue. It is really important that we note at the outset, before getting into a substantive contribution on the proposal, and get onto the record a statement from the Minister for Child Protection, Minister Luke Donnellan, to make sure that we are clear about the direction of this matter and the care that is being taken on this subject, which is often an area of considerable stress, distress, uncertainty and difficulty for people. The Minister for Child Protection has indicated as follows:

We know that teenagers aren’t always ready to leave home as soon as they turn 18. That is why last year the Andrews Labor Government launched Homestretch, a landmark program that extends the age that young Victorians in out of home care can receive much needed support from age 18 to 21.

This investment allows 250 young care leavers to take up the Home Stretch option. It will provide an accommodation allowance to continue supports for young people and carers in kinship or foster care living arrangements and will help young people in residential care with alternative accommodation, up to the age of 21.

In addition, case work and flexible funding will help these young people plan and achieve their goals across different life areas such as education, employment and health and wellbeing.

On behalf of the Victorian Government I would like to acknowledge and congratulate Ms. Patten and the Reason Party for her advocacy for extension of support for Victorian out of home care leavers.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Home Stretch coalition, and in particular, the advocacy from young Victorians who have experienced the challenges of transitioning from Out of Home Care themselves. These individuals are committed to improving the lives of the younger children who followed closely behind them through their journeys.

The Government shares Ms Patten’s desire to see that supports are extended to more care leavers. The Minister for Child Protection will continue to work towards expanding the out of home care program as soon as possible.

That ends the statement from the minister, which occupies the first part of this contribution, as it should.

As I indicated when I got to my feet, this is an area which has occupied considerable time and energy on these benches for many, many years and has taken up an awful lot of space in the priorities that former members of this place and indeed the other place have talked about at length. We know that the out-of-home care environment is one which requires, demands and deserves the appropriate level of dignity and respect afforded to young people and of supports being given to them when and as they need them both directly in the caring relationships that occur and exist within those out-of-home spaces.
and environments on the one hand but also indirectly in the sort of work and assistance that governments, agencies and support organisations need to provide and should be providing.

There is a very long history of the work associated with discussing out-of-home care arrangements and transition and the way in which there is a direct correlation between poor management of a transition on the one hand and the longer term outcomes experienced in environments where these things are not managed well. We see the successes of where they do work, leading to greater outcomes in the long term for those young people who have been nurtured and have had the appropriate care wraparound and follow-through in the course of their journey through out-of-home care and then into a more supported environment in whatever context they choose to pursue from there.

We also know that leaving the out-of-home care environment is a tough thing to do. We know that this occurs for young people who have so often—too often—found it difficult for so many reasons to build and establish effective support networks and the right structures to enable them to build resilience and to be able to cope with demands and rigours in an environment where often they lack the support structures that they deserve and that they need. We know that in various categories that indicate a correlation to socio-economic disadvantage these young people who leave out-of-home care and experience difficult transitions are over-represented. We know, for example, that there is more likelihood of a connection to the youth justice and criminal justice systems and that there is a greater likelihood of poorer mental and physical health. We also know that they experience substance misuse or in fact become parents at younger ages, thus leading to further difficulty in accessing services and supports for themselves when they take on the role of a primary carer themselves.

This is where again we know that intervention in those crucial out-of-home care environment years makes a world of difference when it is done and done well. So in September 2018 the Andrews government announced $11.6 million over a five-year period to implement the Home Stretch program, which is about extending care to the age of 21 years—that additional crucial period—to provide opportunities for transition to resilience, to resource gathering and to creating networks and support structures to better facilitate a positive transition for 250 young Victorians.

Home Stretch rolled out across the state on 1 November last year and it is being delivered through the Better Futures model. In conjunction with one another the Better Futures model and the Home Stretch program offer really comprehensive support to young people in kinship environments as well as foster and residential care until the age of 21. There are a variety of supports that are provided in that context that really do represent not just material support but again those relationship-based approaches to care and collaboration and the sort of wraparound that we do know works where it is provided in a variety of different contexts.

I have met with young people myself who have experienced good out-of-home care environments on the one hand and tough out-of-home care environments on the other, and we know that support and engagement and direct conversations that are more about listening to the young person than about talking are the way to build a comprehensive understanding of what is needed to close those gaps and to reduce and remove wherever possible that disadvantage and to nip it in the bud to prevent it from unfurling into the sorts of socio-economic disadvantage that I referred to earlier.

When we have, for example, through Home Stretch a living allowance to support young people to remain with their kinship or foster carers or to support them in achieving independent living arrangements until the age of 21 we know that a great source of uncertainty and indignity is removed. We know that the unpredictability and the concern that arises from that—the fear that arises from that—is removed where again a meaningful living allowance can be provided. This sort of initiative is about removing, to the best extent we possibly can, the weight of adult concerns from the shoulders of those who are yet to fully develop and come into their own. This is something which is founded and based in care and in the idea of investing in the right sort of support for young people to find their own ways, to make their own decisions and to learn in a way that encourages them toward the best possible paths and outcomes with meaningful supports such as that allowance.
But it is not just about money; it is also about the wraparound support and care that really does demonstrate ongoing benefit as far as relationships with support workers and networks are concerned. Casework support and flexible brokerage funding through this program has been in a position to facilitate access to education, employment and health and wellbeing supports. This is about encouraging young people to make autonomous decisions around the way in which they seek out their future pathways. Whether that is about skills acquisition in a formal learning environment or on-the-job training, it is important for information to be accessible, to be local and also to be provided in a way which is about enabling young people to assess, to weigh up, the various components of a decision and to make the decision which is in their own best interests, including by being able to bounce these things off caseworkers and support networks as they need to.

I know from having been a mentor through a big sister program for some seven years that it is as much about the way in which a young person can access conversations that help them to determine what is right for them as it is about consistently showing up, that in fact it is as much about being consistent and about the certainty that young people so desperately crave in many situations where they have come from or lived in or survived situations of disadvantage as it is about the material support that can be provided to them.

I also know very clearly from my experience as a mentor that it is about making sure that we follow through with care and support beyond the immediate time frames of what is available under a definition of ‘adulthood’ under the law. In fact it is a contrivance, and I think probably a remnant from our past, that we consider that once somebody has attained the age of 18 they are therefore fully fledged and able to be sent into the world with nary a backward look, when in fact this could not be further from the truth. What we know is that where people in this situation do not have the supports and care structures around them they are not going to proceed with confidence that is well-informed, they are not going to proceed with a sense of what their own skin feels like to occupy and they are not necessarily going to be able to make decisions that are well-formed because they have been in a position to talk them over or to get the information they need to act in their own best interests.

We also know, as it relates to maintaining foster or kinship caring arrangements, that the certainty and the support, the insulation provided by that structure, that family structure, in whatever way it may manifest, is absolutely central to the way in which a young person, as they continue to grow beyond 18 and into 21, sees themselves as having a justified and worthy place in the world. That sort of self-esteem, that sort of self-identity, that sort of healthy perspective of the way in which an individual occupies their place in the world is the cornerstone by which they can proceed as adults into a community where participation continues to yield dividends, where in fact positive role modelling continues to flow through generations and where when they have had access to information about everything from jobseeking to independent living young people are then able to make decisions which see them live well, live healthily, participate, continue to receive education in a variety of different ways and continue to make the most of other systems and structures which they may not have been aware of but for the existence of follow-through programs such as those in Home Stretch as well as Better Futures.

As I indicated earlier, young people are eligible for support from Better Futures up until 21 years of age. At the moment we have 90 young people being supported either via Home Stretch or supports that are scheduled to commence in the coming weeks as they turn 18. Some of the outcomes of this include moving young people into private rentals and making sure that these arrangements can, as I flagged earlier, be entered into with confidence, as well as knowing that there is in fact the buffer there for those young people to find their feet and to stay on their feet in the years that follow.

What we will also see, what the evidence and the research very clearly indicates, is more young people completing their VCE and enrolling in post-compulsory education because their priorities have been able appropriately to focus on education. Again, I hark back to the voluntary work that I did as a mentor—those seven years of seeing the young person with whom I was matched go from strength to strength with that care and support, albeit not in the terms of what is proposed here but care and support
nonetheless, seeing that person being able to complete compulsory and non-compulsory education, being able to develop, maintain and sustain a role as a single parent and go on to have a wonderful, positive, respectful relationship with a partner and now a spouse. Seeing these things come to fruition shows that all of the foundations that underpin these programs play through in a way that has a ripple effect across generations. They play through in the most wonderful, positive ways that I think we as governments are only now, only recently, starting to recognise as having not only profound societal benefit but also significant economic impact as well.

We know that the Productivity Commission and indeed other lines of inquiry have started to assess the economic value of front-end investment in a range of programs, which analogously to this particular motion show very clearly that a forward investment not only saves money but delivers significant benefit in fiscal terms to communities and indeed to public coffers down the track.

What we also know is that fear that sits behind so many approaches to 18th birthdays around the state and the removal of that fear is a really key part of removing significant stress and burdens from young people as they move to consider what their options are. This stops being something from which to shy away. This stops being a set of countdowns on a calendar that is about the day upon which nominal, anachronistic freedom might be achieved on the one hand with a crippling sense of fear and dread on the other at how they are going to cope, let alone thrive.

This is about making sure that we do have a situation whereby additional investments build on other supports that are being provided already through the Andrews government. They build on the other supports of the $25 million that is already in the system. That includes $21 million over four years in ongoing funding for the Springboard program, now known as Better Futures, a program which already supports over 280 young people a year, as well as an existing investment of more than $6 million every year in a range of services, including the sorts of supports I talked about earlier: a statewide hotline, post-care support, referral and information services, and services for Aboriginal people leaving care.

There is an additional investment of over $2 million in homelessness services too. We know that these sorts of challenges are not acquitted or resolved with one single solution, that in fact we require a jigsaw of different approaches to meet the needs of various cohorts of young people around our state and that a solution which works in inner-city Melbourne for one young person will be as far removed from the right answer as you can possibly imagine for somebody living in a remote or rural area, for somebody from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, for somebody who is a single parent or for somebody whose priority is education in a certain direction where for others it might be something completely different.

Our commitment also continues through Compass, which is Australia’s largest social impact bond at around $14.2 million, which is testing innovative ways to support young people transitioning from care, and $10.1 million over four years in housing support for young people and those transitioning from youth justice and from state care.

What we have seen in the course of this particular matter being brought before this house is a crystallisation of a conversation that has been happening for a very, very long time. I am delighted to join with the work that Ms Patten has done, to add my voice on the record, which I have been using for many years behind the scenes to underscore the importance of progressing this matter in a way that makes a fundamental and material difference to the way in which young people grow and the way in which young people discover opportunity rather than shrinking from fear into a life that is something other than what they want for themselves. We have a long way to go in this area. We are getting better, but more needs to be done. I think we also need to make sure that we continue to engage with and support the sector, which is so central to providing this support and this care.

Countless youth workers and community development workers and volunteers throughout the sectors of youth, children and young people, residential care and out-of-home care, and the way in which health and other services are provided throughout the state, continuously go above and beyond in
everything that they do to make sure that young people receive dignified focus and attention to their problems, their concerns, their triumphs and their priorities, because the worst thing we can do is turn away and refuse to acknowledge that with every failed conversation a future that might otherwise have been significantly brighter is eroded or destroyed or dissolved. We need to continue to encourage diversity in the way in which these services and supports are provided, and we need to continue to make sure that these programs are delivered in a way that delivers maximum benefit, that allows for sustainability of services and that also respects the work being undertaken in the sector.

My hat is off to everybody who works within the Home Stretch and the Better Futures programs and to everybody who works behind the scenes. Yours is tireless, thankless work. Yours is work which often comes up against myriad obstacles internally and externally and often with clients and consumers of services who themselves are torn as to what it is they want or how they might go about getting it. Thank you to you for your work. As one mentor from a long time ago who saw the profound benefit realised in one young person’s life when they received the care and attention and support that they needed, I think that this can achieve great things not just for the numbers and the numeric increase and the scaling up of delivery that builds upon existing commitments but for every individual person who wants to achieve their best, for everyone who sits outside the traditional areas of policy investment and who may otherwise feel—and quite legitimately so—forgotten or ignored or undermined.

This program is about putting money into the areas that need it most. Now I think we need to move to make sure that the system not just keeps up with the work that is being undertaken but also more appropriately and more accurately reflects the world that exists around us, the environments within which we expect young people to make decisions now and the way in which our communities have changed in relation to the decision-making pressures that we put on young people now. Everything from the cost of living through to where to find information through to how to have a conversation about any number of things is absolutely crucial to get right. I think these sorts of initiatives, like those being taken today in the chamber and that underpin work already going on, are significant and positive steps to be taken.

I really do commend Ms Patten for the work being done to bring this to the point that we are at now. I know that the minister is also really passionate about this topic. He has engaged prolifically on this issue with stakeholders and internally. His words are on the record from the statement I read out at the outset. But it is also very, very clear that he shares an extremely deep passion for getting this right and for making that investment that I referred to earlier. The minister wants, as this government wants, as Ms Patten wants, as the sector wants, as so many young people want, to continue to work towards the further extension of supports to allow for the healthy transition of young people from out-of-home care to independence and adulthood. Thank you so much for bringing this motion to the house. I hope that we have—

**Ms Crozier:** It’s a private members bill.

**Ms SHING:** This private members bill, I am sorry. Thank you, Ms Crozier; it is a nice interjection from you for a change. Thank you for bringing this private members bill to the chamber. I wish it well in the course of the work that is being undertaken by government at this time.

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:56): I am very pleased to be able to rise and speak this afternoon to Ms Patten’s private member’s bill that she has brought to the house. I want to state, as I think she understands, my interest and very significant commitment to this intent of enabling so many vulnerable young children to have the extended care that they require, deserve and need. I say that because I actually called on the Andrews government in June 2018 to back the policy that the Liberal and Nationals coalition had launched at the Victorian Council of Social Service summit in June 2018. I know that there are members in the gallery here who know my commitment and the strong—

**Ms Shing:** Three months before the election.
Ms CROZIER: Well, Ms Shing, in terms of your interjection, there was a real and genuine commitment from the Liberals and Nationals, and I was—

Ms Shing: Just before the election.

Ms CROZIER: Well, you did not actually commit to this until way later in 2018—

Ms Shing interjected.

Ms CROZIER: I am not going to take up your interjections. It is just ridiculous. I want to return to this. It is an important issue. I was very proud to lead in this house and call on the Andrews government to match the Home Stretch policy, because I had been speaking to Paul McDonald, Deb Savaris, members of the community—a whole range of you—that know my commitment. I listened to those foster carers, who told me the most horrific stories of what was happening, and indeed young people who also talked to me. You might raise your eyebrows, Ms Shing, and look over here with contempt, but those young people wrote to me and the former Leader of the Opposition, Matthew Guy, and I want to requote this because I think it is actually important to understand that we took this genuinely and wanted to move with this, and I am glad that we pushed the government to also follow us. As one young person wrote to the Leader of the Opposition:

You may not have heard of me but I’ve been a huge advocate for the Home Stretch campaign and the voice of many young people in out-of-home care.

He went on to say that he just wanted to say thank you for listening to them and understanding, and he said he knew that:

... we are actually being noticed by the big decision-makers and that you have an interest in us, so thank you—

he ended it with. I think that was so heartfelt and I have never forgotten it, because that was the reality of what we were dealing with and that is why I was very passionate and committed to this policy. And I wanted to see it up and running, I wanted to see it really thrive, I wanted to see some of these vulnerable children get the chance, because in a family situation it is very difficult for any child to be leaving at the age of 18 let alone these young, vulnerable children going out into what can be very uncertain circumstances.

While I am on that, I want to just point out that where we have got to under the Andrews Labor government in relation to child protection is not a great picture to paint. The latest figures out of the child protection sector paint a very, very sad and alarming story, where the Andrews government is failing. Many of these children that are coming out of state care are ending up in homelessness or ending up on drugs. They are ending up in the youth justice system. They are ending up in a life of crime. They are ending up in some very dreadful circumstances. I thought that the Home Stretch program was going to address many of those situations, so I am glad that Victoria is following the lead of what happened in Tasmania under Will Hodgman, a Liberal Premier, and what has happened in South Australia under Steven Marshall, another Liberal Premier, in terms of supporting these young people and giving them that care and extending it to the age of 21 should they wish to have that extended care. I was proud of the work I did in relation to developing that policy.

I am disappointed that the figures in our community services sector with these vulnerable children are declining and getting worse. Some 14 400 phone calls to the child abuse hotline went unanswered between January 2018 and July 2019—a massive failure. There has been a 47 per cent jump in the number of children needing protection. The number of substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect have increased by 42 per cent since 2014–15. This bill will hopefully address many of these issues.

I want to also just place on record the support of so many. Ms Bath has just come into the chamber. I know that she is incredibly committed to this too, because she and I would talk to a lot of those foster carers in her electorate of Gippsland. We had a number of meetings in relation to many of those families in her region—
Ms Bath interjected.

Ms CROZIER: Very good people, Ms Bath. They told us of the failings of what was happening—the very real struggles, the very real stories and the very real concerns of the churn of children going through this system. It reminded me of what we faced when we came into government in 2010, with a community services sector in absolute crisis. I want to place on record some of the work that was done in the government between 2010 and 2014 by the then minister, Mary Wooldridge—an excellent, dedicated, hardworking and intelligent minister, who is sadly leaving this place and will be a huge loss to so many not only around the Parliament but in the Victorian community in terms of her policy input.

If I could just reiterate some of the things that she achieved around these very important areas that dealt with some of the most vulnerable children, families and individuals in Victoria. I have to just make note of the many real and large reforms that she as minister undertook that back up what we are talking about today in terms of supporting some of the most vulnerable. It was Minister Wooldridge who established the commissioner for children and young people. It was Minister Wooldridge who appointed the very first Aboriginal commissioner for children and young people. It was Minister Wooldridge who set up Parkville College in youth justice. Look what has happened to youth justice under this Labor government. It is a complete and utter mess. It is in chaos, and it has been for years. I have to say the legacy of the former minister who held that portfolio will be remembered for many, many years.

Minister Wooldridge established the drug treatment court within the family division of the Children’s Court. She established the Australian-first Mental Health Complaints Commissioner and the Mental Health Tribunal. She negotiated the National Disability Insurance Agency to be based in Geelong and led the way on the national disability insurance scheme rollout across Victoria. Could I also note the huge work that she commissioned with the Cummins inquiry that looked at protecting Victoria’s most vulnerable. That work became a landmark report that had dozens of recommendations—90 recommendations, I think, from memory—very, very significant recommendations, that really looked at how to protect some of our most vulnerable children. She led the way in driving those reforms.

I am proud to say that one of the recommendations I was heavily involved with was the recommendation that called for an inquiry into child abuse by religious and other non-government organisations. That piece of work from that inquiry—the work that this Parliament did—led to the royal commission, where we are still talking about the issues today, so many issues, with the work that we put in, the legislation that we put in. As soon as that report was tabled, so many organisations should have taken notice of it and have not, and we are still paying the price. That was led largely by one of the lead ministers, Minister Mary Wooldridge. She can be absolutely proud of the work that she has undertaken. She was a magnificent community services minister. She was a magnificent minister in so many ways who had such care and compassion for those that she really had responsibility for. She took responsibility for those that she had in her charge with real dedication, and she took it very, very seriously.

So I want to say that those reforms that have been started under previous governments, of all persuasions, need to be built on. But I want to say that this bill that we are debating today is not a new idea. It is an idea that has been around for a long time. It is an idea that the sector have been so passionate about in their advocacy on this issue. I want to congratulate them because they tell a very real story, and when they do that, they are very committed to what they are doing as well, in looking after some of Victoria’s most vulnerable children. I do want to acknowledge the work of the sector, because I have got that in my policy document. When I looked back at my policy document that I based our policy on and that we announced in June 2018, it was about just some of those returns, the work of Anglicare and others that did actually talk about looking at the issues of homelessness and how that can be halved in the cohort and how hospitalisation is decreased, arrests are reduced, alcohol and drug dependency is slashed and education and engagement is tripled. They are just some of the points.
That information that was given to me really helped me and convinced me and my colleagues to understand the importance of this policy. I was really proud that we put that policy to the people. Unfortunately we were not successful in attaining government, but I am proud of the fact that we led the way. In an adjournment matter here I called on the Andrews government to match that policy, which they finally did, but now we are seeing a greater commitment by members I think across the board in this house this afternoon in relation to this important issue of protecting some of the most vulnerable members of our community.

From the figures I read out before the failures of the government in dealing with some of the issues around youth justice are monumental. The legacy of the former minister is there and will be there for years because the Parkville College that Minister Wooldridge put in has literally been trashed. I mean, the whole notion and idea of youth justice has been trashed under the Andrews Labor government. There were just too many shocking incidents arising out of youth justice between 2014 and 2018. The data that is coming out about the numbers of children and the issues around the hotline being unanswered are just failures of government, so you have got failures within the Andrews Labor government across the board. And if this policy that is being supported today can make a difference to some of those very vulnerable children, then I am absolutely delighted to be standing here.

I, along with members of the Liberal-Nationals coalition, am very proud to have put our views in this policy years ago, and we still stand by that commitment.

**Dr RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:10): I rise to put on record the Greens’ support for this bill. We know that one of the most important roles our government has is to provide care and support for those who need it, and where this support is no longer sufficient for everyone in need it becomes the government’s responsibility to intervene and do better so nobody is left behind.

This bill is about improving the care and support that the Victorian government provides to our children. All children need a safe, supportive and loving family environment, the most critical factor in a child’s development and their ability to thrive in life. Where families are unable to provide that environment, the state must step in to support and protect vulnerable children, and in some cases this requires the state to provide care for children outside of their families for a period of time.

Around 11,000 children are currently in statutory care in Victoria. Of these most are in foster or kinship care, with a small number in residential care homes. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredibly important work our carers do as volunteers who dedicate their time, energy and compassion to these children, welcoming them into their homes and families on a temporary or permanent basis.

I would also note that a disproportionate number of children in state care are Aboriginal, in part due to the lasting impact of intergenerational trauma from the brutal colonisation of our First Peoples. As a state we must do more to prevent the continued removal of Aboriginal children from their families and keep moving towards truth-telling, justice and healing for the First Peoples of this land.

I am sure all in this chamber agree that our most vulnerable young people need safe and appropriate care and supports in order to heal from significant trauma and lead healthy, productive lives. But our care system is structured so that children in state care are effectively kicked out into the world once they turn 18. Where other young people in Victoria are able to rely on family support, both financially and emotionally, as they adjust to adulthood and independence, children leaving state care are left to fend for themselves often, with state support withdrawn and limited alternative support streams available.

With the cost of living increasing year on year and our federal government absolutely failing in their responsibility to support our most vulnerable, this support is absolutely vital to so many young adults, which is why the effect that abruptly removing this support has on our young care leavers is so significant. In the first 12 months after leaving care half will be unemployed, in jail or find themselves experiencing homelessness. There is strong evidence from the UK, the US, Canada and elsewhere that
providing support beyond the age of 18 results in much better outcomes for our young people. In jurisdictions like these where care has been extended to 21 young people leaving care have significantly improved education and employment rates, housing stability, health and wellbeing, and social and community integration.

The Greens absolutely agree with the purpose of this bill, which is to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to provide for the continuation of out-of-home care to young people up to 20 years of age. In fact we took a policy much like what is outlined in this bill to the state election in 2018, and we have spoken on this issue in our Parliament many times before. So I am very pleased to see a bill that gives effect to this and to the long advocacy of care leavers and Home Stretch, and I am pleased to indicate the Greens will be supporting this bill.

Ms Maxwell (Northern Victoria) (16:13): I rise to say that Mr Grimley and I support the intent of this bill, albeit that I am not entirely convinced that the bill is actually required to trigger the changes Ms Patten is seeking to make. From the time it was established one of our party’s most important goals has always been the protection and welfare of young people. Indeed it has been the core political cause of our party founder, Derryn Hinch, throughout his entire life. Therefore a bill which has the general intent of improving the wellbeing, choices and futures of young people in Victoria is one to which we are very naturally drawn.

It is also worth reaffirming the point made by Ms Patten and others that the changes embedded in the bill have been advocated for for a long time by the likes of Anglicare Victoria through its CEO, Paul McDonald, and other charitable organisations. The Deloitte Access Economics report that Anglicare commissioned on this policy also presents some compelling information and evidence about the potential benefits of such changes.

All of that said, I want to point out that I have for a number of years in my past directly worked with many young Victorians and families in need of support—vulnerable families who have been in kinship care, foster care and residential care. With that background I would observe that all of us would do well to remember that the state’s protection and support of children, youth and families is an incredibly complex area of policy, accompanied by probably some of the hardest questions and choices in budget management that exist anywhere across government.

Without wanting to sound like a spokesperson for either of the major parties, out-of-home care has already been the subject of many, many billions of dollars of funding from governments of both persuasions, not least through the 2016 Roadmap for Reform initiatives, which brought together a vast diversity of measures aimed at increasing the safety of families and the support of vulnerable children. Out-of-home care services have indeed also already been extended to young people between the ages of 18 and 21. Whilst I know that it is difficult for them to say anything about this before May, my understanding is that the government will more than likely be announcing further funding specifically in this area in the budget.

It must be stressed that there is also a very wide range of programs already in place to help people up to the age of 25 transitioning to living away from home, like the umbrella Creating Connections Education Employment Pathways and the Transition to Independent Living Allowance models and the various initiatives underneath them. Quite explicitly the very purpose of all of these is to support young people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness to transition to independent living and to access or sustain education, employment and training.

Whilst I apologise to Ms Patten that I was not able to raise this with her directly prior to the debate on the bill, I would also be keen to see whatever front-end modelling or analysis has been undertaken or commissioned by her or her office on the many hundreds of millions of dollars that would quite clearly be needed as a starting point to implement these changes.

Ms Patten: I’ve just sent you the Parliamentary Budget Office costings.
Ms MAXWELL: Good girl; thank you. At the moment we have only been given the Deloitte report that models what the long-term, post-implementation results might be. I have always been a big believer that money and resources need to go into the primary prevention and early intervention space so that we can mitigate some of the risks and consequences that we see, particularly for children going into residential care.

I would also like to say that we still do certainly have a long way to go in this area—something most people who have spoken on this bill have raised. I would also like to say that there are many people with experience as youth workers and social workers who would also confirm that a high priority in this field, as I have just mentioned, is that early intervention and primary prevention. Preventing or minimising problems before they become as serious as they have in the cases of foster care et cetera is frequently a preferred approach, rather than trying to repair or mitigate the unfortunate consequences that these children often experience.

I have worked directly with these children and know firsthand the trauma that they have often experienced, and often parents are just unable to manage these children. We see them going into residential care, foster care and kinship care, and ultimately the impact that that has on these children is so significant for the rest of their lives. I have worked with young people in residential care who, yes, when they come to 18 become very fearful and anxious about what lies ahead for them. I think a point I would like to make is to ask: what are we actually doing at the moment to prepare them, in that current space, prior to them becoming 18? I believe that more funding is probably required to support organisations to support them through that. I know we have targeted care packages, which cost an enormous amount of money, and I believe that if we could invest in that earlier intervention we could certainly balance the scales and support our children in a more proactive way.

I would hope that most members are aware of the Social Ventures Australia report that was developed late last year for Berry Street, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and other leading agencies across the child and family sectors. It spells out the clear economic case for early intervention. Throughout that report there is a detailed examination of the incredible costs that early intervention measures can help save, including by very specifically reducing the likelihood of children ever needing to enter out-of-home care in the first place—and wouldn’t it be magnificent if we no longer needed out-of-home care.

So on the one hand we have the Deloitte report in Ms Patten’s specific area of expanding late out-of-home care, but on the other we have the Social Ventures Australia report that recommends, as do a wealth of other studies, targeting the other end of the spectrum. We also have before us the commissioner for children and young people’s recent Lost, Not Forgotten report, which not only strongly recommends more early intervention ahead of crisis funding but also targets a range of very real weaknesses in programs and service delivery. In an ideal world none of these things would necessarily be regarded as mutually exclusive, but clearly we do not live in an ideal world, and there is not unlimited money available to be spent on overcoming all of these issues simultaneously.

Anyway, my time for this speech is nearly at an end, so I will quickly finish where I began. Together with Mr Grimley I will be supporting this bill, given its aim is to improve the lives and welfare of many young Victorians. I also particularly commend all of those child welfare organisations who are behind the bill and who do so much work to advance these objectives more generally. As Ms Shing so eloquently, as always, put it, it is often a thankless job, and I do say a very heartfelt thankyou to all organisations, carers and staff who support these young vulnerable children.

What I am about to say is not to diminish the aims of Ms Patten’s bill. However, I will close by reiterating that we should never, ever lose sight of the fact that there is still an enormous amount of work to do that goes way, way beyond this legislation in the support and development of children, young people and families more generally. I would like to congratulate Ms Patten on her bill, and I would like to commend this bill to the house.
Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:22): I am pleased to rise this afternoon and speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Out of Home Care Age) Bill 2020. I thank Ms Patten for bringing this to the house and clearly state that The Nationals will be supporting this bill before us today. This bill really highlights a great need in our system and a great need to support vulnerable children who deserve the utmost attention, as do those that take on that critical role of caring for them.

Indeed, many of us have had very decent and good and wholesome upbringings, but the children, often, that come into foster care or kinship care really have had quite traumatic lives—and it can start from age zero and it can work its way through to any time up until they have left home. In my role as a member for Eastern Victoria Region I have met some most amazing people who do the most amazing work, both directly with the children and in their role within agencies and within departments. Many people take a great deal of care within the system, but also the foster care parents and kinship carers really commit to nurturing children who have had very chequered lives and very challenging upbringings in the early stages.

I wish to discuss some of the contents of the bill before talking about ways to improve the system and picking some points where foster carers that I have spoken to in the last five years really feel that the system is letting them down. How can we make the system better—this role, this bill—if we cannot unpack it and have a debate and a discussion around it? That is part of my purpose today.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to extend that state parental responsibility from 18 to 21, that care for young people who remain in the out-of-home-care system. I believe that this is an opt-in arrangement, where 18-year-olds or those prior to 18 can designate whether they wish to stay in the system until the age of 21 and the carer then can receive some reimbursement. Some of the discussion I have had with carers in the system in Eastern Victoria Region is that unfortunately quite often there is a big drain of children even getting to that point, where they are still in the system at 18 and they are wanting to stay on. They are the winners; they are the ones who have really made it through and had that nurturing, have survived in many ways the trials of their upbringing and their youth and want to have that extension. I am a mother of two boys. They are now in their 20s, but in their 18- to 21-year-old period we were constantly on the phone; you were still seeing the best outcome that we can for these young people.

If we look at some of the systems, the Report of the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry in 2012 found that close to half of the children and young people who were leaving a care experience had periods of homelessness or committed offences—half of those children that went into the system came out still struggling and still sometimes in that period doing the wrong thing in the law, really not fitting into society as a whole and committing offences. According to Anglicare’s 2020 report, which must be just out, just under half of males and 22 per cent of females who leave care are involved in the justice system—again, half of those males who leave care unfortunately are in the justice system—and 29 per cent of young people who leave care are unemployed. So to date at the moment we are still not seeing the best outcome that we can for these young people.

Leading up to the election in 2018 and through the good work of Ms Crozier, we brought the Home Stretch trial initiative to the public, to the people. We unfortunately were not able to implement that, but we see also now that in 2019 the government implemented its own Home Stretch program, which it is going to conduct over five years and which will have 250 people in it. There are also trials of extension of out-of-home care in other states—WA, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT.

I recognise the fact that this bill has widespread support in terms of the agencies and the providers in Kinship Carers Victoria, Anglicare and the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, and I know that we in the coalition have consulted with them, which is really positive. But one of the main concerns I have is that those people at the coalface are still quite frustrated and have raised a number of issues with me. In my time in this place I have held a number of forums in Gippsland and really thanked the people for making conversation there. They brought issues from both the kinship carer point of view and the foster carer point of view, and many of them felt that the system is lacking in
giving the carers the appropriate resources but also the right and the ability to actually parent. Many carers felt that they were being denied basic information.

I will cite you one example of a wonderful carer from down in South Gippsland. I call her a cherub—this beautiful cherub arrived on her doorstep, probably about three or four, with a plastic bag of goodies, which were her full possessions. She came in, and the foster carer, who I will not name—but I could—took her in and bathed her that night. She had an operation mark from the top of her neck down to her stomach, and there was no admitting information with that child. Then that foster carer had to go around to various entities and various doctors appointments to find out what was going on.

Having this sort of information delivered could be so much more supportive for the nurturing of the child and the needs of the child but also for that foster carer. Also many foster carers have other children in their care, and they have to drag those children around to various appointments. So being able to expedite and communicate very clearly and provide the right type of medical information is really important for the foster carer being able to provide very good care and information.

There is a lady in Gippsland who I admire greatly—she calls it how it is. She advocates fearlessly for the parents and specifically for the children, and that person is a not-for-profit advocate, Heather Baird from A Better Life for Foster Kids. She will often ring me up and relate certain issues, again not naming names, but asking: how can we help these children and how can we help these foster kids? Her comment, Ms Patten—and I know you will take it on the chin, because I think it is a reasonable one—is that in addition to increasing the age at which the children exit a foster home or out-of-home care there also needs to be implementation to change from the very start the support given. She states—and I state on her behalf—‘It’s all well and good to say let’s change it to 21, but we need to meet the children’s needs now and when they enter the system’.

In the committees and the forums I have heard some very pertinent points about the lack of stability in foster care homes in so far as children who go into the system, go into the foster care family, need to be given that counselling and therapy at the point at which they enter. Heather related to me some information about a foster care child who came in at six years old. She took 18 months to get counselling—18 months of trauma that that child had to, I guess, reverberate and communicate to the foster care parent without getting that intensive counselling. Again, foster carers do the most amazing job, but they also are human beings, and they need support from the system in order to support those children.

Another comment that we have heard in relation to the foster care system is that the carers do not have enough say in what happens with these children and that there are often sudden and frequent removals from foster carers’ care. Whilst the wellbeing and the stability of the child is paramount to this, carers also deserve to have some transparency around what decisions the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is making, so if they ask why a child was removed that feedback is given. If there is an issue with the foster care family, then isn’t it in the government’s best interests, the child’s best interests and the state’s best interests to work out why that was, to provide support and information and to go forward? Time and time again I think foster care families and parents feel that they are left out there.

The other comment I would make in the time that I have is in relation to the training of agency and—more importantly, probably—DHHS staff. I have actually had the trainers who are training in various institutions say that they feel they cannot provide enough information. I see Ms Tierney is here, and it is probably something that is worth really drilling down into and reviewing—the training of those people who work in DHHS. The foster carers frequently feel that there is a great turnover within DHHS. Why is that? Is it because there is so much pressure placed on them? That may be the case. What sort of mentoring must occur in the department? But is it also that they really have not had that proper level of training in order to meet the needs of the child, the various agencies that they have to work with and the parents? I think that is a fair statement—that in order to have continuity of care
within the system we need to also have that continuity of staff staying. Why are they leaving, and why
the churn within that system?

Finally, there was a survey that Heather Baird put out to 200 of her foster carers last year. She has a
great network, and she works with them. This is quite confronting, but she felt that 100 per cent of
them—100 per cent of 200, meaning 200—said that they did not feel that they were adequately
supported by DHHS in child protection. I am not making any judgement on this. I am relaying this
information for the Parliament to hear and take on board.

The survey also showed that they do not want the children to be in a permanent home because they
lose their jobs. Again, I am reporting on that, I am not making a judgement on that. Also the other
point that she raised is that many of the children have come from parents who, unfortunately, have had
drugs in their life and drugs in their system. Again, it is important to remove them from those very
dangerous situations, but there also needs to be that back-end support to get parents off drugs. But also
there needs to be a line in the sand where if those parents are not going to change their ways there can
be permanent care orders provided for those children.

In conclusion, from the interactions and forums that I have held in Gippsland and from joining in with
Ms Crozier’s thoughts and understanding relating to foster and kinship care, the recommendations that
we came up with are that foster and kinship carers need to be provided with the medical and birth
details at the time that children enter into a home, not a delayed situation, and that privacy guidelines
need to be revisited to enable that. Again, we need to protect the child, but we also need to support the
best welfare outcomes for them. Also, we must have workers in the field who are properly trained—
it was very clearly defined to us—and there needs to be a consistency between caseworkers. I am
speaking of an ideal world, but how can we get to an ideal world unless we understand and know the
problems?

Further, there need to be measures to improve communication between caseworkers, and those
caseworkers need to be able to implement really good communication. Finally—and I guess this is
never the end point for carers; this is not what motivates them—payments need to be responsive to
carers. Quite often—and I have heard it on a number of occasions—the payment system just lets down
carers in a whole raft of ways. That does not facilitate the importance of keeping them in the system.
I endorse this bill, and I wish it a speedy passage through the house.

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (16:37): I rise to speak on the Children, Youth and
Families Amendment (Out of Home Care Age) Bill 2020, introduced by Ms Patten. The Liberal
Democrats are always considering the question: what is the appropriate role of the state? Many things
that go through this house and many things that the government does I would consider to be very
inappropriate uses of state power. But where is it appropriate for responsibility to rest with the
individual, family or community, and where is it appropriate for us to empower the state to step in and
support people?

In this particular case, for children without families, or without families with the capacity to support
them, it is one of the most appropriate and important roles of the state to support them. Giving children
the ability to grow up fed, clothed and with access to education is one role that has a deep history in
classical liberal thought. Indeed two giants of liberalism, John Locke and John Stuart Mill, helped
establish the idea that it can be appropriate for the state to intervene to protect children from parents
who may be abusive or negligent.

Foster care, at its best, can be a wonderful collaboration between members of the community
welcoming vulnerable children and adolescents into their homes and families with the support of the
government. The bill before us today poses a simple question: where do we draw the line where these
young people are considered independent and sent out into the world to find their own way? Young
people are frequently told that VCE is a critical time that can have a lasting impact on their future. The
idea that we would draw an arbitrary line part way through their final year of high school and interrupt
their education and their lives is a questionable notion. There is significant evidence from Australia and from around the world that ending foster care as soon as a young person turns 18 can lead to poor outcomes.

Whilst the Liberal Democrats believe that individuals should be responsible for their own lives and their own decisions, we do however believe that welfare should exist for the genuinely needy. Vulnerable children and adolescents certainly qualify, and there is good evidence that extending the period of foster care for a few more years offers significant benefit. The cost savings claimed by advocates and presented in the Deloitte report are perhaps not as clear-cut as claimed. Rarely are cost savings actually translated into budget savings—there is always plenty of other work that can be generated in the public service.

Supporting young people in their transition to adulthood and reducing the number of people leaving care and entering the justice system or experiencing substance abuse issues may generate some real savings, and it is likely that this policy will at least be cost neutral. With that in mind, the Liberal Democrats wholeheartedly support this bill because our young people deserve better support to get the best start in their life.

Ms TERPSTRA (Eastern Metropolitan) (16:40): I rise to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Out of Home Care Age) Bill 2020, introduced into the house by Ms Patten. We have heard from some of my colleagues today about the investment the Andrews Labor government has made to extend care support from 18 to 21 years of age for young Victorians in out-of-home care through the Home Stretch program, but it is important to make clear that the supports provided by the Andrews Labor government for care leavers through the Home Stretch program extend beyond providing the funding so a child in care can stay in care until they are 21. What they need is someone to sit beside them and help to prepare for and navigate the challenges of living independently once they leave the system. This is where Better Futures comes in, and it is worthwhile spending some time to understand some more about this program.

Before I move on to talking about that, I just want to relate a story of a meeting that took place between me and the Brighter Futures organisation, which is a community-based organisation in Knox. That meeting was to discuss what this program is advocating for. Young people who have often been in out-of-home care may have had to move around a lot, they may have been in different homes, and it can be quite difficult at times to develop relationships with people and get the benefit of relationships that other children might have had by living in their own homes, for example. It is just even simple questions like, ‘How do I get a drivers licence? What do I need to do?’ and ‘I’m interested in working for an organisation or having a career in some particular organisation, so how do I go about doing that? What do I need to know?’. Often these are the things that we may even take for granted, but these are really important things. They go to much more than just downloading information; they go to being able to connect with people who may be able to be a sounding board for young people who may not have been able to have access to that guidance about their future. It was an important meeting, and it really gave me a great insight into some of the challenges that people face.

Another example I might just touch on is even going to get your drivers licence. The government L2P program is another program that actually assists young people in being matched up with somebody who can be a driving partner for that person, because obviously to attain a drivers licence a person has to acquire a certain number of hours. I am going through this with my own son at the moment, having to sit for many hours in the car with him while he drives around and clocks up his hours in order for him to pass his drivers licence test. If you do not have a parent or a significant person in your life who can sit with you and do those things, it is very difficult, and it is a barrier for young people who want to get their drivers licence who cannot access that. The L2P program is an example of something that is provided for young people who may have been in out-of-home care and other children as well who do not have the ability to access that support through a parent or other significant other in their lives.
You can just see sometimes that some of the things that we might take for granted in our own lives, such as having a connected family or an extended family that might be there, can actually provide a significant barrier for children who are not in that situation. So it opened my eyes to see some of the barriers that, through no fault of their own, often children who have not had the benefit of living in their own homes can face, and this is why these sorts of programs are necessary to help. I was very happy to meet with the Brighter Futures organisation, and I hope and look forward to being able to provide some type of assistance that is relevant to those people, should they need it, in my own region of Eastern Metropolitan Region.

Back to the Better Futures program, the Better Futures program is a new way of supporting care leavers by engaging with young people and their support networks, including case managers and care teams, early in their transition from care. After a successful trial in the Barwon and Goulburn areas in Victoria, the Better Futures program was rolled out across the remainder of the state from October 2019. The aim is to engage earlier with care leavers, supporting them to have an active voice in their transition planning and providing individualised supports across a range of life areas, including housing, education, employment and community and cultural connections. All eligible young people are initially referred to their local Better Futures provider. The level of support offered is dependent upon the circumstances of the young person. In other words, it is provided in the context of that young person’s current care status, either when the young person is still in care or when the young person has left and is post care.

For an early referral, for example, to start, the young person is referred to Better Futures at the age of 15 years and nine months by their case manager, which could be a Department of Health and Human Services child protection worker or a non-government provider. A Better Futures worker then consults with the care team, lending expertise to the transition planning process. The worker supports the care team, including the young person, where appropriate, to identify goals and actions for inclusion in the 15-plus care and transition plan, based on the looking-after-children domains. The young person is provided with a level of support commensurate with their needs, circumstances and existing support systems. Young people may receive high, medium or low levels of support or be placed on active hold if they choose not to directly engage. These levels of support correlate with a notional allocation of hours. Young people on active hold receive, at a minimum, a quarterly check-in in person or via telephone from the Better Futures provider.

When the young person is in care and still some time away from transitioning to independence, it is likely that the primary role of Better Futures will be to provide secondary consultation to case managers and care teams. The Better Futures worker does not assume lead responsibility for casework support whilst the young person is subject to a statutory order. Support from the Better Futures worker will gradually increase as the young person prepares to transition from care, which is usually from about six months prior. In limited circumstances the Better Futures worker will provide direct support to a young person in care. This is likely to be in relation to support to engage or re-engage with education, training and/or employment or to support community connections where assessment shows that a young person is at risk of social isolation upon leaving care. Through the Better Futures provider the young person will have access to flexible funding to support their goals for independence. The Better Futures flexible funding will only be used to support the achievement of goals that directly relate to transition.

The key worker can remain involved with a young person up until their 21st birthday. The key worker can provide the young person with direct casework support, information and advice and access to flexible funding, should they need it. The young person is provided with a level of support commensurate with their needs, circumstances, existing support systems and/or the capacity of the Better Futures provider to meet demand. Young people may receive high, medium or low levels of support or, as I indicated earlier, be placed on active hold.

In terms of further detail on the Home Stretch program, another investment the Andrews Labor government has made to provide extra support for care leavers is the Raising Expectations program.
Announced by the Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education, the Honourable Gayle Tierney, the $1 million program provides extra support for care leavers and young people in out-of-home care so they can more easily access high-quality education and training. Young people who have spent time in out-of-home care often face more challenges in life than other children, particularly when it comes to higher education, health and employment outcomes. The program works to improve young people’s chances of breaking out of the cycle of disadvantage by supporting young people to get the education they need and deserve for the job that they want and deserve. Students are provided with resources, services, financial support and assistance, including assistance in selecting and enrolling in TAFE and university courses, should they need or desire it.

The program has been highly successful to date since it was introduced in 2015, with more than 200 care leavers now studying at Federation University, La Trobe University and Swinburne University. Raising Expectations is a partnership between the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Federation University Australia, La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology.

I just want to talk briefly about some of the other programs and initiatives that this government has invested in to reform and support the children and family services system. Launched in April 2016, the Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children plan outlines our strategy to deliver a system focused on strengthening communities to better prevent neglect and abuse, delivering early support to children and families at risk, keeping more families together through crisis and securing a better future for children who cannot live at home. As part of this we are also trialling some new, evidence-based services tailored to the needs of children. The Andrews Labor government is investing in innovative models of care and evidence-based programs as part of progressing the children and families reform agenda.

One of the models of care is called Keep Embracing Your Success—KEYS for short. KEYS is a new model of residential care that is an intervention not a destination. It brings integrated mental health services into the residential care unit for better support for children. Ultimately it is designed to help children with complex needs to leave the residential facility and return to family-based care, which leads to better outcomes for the children.

I have one final comment on another model. Treatment Foster Care Oregon, or TFCO for short, is a model of professionalised foster care that works intensively with children for a short period of time before they are reintegrated to their family or home-based care. You can see the programs that the Andrews Labor government has invested in and continues to invest in to assist children who may have been in out-of-home care to reintegrate back into their family and to support them to make sure they are able to access education, training and jobs. It is critically important to make sure that these children get the support so that they become the best that they can be and successful in their own lives. I will leave my contribution there.

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (16:52): Justice is a powerful word. It means many things. It is in our party’s name. Justice is not just about locking up criminals and throwing away the key. Justice is not just about harsher penalties or sentencing practices. It is about the pursuit of fairness. Justice is about protecting the vulnerable, the children, the elderly and all those in between.

This bill aims to change the current termination of care by government for our youth from 18 to 21. For too long those who have relied on out-of-home care have been let down by a system that has been politicised, underfunded and neglected for brighter and shinier budget items. However, there are serious unintended consequences which stem from a lack of support for our youth at a time when school, peer pressure and personal development are at their peak in terms of stress. Presently some adolescents are worrying about where they will be sleeping after their 18th birthday or how they will navigate the unnecessarily bureaucratic forms required for receiving welfare and further government support.
My son, Michael, is in year 11 this year, and I cannot imagine him at the end of this year navigating the system. Fortunately he is not reliant upon out-of-home care; he is seemingly more reliant upon the PlayStation at this stage. A statistic that has been cited is that around 800 young people leave state care each year as they approach their 18th birthdays, and of these 800, 50 per cent will be homeless, in custody or unemployed within 12 months. This is simply not good enough. I am sure that we can all agree that helping these young people, who through no fault of their own are at risk, should be a top priority for this government and this term of Parliament.

While the government has indicated that it is hoping to increase funding and support for those in out-of-home care, there are kids in year 12 right now who are turning 18 next week and will be let down by a system with a harsh cut-off date. By allowing people to leave state care at the age of 21 instead of 18 you are giving adolescents the opportunity to forward plan and prepare for independent living.

Compared to 18, by 21 you are far more socially mature and able to manage personal finances. And most importantly, you are not having to navigate your way through year 12 at the same time as turning 18 and finding your own place to live.

Our party leader, Derryn Hinch, raised this exact issue with the CEO of Home Stretch, Paul McDonald, on his TV program last August. While Derryn tried to get support for this concept in the federal Parliament, this is fundamentally a state issue and should be addressed by this government. I expect some to understandably raise the budgetary cost of offering the option of continued care until the age of 21, but there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that if we do so, those in state care are less likely to have become engaged with government handouts or, worse, entangled within the criminal justice system. This is where state care becomes a justice issue, because we can help these children before they encounter these issues. It is being proactive in the most productive way.

Finally, I note the need for our attention to be directed not only towards state care but also towards the work of the Department of Health and Human Services and child protection services. There is an overwhelming need for an holistic approach by government towards child welfare. While this bill is a step in the right direction, one measure alone will not resolve all of the existing issues.

I commend Ms Patten on this introduction of this bill. If nothing else it has inspired a very important debate in this place. I hope the government offers the option of continued care until the age of 21 as early as the forthcoming state budget. As many have said before in this place, the protection of children should be a top priority of any government. I commend this bill to the house.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (16:56): The purpose of the Reason Party’s bill is to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to provide for the continuation of out-of-home care to young people up to and including 20 years of age, and I am in support. The bill includes an extended definition of ‘out-of-home care’ to include young people 18, 19 and 20 years of age. It quite rightly seeks to extend the responsibilities of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to provide out-of-home care to young people continuing in out-of-home care.

Speaking to caseworkers in my region who advocate for youth within government services, the biggest issue is providing suitable housing. As other speakers on the crossbench have mentioned today as part of this debate, these young people must be physically homeless—not about to be—before they can even be considered for the homeless waiting list, which is absurd. I have heard of cases where young adults have ended up housed in nursing homes until suitable accommodation can be sourced.

Youths report feeling safer and more secure in a prison and that the prison system has better transitional programs in place. That is a sad indictment of the current situation for these 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds. I have also been told that in practice leaving care plan arrangements are not put in until about six to 12 months before turning 18 even with an extension. The transitional plans need to be in place long before leaving care is occurring, but that does not seem to be the practice. Transitional housing is very difficult to find. Help finding private rental is even harder. Helping these young people out of the foster system and into suitable accommodation is even harder again. A lot of these cases are due to the trauma
Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan) (16:59): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Committees

PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

Reference

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (16:59): Before I move motion 162 in my name I would seek leave to amend slightly the reporting date that was set in this motion at April 2020. I seek leave to extend that date to August 2020.

Leave granted.

Ms PATTEN: I move:

That this house:

(1) recognises that:
   (a) the ability to petition the Parliament is a right of all Victorian citizens;
   (b) petitions are the only way an individual or group of citizens can directly place grievances before the Parliament;
   (c) petitions provide an important tool for improving community engagement with the political process;

(2) notes that:
   (a) a petition is a citizen’s request for action; however, once a copy of the petition has been referred to a minister by the Clerk, no further action is required, which is a flaw in the parliamentary system of democracy;
   (b) the Australian House of Representatives has a Standing Committee on Petitions which receives and processes petitions on behalf of the house and is able to inquire into and report on matters relating to petitions following their tabling;
   (c) the process for petitions in the Victorian Parliament requires urgent reform;

(3) requires the Procedure Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 20 August 2020, on any sessional order or standing order changes that would provide reform of petitions, including appropriate procedures to require the:
   (a) minister, or minister representing the relevant minister in the Legislative Assembly, to table a written response to a petition within 14 days of it being tabled in the Legislative Council;
   (b) Legislative Council to debate the issue raised in a petition upon reaching a certain threshold of petitioners that is to be fixed by the house;

and calls on the government to implement petition reform no later than 1 January 2021.

This motion relates to the petition process that we have in this Parliament. I was very fortunate in the last Parliament to be part of the move of this house to e-petitions. What we saw from that was an incredible increase in the number of citizens that engaged in this house through e-petitions. I think the very anachronistic pencil-and-paper type of petition is something quite foreign to many of our constituents these days with Change.org etcetera.

We saw this very big change. Petitions to this house had not really changed since they were introduced in the late 1800s, and the model that we used in the late 1800s harked back to the first model of petitions that dates back to the 14th century. Since the 14th century we have always understood that there is a right for our citizens to petition us, and I think now that is more important than ever. Now we are
seeing our citizens lose faith in our governments, our citizens lose faith even in democracy itself. Our citizens see us as the ‘other’. They do not have a connection with this house as they should.

I know all of us speak to and engage with our community as best we can. We are out there, and I hear members statements about the wonderful times that all of us have spent with our constituents, engaging, listening and bringing those grievances back to this house, whether it is through second-reading debates, whether it is through constituency questions, adjournments or whatever. But really the petition is that direct democracy. It is that ability for a citizen to directly speak to this Parliament. It is cherished, and it should be. But I think we could go further. The heart of this motion is about how we can take further the way that we respond to our citizens when they take the time to petition us.

I commend a research paper done by the library on e-petitions, and I would certainly like to commend Caitlyn Grover, who is the author of this research paper. It is a very good read. She very succinctly but in great detail looks at what other countries are doing right now in how they respond to their communities when their communities petition their parliaments. I will speak to how other jurisdictions deal with petitions in a moment.

But if we look at how we deal with it, I suspect all of us during our time in this house have delivered at least one petition—have tabled at least one petition from 10 citizens, 1000 citizens, 10 000 citizens or 30 000 citizens. We have delivered that petition. We have brought in sometimes bundles of curled papers, or more recently we have relied on the e-petition process that is operated through our table office very effectively. However, what happens then? What happens to that petition? What message do the citizens that either spent the time collecting those signatures or the citizens that purely signed that petition get? What happens? Nothing happens.

I do not know where the petition cupboard is in this Parliament. I will find out, but I suspect that it is a very big cupboard. I do not know how long we keep them for, but that is pretty much what we do: we pop them in a cupboard. We do not necessarily respond to them. We do not act on them, we let them go. So what this motion seeks to do is change the way we respond to our citizens who petition us. This motion asks that the Procedure Committee consider how we could best do that.

I can tell you that a lot of other jurisdictions have considered this, even as close to home as Queensland. When an e-petition is received by their Parliament, ministers are actually required to respond to it. Within 30 days a minister must consider that petition and must write back and give their position on that petition—whether they will act on it, whether they will dismiss it out of hand. They do not necessarily answer the petition, and we all know that from asking our questions of ministers; we do not necessarily get answers, we get responses. But they must respond to it, and that response must be online—that response is public.

In Germany if there is a petition of over 50 000 people, there must be a public hearing. There actually must be an inquiry into what that petition has called for. So they will hold public inquiries and they will investigate to see where the support is, what the views of the rest of the country are on that petition. In the United Kingdom they require a response from government to petitions that receive over 10 000 signatures. Petitions that receive over 100 000 signatures are considered for debate in Parliament. As I say, trust in our governments is at the lowest it has ever been. The 2020 Edelman Trust report that came out earlier this month shows that in Australia less than 44 per cent of Australians trust government.

I have just listened to the debate that we have had on out-of-home care, and I have to say that it was a respectful debate, it was a very good debate, it showed the multipartisan nature that so often people do not get to see. They do not get to see what we do when we do it well. They get to see us probably at our poorest moments because that makes the best TV, that makes the best headlines—us at our poorest moments. We should look at ways that we as a Parliament can engage with our constituency in a meaningful way so they can see that we are listening to them, that we are responding, and I think petitions is an excellent way of doing this.
In Scotland they have a petitions committee. When you go to put a petition up in Scotland it is not as simple as it is here. There are certain strict rules and regulations about how a petition is developed and how it is placed onto the website. I think that is very sensible, but what that means is that the Parliament in Scotland takes that petition very seriously, and they will consider it at different levels. The United States do something similar. The United States actually set a rule that the White House must act on a petition if it is over a certain number of signatures. That number has steadily increased over the years. It was at 100 000 until 109 000 people petitioned the US federal government to kick Piers Morgan out of the country. The petition level has actually now increased in that jurisdiction.

E-petitions have been introduced into Queensland, Tasmania, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Portugal, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Finland, Ukraine, Romania, Latvia, South Korea, the European Union, the Norwegian municipalities and Victoria as well. What the table office tells me right now is that since the development and introduction of e-petitions they have expanded and increased remarkably.

What is particularly sad about it, though, is that we as MPs have not tabled those petitions. We are actually seeing more petitions coming into our Parliament but less of them actually making it onto the floor of this Parliament. I think that if we changed the way that we responded to our petitions, we would see greater engagement. I think I would certainly be more engaged in a petition if I knew that the minister would need to respond to it and if I knew that after a certain number of people had signed it we would actually debate it in the Parliament.

Mr Davis has shared some of his thoughts with me on this, and I hope when we get to debate this in greater detail at a later time we can discuss this. But I am very pleased to see that Mr Davis and other members in this house have considered where we can go with petitions and how we can engage with our community in a much more meaningful way. Particularly our younger constituents sign a petition on a daily basis. They are signing a Do Gooder petition; they are signing a Change.org petition. But they do not understand that none of those petitions make it into our Parliament. We have a system for petitions to make it into our Parliament, and I think that is quite right. However, what they probably do not understand is what happens to that petition once it makes it into Parliament. So they are very pleased that that petition has made it into Parliament, but what they are unaware of, and I think is the absolute flaw in our system, is that we do nothing with those petitions.

Mr Barton interjected.

Ms PATTEN: I take up that interjection from Mr Barton. I think it is disrespectful, and I do believe that people do not see government, they do not see our Parliament, as part of their lives. They see us as something other. They do not see that we impact on their lives every day when in fact we do. So it behoves us to, and we must, do what we can.

I think seeing a large crossbench shows the diversity of the community here, and I think those voices will be further extended and further amplified by changes in the way that we deal with petitions. So this is I think quite a simple approach, and I would hope that we may actually get to this position without having to go through the full debate on this motion. But I would suggest that within a certain period of time a minister must respond to a petition, and everyone, particularly those on the e-petitions—everyone who signed that petition—will be notified of that response. That response will go up online. If we get to petitions that have 50 000 or 100 000 signatures, then maybe we need to consider a different response to that—a different response to the importance that our community have put on the issue that they are petitioning us to act on.

And we can learn from the many other jurisdictions that have been doing this for many years. I will particularly refer back to Scotland, which has got an incredibly sophisticated system of a public petition committee that determines what is admissible. There is a process that it goes through. The website keeps them informed. What we find with those petitions is that they are actually acted on. There are a number of petitions, and I would again encourage people to look at the research that the
library has done on e-petitions but also certainly to go to the Scottish Parliament’s website on petitions, which goes to the Scottish Parliament’s process for petitions, where you can see what the petition was, how it was formed, who formed it and how the government responded to it or how the Parliament responded to it. What I saw there was that those petitions effected change, and that is what our community wants. Our community wants to hear that they are being heard. Our community wants to see that they are being heard. I myself am told by people, ‘Why don’t we start a petition?’, and I certainly think it is one way to illustrate support for a particular position, but the fact that we have no way of furthering the debate on that petition within the Parliament I think is a flaw in our system.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Statements on reports, papers and petitions

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE

Budget papers 2019–20

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:15): I rise to speak on the budget papers 2019–20, which raise the funding for education in our state. In talking about that I want to talk about some of the problems that have faced families in Victoria since the beginning of the school year, when the state government closed all four secondary colleges in Shepparton and created one super-school, the Greater Shepparton Secondary College. This has been a very unpopular plan with the local community. It remains very unpopular. Parents warned that there would be a number of problems with this, and some of those problems that have arisen in the first couple of weeks are what I want to talk about tonight.

The first thing I would like to talk about is the bus timetabling. Despite reassurances from the government and the Department of Education and Training that the transport of students to the three different campuses would be without issue, the opposite is actually the reality. Bus drivers have been allocated too many students to pick up and not enough time to get them to their particular campus. They also have a very limited time that they can stop at each school, which is causing a lot of problems. Many students have been left at the wrong school, and drivers have been forced to ignore students running to the bus because of time constraints. It was taking students from North Shepparton over an hour to travel to the McGuire campus, and this was of great concern to many families, who complained about this. That resulted in the campus principal, John Sciacca, actually riding on that bus one day, and following that the schools have now introduced a McGuire express bus, which has solved the problem for a few people, but there are still far too many students that are on buses for very long periods of time both in the morning and in the afternoon. Parents are furious about this, and all of these things that I have raised have come to us via parents as concerns that they have.

A similar problem with the McGuire kids on the bus also exists with buses that go to the Mooroopna campus. There was, prior to the start of the school year, planned a kind of Mooroopna express service, but that was scrapped on the day before school started with no notification to parents. It was only when some parents found out about it by looking at the timetable just to double-check the time that news started to actually filter out about that. That resulted in the campus principal, John Sciacca, actually riding on that bus one day, and following that the schools have now introduced a McGuire express bus, which has solved the problem for a few people, but there are still far too many students that are on buses for very long periods of time both in the morning and in the afternoon. Parents are furious about this, and all of these things that I have raised have come to us via parents as concerns that they have.

I am not going to get to go through all my problems, so I am just going to speed through a lot of things now. There have been violent incidents on a daily basis. Parents feared that this would happen; they warned that it would happen when they merged all four schools together. There has been a report of even a teacher being assaulted by a student at one of the campuses. It is believed that there is a higher than normal number of students that have been suspended since the start of the school year. Of course we are not able to get confirmation of that, but that is what is being reported around town.
It was claimed by the minister and those proponents of the school that there would be an extension of subject choices, that there would be plenty of subjects available, and yet that has not been the reality. There has been one year 11 student from Shepparton High who in 2019 was studying VCE photography and obviously planning to continue that subject into year 12. However, I have been informed that there is no year 12 photography subject, and the student has been offered under the new arrangement to be put into a media class instead.

The uniforms have been a huge issue. There have been very poor quality uniforms from one of the suppliers. Parents tried to move their vouchers to an alternative provider, and they were unable to do that. There are problems with timetabling, there are problems with discipline — with children not being disciplined, I might say — and there are problems with the department mocking parents. Shepparton deserves better than to be treated with such contempt by the minister, the government, the department and the lower house member, who has been complicit in allowing the closure of the four secondary schools in Shepparton.

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE

Budget papers 2019–20

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (17:20): My point today relates to the state budget, and in particular the transport infrastructure sections of the state budget, which lay out a number of key points in terms of stabling yards and the decision of government to build stabling yards at Wyndham Vale. This is a decision that was made by government — to place the stabling yards at Wyndham Vale — because the West Gate Tunnel, one of the fly-offs from it, comes into the E-gate stabling area in North Melbourne. So not only did we lose the E-gate stabling capacity but we have also lost the development potential of some of that E-gate land, and the government has made the decision to build the stabling yards at Wyndham Vale.

What we have discovered in recent days is that the government also intends to dump toxic soil at Wyndham Vale — a bizarre idea that you would have a stabling yard with a toxic dump close to a waterway and close to houses in Melbourne’s western suburbs. Goodness gracious, what an arrogant decision. We heard the Treasurer on 3AW last week, when he frankly did not provide any assurance to anyone. It became clear that he will arrogantly push forward with his plan and the government’s plan to put the toxic soil in the area where the stabling is occurring. That stabling yard Metro are involved with, and it is clear that the business case came from Metro and the Level Crossing Removal Project. Those organisations were to build these stabling yards and they were to provide assistance for V/Line, provide washing and maintenance facilities for V/Line, and ultimately likely too for Metro Trains. So this is an important stabling yard, which is to be compromised now by the government’s decision to turn this into a toxic dump.

This responds directly to the government’s failure to plan its transport infrastructure. If the idea is that you start a massive tunnel project with no solution for the toxic soil coming out of it, I cannot think of a more bizarre way to organise the transport infrastructure development for the state. With the West Gate Tunnel not only are we seeing tolls now being paid by people on existing CityLink roads, increased tolls going up year by year for 10 years and extension tolls that will come later, we are now seeing the slowness of the process, the legal complications that are likely to be seen and the outcomes that are very much against the community interest. The community want good transport infrastructure, but they do not want chaotic planning; they do not want a hand-to-mouth decision to be made where decisions are such that this toxic soil — the toxic spoil — coming out of the West Gate Tunnel will be dumped right near houses, right near the significant stabling yards that the government is intending to build.

You have got to ask: in the business case was the cost of these stabling yards and the cost of the toxic soil properly taken account of? My answer to that is no on both counts. The government has not made the proper decisions; the government has not made the decisions that the community would expect. It was a cosy deal with Transurban — a very cosy deal. The government is very close to Transurban. Staff
from the Treasurer’s office moved across to Transurban. It is clear from what the Treasurer has also told 3AW on different occasions that the government was aware of the plans in 2014, before the state election, for the West Gate Tunnel project that came forward as a market-led proposal early in 2015. So the government went to the election. They lied. They lied to the people about a $500 million slip road to the port. Actually what they were planning was a $6.7 billion West Gate Tunnel road. The Treasurer knew about that tunnel and that proposal before the election in 2014. Now we find him trying to back-fit a toxic dump in the western suburbs of Melbourne—a toxic dump near houses, near the Werribee River; an extraordinary outcome for the community—and I think people have every right to be angry.

Labor take the western suburbs of Melbourne for granted—absolutely—and Mr Finn and others are very strongly fighting for them. But the key point here is that this is the chaotic planning of Labor. They cannot manage money, they cannot manage these major projects and they are now in a legal and logistic imbroglio.

**ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

_Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture_

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:25): I rise this evening to make a contribution on a report, the *Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture*. In doing so I want to again reiterate my huge disappointment in the actual report, the committee report that came out. It was not as it was intended, and by that I mean it did not stick to the terms of reference at all. The terms of reference were to consider the type and prevalence of unauthorised activity, workplace health and safety and biosecurity risks with regard to animal activist activity, compliance with the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 and the civil or criminal liability of individuals and organisations who promote such activity.

Now, what happened in this report is that rather than actually stick to the terms of reference, the various members of the Labor government, the Labor MPs and other members other than the Liberals and The Nationals, took it on a journey that does not support our farming communities and does not actually protect law-abiding farms and farmers and the agricultural industry as a whole. In fact in a vacuum, without industry consultation, it created its own recommendation that we did not support—the Liberals and The Nationals certainly did not support it—and that was in relation to euthanasia methods within the industry. What was so ridiculous in regard to this was that on many occasions there were multiple people within industry who were at hearings and at no time did the government take the liberty to ask them questions about this. A particular recommendation, recommendation 12, was moved by the Animal Justice Party and supported by Mr Elasmar, Ms Terpstra, Mr Gepp and Mr Barton. The people who they did not talk to, who they did not ask, were a range. They were from the egg and poultry industry. They were from the LTs Eggs farm. We had Ms Danielle Sinotta and her father, Brian Ahmed, here today to talk about the great things that they are doing with caged eggs and how they are taking huge steps to be very transparent about their animal welfare practices and the way they create or make eggs and distribute them et cetera. They are going out into schools now and providing a very clear indication so that people can make wise and informed choices.

They did not talk to anyone in AgVic about what they thought of these changes to euthanasia measures. They did not talk to Professor Paul Hemsworth, who is an animal welfare specialist, or the Victorian Farmers Federation—any part—or the United Dairy Farmers of Victoria or Livestock Australia or Luv-a-Duck or the RSPCA or the meat and livestock industry or the Gippy Goat Farm.

Now, you would think when a government says, ‘Trust us, we’re egalitarian. We believe in equality’, it would be equal. Well, it is not equal if you are a farmer in the country, because this government did not bother to communicate or to canvas that. It is not necessarily that they would go against it entirely; they just wanted the opportunity to have consultation and proper consultation.
The other issue that I would like to raise tonight is in terms of judicial reform or judicial awareness and training. It was very clear across many of the submissions, many of the hundreds of submissions that we received and heard during our hearings, that people were most concerned that the judicial system needed to have a better form of education. Indeed the National and Liberal recommendations spoke to the fact that the Victorian government should request the Judicial College of Victoria to provide education and training—not tell them what to do and not say, ‘This is what we want’, but provide education and training—to magistrates and judges about the consequences and impacts of farm trespass and animal activism on farms, particularly those judges and magistrates doing circuit work in regional courts. That is sensible. That is reasonable. But it was voted down, and the people who came and spoke at these hearings and the many people who put in submissions are furious about this. There really is not the right rationale behind it.

Finally, in my last 30 seconds I would like to acknowledge the Honourable Mary Wooldridge. I would like to acknowledge her dear family in the room. They are wonderful country people. They have farms, and they care about their animals. I think—I am pretty sure—that they would be backing this report, our minority report, all the way. I look forward to Ms Wooldridge’s final speech with reluctance because I do not want her to go.

WIRE ROPE BARRIERS

Petition

Mrs McARThUR (Western Victoria) (17:30): I am pleased to be able to make a statement on a petition I submitted today, which was about building roads, not barriers. In 1972 prime farming land along the Princes Highway was compulsorily acquired and unwillingly sold to enable the construction of a dual highway between Allansford and Panmure. Now, half a century later, the Transport Accident Commission has informed property owners that instead wire rope barriers will be installed on the Princes Highway over two sections: in the median strip of the dual-carriageway section between Deakin University and Allansford, and in the centre of a single-carriageway road between Allansford and Panmure.

This petition was launched opposing this installation following a meeting with over 50 concerned Allansford residents led by local dairy farmer Mick Mahony. Mick has been an indispensable warrior for his local community, driving this meeting and distributing this petition in recent weeks, and I thank him greatly for his hard work on behalf of his community. Mick’s local community, particularly farmers and transport operators, are extremely angry about the planned installation of wire rope barriers, especially down the centre of a single carriageway. Everyone agreed the only solution to ensure safety on this section of the Princes Highway is the duplication of this road, as was originally promised when land was compulsorily acquired in 1972.

The installation of wire rope barriers will have an adverse effect on the safe operation of milk collection services, which in many circumstances occur twice daily. Any major alterations to the transit of produce could pose a serious hazard to tanker drivers and other road users. Residents do not want hardworking taxpayers’ dollars wasted on a stop-gap, short-term measure which will cause considerable inconvenience to local farmers, transport operators and indeed all motorists. The resounding plea to the Andrews government from the local community is to build roads, not barriers. This is indicative of the concerns of community across rural and regional Victoria, demonstrated in almost 4500 signatures on this petition from people across the state.

The Labor government’s curious insistence on installing wire rope barriers across our state’s highways should be treated with suspicion, particularly when local communities oppose them and foreign countries are removing them over safety concerns. There are a plethora of reasons why wire rope barriers are a bad idea: ongoing repair costs are extremely burdensome to the taxpayer; they prevent motorists from being able to pull over in cases of emergency; they make highways difficult for transport operators to drive on; the barriers down the centre of a single carriageway significantly hinder
the mobility of larger vehicles; and motorcyclists are seriously endangered, to say nothing of the wildlife that gets caught up in them.

Dairy farmers are already struggling with dilapidated, inadequately funded roads in western Victoria. The government’s addiction to wire rope barriers is just another obstacle to rural lives and family farms. Regional Roads Victoria’s pathetic barriers is just another obstacle to rural lives and family farms. Regional Roads Victoria’s pathetic excuse for community consultation was setting up a stall opposite the kiosk at a night market in Warrnambool. A pop-up drop-in stall is no substitute for a fully-fledged public meeting.

This installation is just another example of bad decisions being made by bureaucrats in ministerial offices a few minutes walk from the Yarra and inside these tram tracks without properly consulting rural communities who have to live with them. The petitioners therefore requested that the Legislative Council call on the Minister for Roads to abandon this proposed barrier installation and instead duplicate the highway in accordance with the justification provided in the 1972 compulsory land acquisition.

Members

MS WOOLDRIDGE

Valedictory statement

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:37): (By leave) It has been a privilege and an honour over the past 13 years to have been elected twice as the Liberal member for Doncaster and then twice as a Liberal member for Eastern Metropolitan Region, including a term elected by the party as the Leader of the Opposition and leader of the Liberal Party in this place. In my maiden speech I said that I stood for Parliament because I believe that a committed and passionate member of Parliament could make a difference at a local, community and state level. And today, 13 years later, I still believe that to be true.

As minister you can genuinely drive reform for positive change for families and individuals, although it is unrealistic to imagine that change can be perfectly designed and implemented immediately. Having the courage to reform, to drive change, to learn and then to refine and improve again is a journey and one that I welcomed. I felt a huge sense of urgency as minister, and there was not a minute to waste. While four years in opposition absolutely drags, it flies by when you are in government.

Working with my exceptionally capable departmental secretaries and deputies, including Gill Callister, Simon Phemister and Pradeep Philip, we trialled the redesign of community services as well as mental health and alcohol and drug services to work collaboratively with families across their full range of needs, eliminating up to 20 different case managers working with one family to seek to simplify the support and prioritise the family’s most pressing needs. The evaluation showed that people were getting better support; they had improved self-management and were exiting the system earlier. We called this Services Connect.

This program went on to be recognised as the best and most innovative public sector policy in the nation in 2014. With the change of government the name ‘Services Connect’ disappeared, but the platform and the learnings live on today in current programs. This continues to be an area of massive opportunity—to work better with adults and children, putting their needs at the centre of decision-making and joining up and coordinating the delivery of their services and support.

I am very proud of Services Connect, and I am proud that there were many other great reforms that I was able to work with others to develop and implement as minister: the establishment of Our Watch, the national foundation to prevent violence against women and their children, with headquarters in Melbourne, and the inspired appointment, I believe, of Natasha Stott-Despoja as the inaugural chair; legislating and making truly independent the Commission for Children and Young People and appointing Bernie Geary as the inaugural commissioner; and appointing Andrew Jackomos as Australia’s first commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people.
I will never forget visiting the Parkville youth justice centre and seeing young people effectively lying around watching television in the middle of the day. They were only getting about 6 hours of education per week. Given that for many of them their formal education had not progressed beyond years 2 and 3, Martin Dixon and I established Parkville College, providing a compulsory 36 hours over six days of formal education each and every week for young people in the youth justice system and giving them a real opportunity to turn their lives around.

Together with Robert Clark we established Australia’s first Family Drug Treatment Court, providing treatment and support for parents who had had their children taken from them due to persistent alcohol and drug abuse and giving them a greater chance to address their addiction issues and reunite their families. There was passing the permanent care amendments to give vulnerable children the certainty of placement and reducing the time to achieve stability and permanency. This was off the back of the significant Cummins inquiry. There was establishing the Cradle to Kinder program, working with young at-risk mums to strengthen their parenting; investing to improve the safety of women in mental health wards; rewriting the Mental Health Act and establishing Australia’s first mental health complaints commissioner; building many mental health beds, mother and baby mental health and drug rehabilitation beds, and disability supported accommodation; closing two of our last disability institutions, Sandhurst and Oakleigh; and of course signing Victoria up to the national disability insurance scheme (NDIS), securing the headquarters in Geelong and undertaking the trial in the Barwon region.

These were significant reforms of a Liberal-Nationals government focused on using government support to help individuals and families to break the cycle of disadvantage, to assist them in getting their lives back on track and to become responsible, contributing members of society. I believe these reforms have genuinely made a difference in many people’s lives.

There is no doubt that the capacity to have an impact is significantly higher when your party is in government, but even in opposition I was proud that we succeeded in extending the review of child deaths from within three months to up to 12 months of interaction with child protection and amending the Tobacco Amendment Bill 2016 to treat water-pipe tobacco equivalent to cigarette tobacco.

Some of the most personally challenging and gruelling times are during the debates where we have a free vote. The abortion law reform debate in 2008 and the voluntary assisted dying debate in 2017 come immediately to mind. On both of these occasions I voted with the majority in the Parliament but the minority in my party. It was an agonising experience, but I know that these laws are making a big difference for women and those who are terminally ill, and I am proud of the small part that I played in helping to make them a reality. I do thank the Liberal Party and my colleagues for the respect I have always been shown as part of the Liberal and the coalition team despite sometimes having some different views on controversial social issues.

No matter whether in government or opposition, a member can always make a difference in their local community, listening to and advocating on behalf of their constituents and delivering investment in infrastructure and services. In Doncaster it was wonderful to fund the upgrade of Birralee Primary School, the new Manningham civic building MC Square, the mini pitch at Doncaster Hockey Club, the No Boundaries Cricket program, Onemda’s accessible development at the Ted Ajani Community Hub, the Doncaster RSL and the Doncaster Playhouse, the United Muslim Migrants Association, or UMMA, centre, Doncare’s family violence services and the Zerbes and Donvale reserves.

For all the talk about funding of infrastructure and services, what really is inspiring and motivating for me is the people—the compassionate and capable people who work day in day out to improve the lives of others and of course the people who need assistance, sometimes at the most vulnerable times in their lives. It is these people who are indelible in my mind.
I will never forget calling Bruce Clark, who had been campaigning for 10 years following the death of his son, to say that we were introducing legislation to give parents greater control over who can supply alcohol to their children, through secondary supply laws. We both had tears in our eyes.

There was hugging the mothers who had had to relinquish their babies for adoption, following our historic apology in Parliament.

There was the young man who, while eligible for release from Parkville, was seeking to delay parole by two weeks so he could complete a component of his schooling. Of course his parole was not delayed, but this led us to establish a campus of Parkville College outside the youth justice centre walls so young people could continue their education in a suitable environment.

There were the parents in their eighties who were so worried about what would happen to their adult child with a disability but who through the NDIS have secured appropriate accommodation and support and now have comfort about the future.

There was Greg, the father whose family was case-managed as part of Services Connect, who told of the difference it made, how his mental ill health was now under control, how his boys had just joined the cubs and how he hoped to get a job in the coming months. These are the people and the outcomes that make it all worthwhile.

And of course it is the people who work with you and support you to undertake the role of member and minister who actually ensure that it all happens. I have been blessed with wonderful staff. I particularly want to acknowledge Lyn Hall, who makes the world go round. I also want to acknowledge Linda, Kieren, Paul and Denise and, from my former ministerial office, my chief of staff, Ben Harris, along with Michael, Christabel, Pete, Anna, Matt, Russ, Sarah, Odete and others. I must also mention Andrea Coote, who worked with me as parliamentary secretary. As you can imagine, there was never a dull moment. You absolutely rely on your team, and my team have never let me down.

Neither have the wonderful Liberal Party members in Doncaster and Eastern Metropolitan Region. Particular thanks to Brent Rodrigues and Peter Clarke, my two very skilled and capable electorate chairs, as well as stalwarts like Johnny Hassed, Susan Turner, Helen Jurcevic and Keith Wolohan. Thank you for trusting me to be your MP and supporting me to do so. I have also been blessed with a great group of supporters beyond the party, particularly those who joined my regular women’s lunches and wine dinners over the years.

I have served in the cabinet or shadow cabinet under four leaders. I particularly want to thank Ted Baillieu, who had confidence in me from the start and took the risk of promoting me straight to the front bench where I have, very fortunately, remained ever since, and then of course Denis Napthine, Matthew Guy and Michael O’Brien.

A word about Michael: Michael is a true Liberal. He is driven by values, evidence and the passion to make a difference in the lives of Victorians. He will make a wonderful Premier.

Gordon, it was a pleasure teaming up with you as deputy leader in this place last term. Your capacity to analyse, question and amend motions, bills and procedures is second to none, as is your commitment and your friendship.

In that context I want to acknowledge the parliamentary staff, led by Anne and Andrew Young particularly, who manage the twists and turns in this place with calm and diplomacy.

Particularly with a young child, you cannot do this job without an extended support network, and I want to acknowledge those people who work and assist quietly behind the scenes—Amynta Baxter, Marc and Carol Niemes and Effie Natsis particularly, who have stepped in to fill the breach too many times to count.
But most of all, thank you to my family: my parents, Anne and Philip Wooldridge, who have been wonderful role models in all aspects of my life and who taught me—and this was one of my father’s favourite sayings—that ‘if it is to be, it is up to me’; my brother, Michael, whose deep political wisdom I call on regularly and trust and greatly appreciate; as well as the unconditional support of my sisters, Jenny and Sue; and my nieces, nephews and in-laws.

My husband, Andrew, with a very busy medical career as well as a breast cancer charity to run, has supported me every step of the way, no matter what is needed, whether it is advice, encouragement, moral support, domestic chores or even just lots of love and hugs. Thank you to Andrew and also our son, Jamison. He was only 10 months old when I was preselected, so this is the only life he has ever known. Jamison, it has been a particular pleasure to see that you have grown into a thoughtful and resilient young man. In fact when I was a minister and Jamison was a young child he was asked if when he grew up he would rather be a politician like this mother or a surgeon like this father. He answered without a moment’s hesitation, ‘Definitely a surgeon; they have more time with their family’. Andrew is perhaps the only surgeon whose child thinks he has a good work-life balance. This work does take you away from your family, but given the impact you can have it is a sacrifice you willingly make, and we are supported by those that we love. I want to deeply thank my family for supporting me through thick and thin, helping ground me in terms of what is important and motivating me about the importance of working for a better future for Victorians. Thank you for being with me tonight in the chamber, and I am excited to have more time with you soon.

To my colleagues in this place, I often think about the debates this chamber has witnessed over the years. This is the place where we craft the prosperity, wellbeing and safety of Victorians in the future, and we can and do make a difference in doing that. I tried to use every day to have a positive impact and will now seek to do so in a different forum. So I say to each of you: have the courage and the fortitude to do your best and stay focused on what is most important—improving the lives of all Victorians and securing a bright future for this great state. Thank you, goodbye and good luck.

Members applauded.

Adjourment

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (17:53): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

SHEPPARTON INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:53): My adjournment matter is directed to the Treasurer, and it concerns funding priorities for projects in the Shepparton district that must be included in the upcoming 2020–21 state budget. The action that I seek from the Treasurer is that he provide a commitment in the upcoming state budget to fund the Shepparton district priority infrastructure and investment projects that I will outline in this contribution.

The state budget, which will be delivered on 5 May, is an ideal opportunity for the Andrews government to financially commit to key infrastructure projects in Shepparton. Infrastructure projects in Shepparton are either usually ignored by the state government or nearly always funded by drip-feed, ensuring that every piece of planned infrastructure becomes a staged project, with some never, ever being completed. Despite government spin eagerly promoted by the Labor-voting Independent member for Shepparton, the communities of the Shepparton district have been treated with contempt since Daniel Andrews became Premier. It is hoped that the following infrastructure priorities for Shepparton will be fully funded in the state budget delivered on 5 May.

The Shepparton Education Plan has only received $21.5 million, and it is widely known that an additional $120 million is needed to fully fund the promised Greater Shepparton Secondary College in full. Our students are now in transition, and the government must not disrupt them for one moment
longer than was promised. For this school to open in 2022 it must be funded in full in this budget. It cannot be a staged build. A commitment for the funding of stage 2 of the Goulburn Valley Health (GV Health) redevelopment, estimated to cost between $272 million and $374 million, is needed to ensure a continuous build upon the completion of stage 1.

After a majority commitment from the federal government of $208 million towards the construction of stage 1 of the Shepparton bypass, the state government needs to contribute at least $50 million to complete stage 1 of this vital project. The budget must also include the additional funding needed to bridge the enormous $282.5 million budget black hole that has been identified in the Shepparton rail corridor project. Thirteen million dollars is needed for the proposed $42 million stage 1 Shepparton sports and events centre redevelopment, which would generate approximately $5.7 million of new spending in the local economy, meaning more visitors, more business and more jobs.

Of course there are many other projects that need to be funded or delivered, including a mother and baby unit at GV Health, a clinical school, continued funding for the Lighthouse Project, the Maude Street Mall redevelopment, road upgrades, the La Trobe University expansion, job creation and a vital commitment to water security for our irrigators.

PUBLIC AND RETIREMENT HOUSING

Ms Maxwell (Northern Victoria) (17:56): My matter is for the Minister for Housing. However, it does potentially traverse multiple portfolios, so I would both understand and appreciate it if he chose to redirect some of it to another minister on my behalf. It is about two very important housing issues that each have obvious resonance at the height of summer.

The first is the lack of any requirement for air conditioning in Victorian public housing. This is clearly an especially acute need in many parts of my electorate of Northern Victoria, which has typically some of the state’s hottest areas. The state government is obliged by law to provide public housing tenants with facilities that are—and I quote—‘fit for habitation’. Yet because this term is only loosely defined, minimum requirements normally only apply to the heating and not the cooling of homes. A recent Sydney University study for Mallee Family Care asserts that this actually represents a breach of the longstanding United Nations The Right to Adequate Housing principles. Obviously the ramifications of living in overly hot housing are multifaceted, but they include sweating, dehydration, headaches, lethargy, poor nutrition, heat stroke, heat exhaustion, various mental conditions and, worst of all, family violence.

I am also greatly concerned about the lack of any clear compulsion for Victorian retirement village operators to institute emergency evacuation plans or even assembly points. Naturally the residents of these villages are typically older, more frail and less mobile than most other people, and therefore they invariably require greater consideration in such circumstances. However, the needs of these often highly vulnerable Victorians do not appear to be recognised or expressed in our state laws.

By contrast, I understand that emergency and evacuation procedures are compulsory requirements in New South Wales retirement villages, for example, and at many other Victorian localities, including hospitals and public aged-care facilities, as well as schools, early childhood education and care services, libraries, other state and local government buildings, and the like. Whilst this issue is equally relevant to all forms of emergency situations, I raise it especially in the context of our state’s recent bushfires, which threatened many towns and their residents and which saw thousands of people, including many retired citizens, asked to urgently leave their homes.

Given all of this background, the action I seek is that the minister review each of these various gaps in current legislation and policy and advise in his answer of any steps the government will take to improve these arrangements for public housing and retirement village residents respectively.
ST ALBANS LEISURE CENTRE

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (17:59): I wish to raise a matter this evening for the attention of the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and I wish to bring to his attention a tale of two cities, as it were. It has recently been brought to my attention that the Parramatta Leisure Centre—of course in the state of New South Wales—has been granted by the New South Wales government and the Parramatta City Council a refurb to the tune of some $77 million. That obviously is pretty impressive for the people of Parramatta. But the same cannot be said for the people St Albans here in Melbourne. Western Sydney is obviously doing a hell of a lot better than western Melbourne in this regard because, as I have raised on a number of occasions in this house, the St Albans Leisure Centre needs to be bulldozed and needs to be rebuilt—desperately needs to be rebuilt. We have had no joy from this government at all. One has to ask why that is the case.

If I were a cynic, I might think that because Parramatta is in a marginal seat, that is why they got the $77 million, and the fact that St Albans is in a safe Labor seat and has a member who is pretty close to useless is why they get no support at all. It is so wrong. The people of St Albans and surrounds need that leisure centre as much as anybody else. They need the ability to exercise. We know that there are some major health problems in the west, particularly with diabetes, and a new leisure centre—I think they are calling it a healthcare hub or something similar to that—is something that would be of huge benefit to many thousands of people in the western suburbs of Melbourne. I hope Mr Jennings is listening to this because this is something that he should take up as well with his cabinet colleagues.

What I am asking is for the minister to go to the Treasurer and to get the money in the coming budget for the leisure centre in St Albans. My understanding is they are looking for around about $60 million, which is a saving of $17 million on what has been received in Parramatta, and I cannot begin to tell the house what an improvement it would be to the lives of so many people in the western suburbs of Melbourne. I ask the minister to do everything he can to deliver this new leisure centre for St Albans, and hopefully we will see this budget with the dollars that the people St Albans so desperately need.

KEEPING WOMEN OUT OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (18:02): My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Corrections, and the action I seek is for him to fund the Keeping Women out of the Justice System community of practice, and this is supported by the Victorian Legal Services Board. I am sure that the minister is well aware of the work that this group of organisations does, and it is very good work, but let us not forget that between 2006 and 2016 the women’s prison population in Victoria increased by 75 per cent. From an Ombudsman’s report in 2015 we found that the number of women in prison doubled compared to the rate of the male prison population. The jump in the number of Aboriginal women prisoners is incredibly stark: a 240 per cent increase in Victorian prisoners, in Victorian Aboriginal women. The remand numbers here are incredibly high. Corrections Victoria data indicates that in 2017, 39 per cent of all women prisoners were unsentenced, so nearly 40 per cent had not been sentenced at that time. Changes to bail and parole laws are exacerbating this growth in prisoner numbers. Let us just remember that very few of these women are in there for serious violent crimes.

The Keeping Women out of the Justice System community of practice have made a funding submission to the government that gives the sad numbers I have just mentioned. Some of the key areas of their submission are to fund early intervention programs and partnerships in order to save on downstream costs, the creation of a specialist women’s list and the expansion of the work and development permit scheme. I have seen firsthand some of this work. I have met with some of the mentors that grab them early. When a woman is first making touches, is hitting the edge of the justice system, they send in mentors that help them navigate some of the more difficult parts of life that some people, particularly people from disadvantaged backgrounds, are struggling with. Being on the homelessness inquiry, it is no surprise that to keep people out of prison we need to provide homes, and there is a request for an increase in homelessness services, particularly to ensure that people experiencing mental illness get the support they need.
I have seen the minister at the women’s prison the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, and I know that he understands this issue. I just implore him to consider fully funding the Keeping Women out of the Justice System community of practice.

**ONSHORE CONVENTIONAL GAS**

*Mrs McARTHUR* (Western Victoria) *(18:05):* My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Resources, and it relates to the Labor government’s damaging moratorium on conventional gas exploration in Victoria. There has been no moratorium on the demand for gas. August last year saw the single-highest level of use ever recorded in Victoria. In peak periods most of the energy we use comes from gas, not electricity—three times as much in fact—and demand is constantly growing. On average there are around 40,000 new connections to the network every year. Last year Australia overtook Qatar as the largest liquefied natural gas exporter in the world, increasing from 15.4 million tonnes to 75 million tonnes in the last decade. Yet despite this huge increase in production, prices are rising. Worse still, there are now serious proposals to build gas import terminals in sensitive areas like the Mornington Peninsula.

What has gone wrong? It is a scandal that we have had a gas boom and yet consumers and businesses in Victoria are paying more. Why are we considering imports from other countries or pipeline gas from other states which can cost six times more? How is it that we have the highest power prices in the country and that the price of gas has tripled since 2014? Alcoa’s recent update on the Portland smelter puts this into perspective. Company president Roy Harvey noted last month:

> It is a plant that operates very stably, it is a good technology, it just happens to be one of the … highest energy price markets on the planet.

The simple answer is Victoria’s inexplicable ban on conventional onshore gas exploration. Industry cannot build new supply closest to where customer demand is greatest, hence the absurdity of high-cost pipeline imports or expensive and potentially environmentally undesirable import infrastructure. Western Victoria Region has abundant resources of natural gas. We can increase supply and reduce prices, bringing lower energy costs for consumers and benefits for business, which will encourage investment and increase job creation.

The government in Canberra has asked Victoria to increase supply. Even the Labor Party recognises the stupidity of the policy. Resources spokesman Joel Fitzgibbon has said the ban makes neither economic nor environmental sense. Everyone wants the ban lifted. Victorians are paying the price. The action I seek is that the minister support my longstanding campaign to remove the moratorium and stimulate development by allowing royalties for landowners. They too should benefit from the opportunity this development presents. Like the rest of Victoria, like the rest of Australia, Western Victoria Region cannot accept that misplaced ideology should continue to cost us so dear.

**GAME RESERVE MANAGEMENT**

*Mr LIMBRICK* (South Eastern Metropolitan) *(18:08):* My request is directed to the Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Resources. Firstly, I would like to draw the minister’s attention to an initiative by Field & Game Australia to deploy a duck hunting educational project with the Gunditjmara people of south-western Victoria. This will continue an unbroken tradition of hunting for these people that has gone on for tens of thousands of years. It will also be in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which acknowledges the right of Indigenous people to use the resources on their land.

In further good news I am informed that although 5.7 per cent of Victoria has been impacted by fire this summer, there has been no impact on any of the 200 state game reserves comprising the more than 75,000 hectares where ducks are hunted. You can find a map that shows this on the website of Field & Game Australia. My request for action is for the minister to check on the accuracy of this information. Could the minister provide any data about the number of state game reserves burnt during the bushfires and how much was burnt?
ADJOURNMENT

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:09): My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Honourable Lily D’Ambrosio, in the other place. It relates to the government’s response to recommendations delivered in the final VEAC, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, report. The action I seek from the minister is for her to delay the government’s response by at least three months in view of the recent bushfires, which have wreaked havoc through our rural communities and regional communities but also through Crown state parks and national parks. They are in the eastern part of the state, but it is very important that a lot of resources and energy have been, rightly so, sent into that region. What I am asking is for the minister to therefore take some extra time to evaluate and consider the government’s response in relation to this report.

In March 2017 the Victorian government requested that VEAC conduct an investigation into public land in central-western Victoria, including Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and the Pyrenees Ranges, in terms of their forests. The terms of reference were about finding a balance for the future management and conservation of natural and cultural values within the forests. The VEAC recommendations—and I am being very calm in my language here—provide some feedback but they also give recommendations for the future in terms of Indigenous engagement, resource management, landscape connectivity and ecological restoration.

It is no secret in here that many of the bush user groups are very concerned about this VEAC report and have articulated that to me and their opposition to some of the recommendations within that VEAC report. But in relation to what is happening in the state at the moment in terms of the fires and the whole landscape in which parks and forests operate, it is important that the government now takes time to strategise the recommendations in the VEAC report. It should also take time to focus on the response efforts in relation to Eastern Victoria and getting people, farms and farmers back on their feet, focusing on the wildlife, certainly, and recovering those creatures that have been so devastatingly hurt through the fires, and then take a breath and provide that response at least a three-month period after the current due date.

WEST GATE TUNNEL

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:12): My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the minister to urgently inform my community about the plans for the toxic soil found as early as July last year during the West Gate Tunnel Project. Minister, the community of Western Metropolitan Region are understandably upset to hear that the soil, containing asbestos and the industrial chemical PFAS, may be dumped in sites near their current homes. In addition, there are rumours that the waste will be dumped in Wyndham Vale close to proposed schools and further housing as well as the beautiful Werribee River.

It appears that the government has known since at least July 2019, and now all we have left is speculation as to where this rubbish, this toxic waste, is going to be dumped and if it is going to be dumped in our backyard. I am, however, seriously struggling to believe that no one actually thought of a plan for contaminated soil when digging land in Melbourne’s Western Metropolitan Region. Historically the west has had a high concentration of factory-based businesses coupled with weak or no regulations, and this has resulted in the dumping of toxic material all over the west. It is unfair to keep the residents in a state of anxiety that is quickly turning into anger and frustration. Melbourne’s Western Metropolitan Region does not need any more toxic waste, but what we do need are proper waste management services.
Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (18:14): My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in the other place, and the action I seek is for her to implement a wombat gate trial in Western Victoria. Victorians were relieved when two weeks ago the government changed an outdated loophole in the Wildlife Act 1975 which allowed wombats to be hunted without regulation in some parts of Victoria. Indeed I was a strong advocate for the change in this house, and I thank them for their decision. However, another threat facing wombats is killing through authority to control wildlife permits.

Wombats are unique native marsupials. They live within complex burrow systems and social groups known as wisdoms. Wombats live for between 20 and 30 years, are nocturnal and bond strongly with their young. However, wombats are capable of breaching most exclusion fences. They are determined and follow predictable pathways, which can frustrate farmers. Wombats dig under fencing, allowing other animals free passage, often damaging the fencing in the process, resulting in many farmers choosing to kill them with departmental permission.

Wombat gates offer a solution to wombat deaths and farmer frustration, and they have been successfully trialled in Tasmania. Wombat gates allow native animals to pass freely whilst preventing damage to fences and unwanted grazing. Wombat gates can be placed where wombats have existing runways, built when the wombats have dug under the fence or cut into the fence to allow the gate to be fitted at the correct height. Wombat gates are yet to be trialled in Victoria, and my office has identified many farmers across Western Victoria who would utilise the opportunity. The government now just need to commit to a trial to make it happen, and I hope they will.

**SPORTS GRANT PROGRAMS**

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (18:16): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. As you know, the federal government has been embroiled in a sports rorts scandal. As the scandal unfolded we learned how a government minister used a sports grant program to direct taxpayer money to clubs in marginal electorates. It has been my experience that governments take every opportunity they can to buy votes with taxpayer money. Sports grant programs are themselves designed to win votes from voters who are invested in sports. Last week MPs accused Queensland’s Labor government of running a similar rort: taxpayer money being directed to clubs in marginal seats, this time at the behest of Labor politicians. Indeed the four electorates that garnered the least amount of funding were all Liberal seats.

It is clear that these grant programs are a breeding ground for corruption, vote-buying and pork-barrelling. We know that here in Victoria Labor has committed $175 million of taxpayer money to sporting grants. There is little publicly available information that demonstrates the integrity of these programs. Labor has also committed to spending $11.8 million on a sports precinct in Labor-held Ballarat, $600 000 in Labor-held Geelong and $700 000 in Labor-held Macedon. This is spending that is entirely at the minister’s discretion.

The Liberal Democrats have been consistent on this issue. We do not believe that grant rorts are an isolated thing or that they are rare. Wherever government picks winners and losers it will always play favourites. Buying votes with taxpayer money is not a rare occurrence; it is the standard operating procedure of both the major parties. The Liberal Democrats believe in honest government. We have no interest in buying votes with taxpayer money. I call upon the minister to discontinue the Victorian sports grant programs while he refers them to the Auditor-General for independent review.
RESPONSES

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (18:18): I have adjournment matters from the following members: Ms Lovell, Ms Maxwell, Mr Finn, Ms Patten, Mrs McArthur, Mr Limbrick, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Meddick and Mr Quilty. They are for various ministers on various matters, and I will seek written responses in accordance with our standing orders for members to the matters that they have raised tonight.

I also have a written response to an adjournment debate matter raised by Mrs McArthur on 27 November.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.19 pm.
Written adjournment responses

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers.

Wednesday, 19 February 2020

SENTENCING REFORM

In reply to Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (27 November 2019)

Ms HENNESSY (Altona—Attorney-General, Minister for Workplace Safety):

The threat of fire is a year-long challenge for Victoria.

The Victorian Government recognises the devastating impact bushfires have on communities, which is why we have committed to a partnership approach aimed at preventing the incidence of bushfires, and increasing the detection of arson offenders.

A key component of this is Victoria Police’s 2019-20 Fire Strategy, ‘Operation Safeguard’. The strategy combines the efforts of Victoria Police, the emergency management sector and the community, to work collaboratively to prevent bushfire, arson and other fire-related incidents.

We take all bushfire-causing actions very seriously, which is why offences such as intentional or reckless lighting of a bushfire under section 201A of the Crimes Act can attract a maximum penalty of 15 years' imprisonment, and lighting a fire during a total fire ban can also attract a sentence of imprisonment. Between 2013 and 2018, the higher courts imposed 58 sentences for intentionally or recklessly causing bushfire offences, and over two-thirds resulted in terms of imprisonment.

In addition, there are serious penalties for those who commit arson (noting that arson includes non-bushfire related offences). Arson attracts a maximum term of imprisonment of 15 years. In the tragic event that a person is killed as a result of arson activity, the offender would be liable to a charge of arson causing death, which carries a 25-year maximum term of imprisonment. Between 2013 and 2018, the higher courts imposed 275 sentences for these offences, 78.2% of which were for imprisonment.

However, it is important to acknowledge that a review of bushfire incidents and events attended by Victoria Police in recent years has identified that the most significant risk to the community, and the environment, are those fires which have been lit as a result of accidental, negligent or reckless fire-lighting activities or behaviors. Examples of the types of situations where this might occur include fires resulting from the use of power tools, grass mowers, slashers and other farm equipment on days of total fire ban or of elevated fire danger. Individuals responsible for starting a fire in these circumstances may be charged with a regulatory offence under the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 (CFA Act) or the Forests Act 1958 (Forests Act). Lesser penalties generally apply to these types of offences than those which apply to deliberate acts of arson, and for which specific offences under the Crimes Act 1958 or the Summary Offences Act 1966 would be more likely to be charged. Between 2013 and 2018, there were 3,579 fire related regulatory offences recorded under the CFA Act and the Forests Act.

Unique sentencing arrangements also exist so that serious arson offenders can be subject to community supervision even after serving long terms of imprisonment. Arsonists found guilty of more than one arson offence are also treated more seriously at law, and may be subject to a longer sentence than would ordinarily be imposed so as to ensure the protection of the community. The Government will continue to monitor these laws to ensure they are operating as intended.

In acknowledgment of the increased risk over the summer, the Government is also delivering the resources and support needed to protect the community this fire season. All available emergency management staff and agencies have responded to incidents across the state as the current bushfire emergency has enveloped much of the state. This includes thousands of our dedicated volunteer and career firefighters from across all agencies, as well as a record fleet of 50 aircraft, which have already hit the skies to help fight fires and keep communities safe.