



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 16 October 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁷	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Farnham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam ^{5,6}	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁸	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁸ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Business of the house***Orders of the day**

The SPEAKER (09:34): General business, order of the day 3, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:**

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Protecting the Biosecurity of Agricultural Plant Species – Ordered to be published

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 92, 110.

*Bills***Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (09:34): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024 without amendment.

Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024*Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (09:34): I have also received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

*Motions***Energy policy**

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Ripon for forcing home owners to pay costly gas conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000 per household, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:35): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Point Cook for burdening home owners with up to \$27,000 in costs for forced gas-to-electric conversions, driving rental properties off the market and forcing renters to pay more for their homes.

Leave refused.

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Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for St Albans for burdening home owners with up to \$27,000 in costs for forced gas-to-electric conversions, driving rental properties off the market and forcing renters to pay more for their homes.

Leave refused.

David HODGETT (Croydon) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bayswater for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Box Hill for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's rental crisis.

Leave refused.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Niddrie for burdening home owners with up to \$27,000 in costs for forced gas-to-electric conversions, driving rental properties off the market and forcing renters to pay more for their homes.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Carrum for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That on the next day of sitting this house condemns the Premier and the member for Yan Yean for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Hastings for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 104 people have a right to stand up in this place and be heard and to be heard in silence –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bulleen will come to order. The member for Berwick will come to order. The Leader of the Nationals is on his feet. I ask you to show respect to the Leader of the Nationals.

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Peter Walsh: It is also unruly for people to speak that are not in their seat.

The SPEAKER: Is that your point of order, Leader of the Nationals?

Peter Walsh: No, the point of order is that under 104 people have a right to stand up and be heard in silence. Those on the other side may think these issues are funny, but they are not funny, and we have a right to raise them.

The SPEAKER: I agree with the Leader of the Nationals' point of order. I ask members to show respect to each other on both sides of the chamber.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Monbulk for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more per week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Mordialloc for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Narre Warren South for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Mill Park for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Cranbourne for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Eltham for burdening home owners with up to \$27,000 in costs for forcing gas-to-electric conversions, driving rental properties off the market and forcing renters to pay more for their homes.

Leave refused.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen will leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Rowville will come to order.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the always absent member for South Barwon for burdening home owners with up to \$27,000 in costs for forced gas-to-electric conversions, driving rental properties along the Surf Coast and Armstrong Creek off the market and forcing renters to pay more for their homes.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Ivanhoe for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bundoora, who I am disappointed is not in the chamber, for burdening home owners with up to \$27,000 in costs for forced gas-to-electric conversions, driving rental properties off the market and forcing renters to pay more for their homes.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bass for forcing home owners to pay costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 a week more in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Geelong for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Werribee for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Glen Waverley for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exasperating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That the house condemns the Premier and the member for Sunbury for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Ringwood for burdening home owners with up to \$27,000 in costs for forced gas-to-electric conversions, driving rental properties off the market and forcing renters to pay more for their homes.

Leave refused.

Land tax

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:48): I move, by leave:

That notice of motion 38 relating to the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into Labor's land tax be agreed to.

Leave refused.

Energy policy

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (09:48): I move by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Frankston for forcing home owners to pay for costly gas appliance conversions, with bills as high as \$27,000, punishing renters with up to \$65 more a week in rent and exacerbating Victoria's housing crisis.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Robbie Heritage

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:49): Robbie Heritage was larger than life and one of life's real characters. It seems he knew everyone in the Upper Yarra, Healesville and beyond to Marysville, and this was evidenced by the enormous number of people who attended his funeral in person and online. Robbie loved his family, loved mischief, loved the timber industry and hated what the government has done to it. He was not keen on sport or school. He was extremely generous and was always up for a laugh or a chat about politics. Most particularly, though, he loved the funeral industry and was patriarch of Heritage & Heritage Funerals, which now is proudly four generations old. His service was held in the Pioneers Chapel in Woori Yallock, and although Robbie had a strong hand in planning his service, his family did have the last say. Deepest sympathy to his wife Elaine and children Sandra, Gavan and Janet.

Anthony Brady

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:49): The efforts by some community members to keep our environment clean never cease to amaze. Anthony Brady has done a wonderful job cleaning up dumped rubbish along the St Andrews Heidelberg-Kinglake Road. Countless rubbish bags were filled, along with approximately 800 to 1000 dumped tyres that were removed. He got a mention on 3AW, which applauded his efforts. People like Anthony who want to make a change to the environment and go about doing it in a safe, respectful way are to be admired.

Chum Creek Primary School

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:50): Well done to Chum Creek Primary School students, who raised \$100 through their pyjamas day dress-up as a gift to the Healesville CFA brigade. Student captains Eamon and Violet encouraged students to bring a gold coin donation and chose to give the donation to the fire brigade, as they are fast approaching bushfire season.

Noel Francis Pullen

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (09:50): I rise today to pay tribute to the late Noel Pullen. Noel Pullen was a true believer in every sense of the word. He was a lifelong Catholic, carrying with him a determined belief in social justice, fairness and compassion. He was a faithful Essendon

supporter – something I also support – a belief that sustained him even throughout those not so glorious days of the mid-2000s. But mostly Noel was a true believer and a staunch believer in our party and our movement. In his first speech in this place Noel shared the words of Ben Chifley, describing that ‘light on the hill’ as his driving force, his lifetime purpose.

It was a delight to serve with Noel in this Parliament during his four years as the member for Higinbotham. Those who worked with him during that time described him as unwavering, deeply committed to the people he served and fiercely determined to use the time he had. But as always with the very best of those who serve in this place, Noel’s contribution went far beyond his time here in Spring Street. In his so-called retirement Noel remained as busy as ever, serving his community as both a volunteer and a justice of the peace and continuing to be an unwavering source of wisdom for local Labor MPs. I also should make a tribute to Noel’s commitment to his beloved Brighton Union Cricket Club – a member for 60 years.

On behalf of our Parliament and our party, I extend my love and support to Noel’s family and friends, his former colleagues and comrades and the community he loved so much. Vale, Noel Pullen.

Bayley House

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): Kitted in their colours, the clients of Bayley House recently broke through the footy banner onto Wilson Street Reserve to celebrate football day. Bayley House is a wonderful not-for-profit Brighton-based organisation that provides exceptional support for people with an intellectual disability. Thank you to the Bayley House team, the AFL and past player Brendan Fevola for being part of the event.

New Street railway gates

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): The New Street railway gates and gatekeepers cabin are listed on Victoria’s heritage register. The infrastructure was first built when the line was duplicated in around 1900. There are few gates and cabins left. Despite the historical significance of the site, the cabin has deteriorated, and the state Labor government has not funded improvements. Thank you to the Brighton Historical Society for their ongoing advocacy.

Nepean Highway noise mitigation

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): The state Labor government refuses to install proper noise mitigation barriers along the Brighton side of Nepean Highway. For three years the residents of Primrose Crescent have advocated for their broken fencing to be repaired. Recently the fence blew over. As one resident recently said, not having a dividing fence at the moment is presenting a noise, security and safety issue for residents.

St Leonard’s Uniting Church, Brighton

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:53): Over the last seven years St Leonard’s Uniting Church in Brighton has raised almost \$120,000 to combat homelessness. A significant portion of their fundraising has been directed towards the Ruffy Swag project. The project produces swags that are distributed to rough sleepers around Wodonga. The Brighton donations have already funded 90 swags. Thank you to Barry and Judy Schofield and Reverend Kim Cain for their dedication.

Noel Francis Pullen

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:53): I rise to pay tribute to my friend the late Noel Pullen, who we laid to rest last month. Noel loved three things: the Essendon Football Club, his Brighton Union Cricket Club and the Australian Labor Party. Noel was a member of the Legislative Council for the district of Higinbotham from 2002 until 2006. It was a blue-ribbon seat held exclusively by Liberals and conservative MPs until Noel Pullen came along and won it in 2002.

Noel was the absolute epitome of a true believer, and he represented the absolute best of what politics can be. He cared deeply about his community and helping people. He valued loyalty and integrity

above all else. His political career ended prematurely because he refused to join a faction despite plenty of offers, but he remained a loyal and tireless servant of the Labor Party from the day he joined in 1966 as a 22-year-old right until the end at the age of 79. He used to say he did not care if you were left or you were right, as long you were a good person and you knew what you stood for.

I had the absolute pleasure of having Noel in my electorate office for the last 18 months. Noel would take on any constituent case with passion and vigour, no matter how difficult or hopeless it seemed. Noel had a heart of gold. He was kind, he was generous and he was always smiling. Anyone who knew him found it impossible not to love him. He was top of the class. His friends, his family, his colleagues and his comrades will all miss his generous spirit, his advice, his friendship and his kind soul. He was a true gentleman. Vale, Noel Pullen.

Wellington's Biggest Ever Blokes BBQ

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:55): It was a big day for the fellows in Sale on Friday for the annual Wellington's Biggest Ever Blokes BBQ. 420 blokes piled into the Sale Memorial Hall for a day of fundraising and a few frothies, all in the name of prostate cancer awareness, funding and research. The crowd was well entertained by comedian Marty Fields and former sportsmen David Rhys-Jones and Jeff Thomson and fed by Duart Homestead in Maffra. There was also a poignant moment as the crowd paid tribute to Bruce Ellen, one of the founding members of the event 10 years ago, who tragically and ironically died of prostate cancer earlier this year. It has been a pleasure to be a bit part of the organising committee, which has now raised in the order of \$800,000 over nine events, helping fund a prostate cancer nurse at Central Gippsland Health and contributing to the wider fight against this disease.

Heather Baird

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:56): Congratulations to Heather Baird of Dutson, who has been named a finalist in the Community Achievement Awards leadership and innovation award. Heather is the founder and driving force behind local charity A Better Life for Foster Kids, and she and her team of volunteers do an amazing amount of work providing resources and support to foster kids and foster families at home and across the state. Good luck to Heather at the final in December.

Melbourne Cup

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:56): It was great to see the Melbourne Cup on tour in Yarram, Woodside and surrounding districts last week. I caught up with the cup as well as the 1915 version won by Nambrok-owned Patrobas. A big crowd of locals turned out to see the trophies. The member for Scoresby was there.

Gippsland Times

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:56): It is sad to see the *Gippsland Times* reduced from two editions per week to one from next month. It is now going to one a week, on a Wednesday, and I wish it all the best for the future.

Noel Francis Pullen

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (09:56): It really is an honour to say a few words about my friend Noel Pullen. Noel simply loved the Labor Party, so much so that at the 1999 election, when Labor did not field a candidate for Higinbotham province, he vowed then that he would run for the seat in 2002, and he did that because he believed that everyone, regardless of the seat they were in, should have the opportunity to vote Labor. Against all odds he won the seat of Higinbotham, and that was the first time that the people of Brighton were actually represented by a Labor member in this Parliament.

I first met Noel a couple of months after that election at Cosmic Bear Cafe in Oakleigh, which was owned by the member for Oakleigh. It was a branch function, and I said to him that I would like to

run for council at some stage. I did when I turned 18 or 19, and Noel really was my guide throughout not just my council campaign but the rest of my political journey.

One thing that says a lot about Noel's character is that he supported upper house reform even though he knew it would mean the end of his parliamentary career, but he knew it was the right thing to do. The reason it says it all about Noel is that Noel always put the Labor Party ahead of himself. He was a proud life member of the party. He loved the Labor Party and he loved Brighton Union Cricket Club in equal measure. In fact he wrote a book about the history of the Brighton Union Cricket Club. Vale, my friend Noel Pullen.

Syndromes Without A Name

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:58): Syndromes Without A Name, or SWAN, is a service that provides information, support, connections and advocacy for families who care for a child with an undiagnosed or rare genetic condition. SWAN want to raise awareness about the work they do and the impact on families. Heather Renton, who founded SWAN in 2012, was inspired by her daughter, who had the neurodevelopmental disorder FOXP1 syndrome. Heather was taught by her parents not to whinge but to do something about it and to make things better, and that was where SWAN started. Today we have Maya with us from the SWAN board, who is working with Steve as the chair, Ant, Craig, Jess, Chris, Darren, Paul and many SWAN families that are making a massive difference in ensuring the message gets out there. I would also like to thank Sam Dennison, who is the council candidate for Akoonah, who has been working with SWAN as well to support them to get that message out. To Maya, we hope that this assists in getting your message out and that people look up SWAN and offer their assistance or what they can do to help. A recent fundraiser was the beginning of that down in Beaconsfield at DoppioZero restaurant, where they invited people from the community to come along. It is not just about the funds raised; it is about the information that gets out there so people are aware of the impacts of having a child or raising a child that has an undiagnosed disorder. To Maya and your team: thank you so much for what you have done in our community. We thoroughly appreciate it, and we look forward to supporting you in the future.

Noel Francis Pullen

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:59): I would also like to dedicate my members statement to the late Noel Pullen, who was the member for Higinbotham from 2002 to 2006. I had the honour of attending his funeral at St Joan of Arc Catholic Church, and I must say it was absolutely packed, such was the love for this wonderful human being. It was a truly moving ceremony as well. As has been stated, his love for the Labor Party was profound, enduring and actually inspiring. If ever you wanted to see the personification of values, it was Noel Pullen. His love for the Brighton Union Cricket Club was perhaps unrivalled, but the club loved him too, and I think they will always love him and always cherish the memory of his incredible devotion to the club.

The other thing that I wanted to express profoundly that I always felt with Noel was that he always put others ahead of himself. His devotion to community day in, day out was absolutely incredible. It was authentic. He did it because he wanted to, not just because it was the right thing to do. He was absolutely motivated from the heart but strategic in a very sensible way as well. I certainly learned a lot from him, and he helped me when I was in the upper house in Southern Metro. Vale, Noel Pullen.

Latrobe Valley Eisteddfod

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:01): Coming off the Latrobe Valley Eisteddfod – I am a former passionate dance dad who used to follow my daughter around the Latrobe Valley – the Latrobe Valley Eisteddfod has been running for a very long time. I was happy to be able to re-engage – because unfortunately with all our eisteddfods and so forth around the place people willing to put their hand up and help out are a diminishing breed. I did a couple of 4-hour instalments on the front door, booking in the ballet dancers as they came in. The little girls with their tiaras and their tutus running around took me back all those years ago, when my daughter was doing the same thing. So I was very happy

to be able to re-engage and help the Latrobe Valley Eisteddfod out. Huge congratulations to the president and the committee on another outstanding event.

Traralgon Football Netball Club

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (10:02): I want to talk about football also, which is a passion of mine, and the Traralgon football club in the Gippsland league. At the start of the year a lot of the pundits around the place had the mighty Maroons, the Traralgon football club, languishing down at the bottom of the ladder. But come that one day in September in the Gippsland league it was the wonderful Traralgon Football Netball Club that stood at the top on the day, holding up the premiership cup. So to president Kevin Foley and vice-president Natalie Jaensch and everybody, well done on a great win.

Noel Francis Pullen

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:02): I am honoured to stand and pay my respects to Noel Pullen. It has been great to hear what people have said in this chamber about him. I did not know Noel for very long and I did not know Noel very well, but those who did know him will not be surprised to know that he left his indelible mark upon me and my life and I am forever grateful for that.

I first met Noel about 2½ years ago when I turned up to a branch meeting seeking endorsement, and I have often wondered what Noel thought of this dancer-actor bloke turning up thinking he could be a politician. Noel gave me respect. He gave me time and he listened. I do not actually know if he voted for me, but that does not matter, because once I was endorsed Noel was completely behind me. He had my back. I was always welcome at Noel's kitchen table. I was always welcome to call him, and he always was welcome to call me. He stood behind me, and without a doubt the work he put in helped me to win the election. Again, I am forever grateful. Noel never, ever gave me the sense that we would fail, and that was his strength.

I am forever grateful to Noel, and I send my love to his family. He has done me proud. The other thing is that once we won the election, which I would pin to Noel, he was always proud. He was always a Labor man, but he was always proud and happy that we had achieved something. I am a better man for knowing Noel Pullen. Vale, Noel Pullen.

Rowville electorate roads

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:04): With the looming federal election, the Rowville state electorate voters deserve to be heard. Under the current Labor MP in Aston voters have not been heard. Constantly voters have been calling out for road maintenance, as our local roads are literally falling to pieces. Ferntree Gully, Stud, Napoleon and Wellington roads are almost undrivable, yet the federal MP and the Labor government have failed to listen to the concerns of the voters in Aston and Rowville. Federal Labor cut funding to extend Dorset Road and to rebuild and repair Wellington and Napoleon roads, totalling \$240 million in money axed for road maintenance and rebuilding. Federal Labor also cut more than \$450 million for Rowville rail. I cannot fathom who they were listening to when they cut such critical funding to core local projects, but it certainly was not the local residents in the Rowville electorate. I would encourage all local residents to consider what you are voting for at the next federal election: Labor, who cut funding as soon as they get in, or the Liberals, who time and time again have sought to deliver funding for roads.

Geelong Aboriginal employment and careers expo

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:05): On Friday last week the Geelong Aboriginal community, in collaboration with many Geelong employers, came together for the inaugural Aboriginal employment expo. It was a huge success, with hundreds of mob attending to check out the employers, skills and training opportunities and the jobs on offer. The expo was led by the Aboriginal community leaders as part of the Aboriginal employment taskforce.

I want to acknowledge and thank everyone involved in making the expo such a great success, with special mention of Marsha Uppill of Arranyinha and Beth Davis from Wathaurong for their dedicated event coordination. This initiative highlighted two years of sitting around the table as a taskforce, which also included three summits and the aim of breaking down employment barriers for Aboriginal peoples. The taskforce members, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have shown their commitment, support and collaboration, which is driven by the need for self-determination, closing the gap and education of employers. Many of the employers also made a financial commitment as well as having a stall at the expo.

A huge thankyou to the Geelong Football Club and Kardinia Park Stadium Trust for providing the stadium for the expo and Murran Aboriginal hub for providing their venue for the expo launch. A special mention goes to our first responders who participated, Fire Rescue Victoria, who have continued to strongly support the work of the taskforce, and Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria. To the employers who contributed and participated, such as WorkSafe, TAC, Gforce employment – *(Time expired)*

Housing

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:07): The housing system is broken, and it is breaking people. Labor and the Liberals have created a housing system where a property investor can buy a \$4.3 million beachfront, clifftop home, while young people cannot even find a place to rent, let alone buy their first apartment to live in. The system is totally cooked. The housing system that Labor and the Liberals have created gives tax discounts to people who buy their 10th home, called negative gearing. The system that Labor and the Liberals have created gives a 50 per cent tax discount to people who make profits from speculating on property. These tax discounts and handouts cost the rest of us \$176 billion. That is \$176 billion that working people are paying to wealthy people so they can buy investment properties.

Rents in Melbourne have gone up \$110 a week in the last two years, far outstripping wages and inflation. It is no wonder young people are angry, and the Greens are angry also because we are the only ones fighting to actually fix this totally cooked system, but pressure is building on Labor and the Liberals. Young people are angry, and they are asking Labor and the Liberals to act. They are demanding change, and if Labor does not change, they are not going to just have to worry about the cliff that their beachfront home is on, they are going to have to worry about the cliff their vote falls off at the next election.

Country Fire Authority Mernda brigade

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:08): What a cliffhanger! I was really happy to join my family and community members at the Mernda CFA open day recently. It has become an absolute must-do on the calendar in my community. It is helped along by the hot doughnut and coffee van, which helps get the parents there on a weekend morning with the kids. While there the children can see demonstrations of what our firefighters get up to. They can go for rides in vintage fire trucks, jump in jumping castles and of course sit in the driver's seat or sit up in the truck, which is always very popular with my girls. I did not manage to climb up into the truck this time in my condition, but I think it was a fantastic example of what the Mernda CFA do for our community. Of course that was in the daylight, a beautiful weekend, but a few weeks prior I had been with them on a rainy Monday night where they turn out week after week for training, and that is the real honour and dignity of our volunteers, that when nobody is there to praise them, to see them, they turn up, they train and they prepare to protect their community. They are absolute heroes in my eyes. Thank you to Captain Steve Dusting, Gary, Dean, Jordan, Jai, Sandrah, Ray, Kim, Courtney, Matt, Nella, David and all the crew at the Mernda CFA.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:10): October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and I was pleased to recently attend Park Orchards community house's Scones Together program in support of it. It is a fantastic event led by incredible volunteers, Tristen and Vickie, who dreamed up this program during lockdowns to help people, particularly senior citizens, to come together and have an opportunity to socialise and connect with their community. What started with 20 attendees has now grown to over 90 each month, with a waitlist of more. Thank you to Biddick's Bakery in Warrandyte for donating the scones each month and to Kelly Cooper, manager at Park Orchards community house, for all that you do. This month's Scones Together program was particularly meaningful in raising awareness for breast cancer and raising funds to support breast care nurses through the McGrath Foundation. This great event was put on with the help of local legends Warrandyte's pink ladies Katie Taubert and Sandra Mills. Thank you, ladies, for all your efforts this month in pinking up Warrandyte.

Holy Spirit Community School

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:11): A huge shout-out to the Holy Spirit primary school in Ringwood North for their brilliant annual fete. Congratulations to the school community on such a successful event, which just gets better and better each year. In my opinion it is one of the best school fetes in Melbourne, with thousands from the area turning out annually. Well done to principal Duncan Arendse, fete president Lauren Cefai, fete committee managers Hannah Lehman, Karla Cooper, Helen Radford and Belle Godfrey, and all of the organising committee and volunteers on another amazing event.

Monbulk electorate community groups

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:11): I rise to celebrate two outstanding local organisations and highlight the incredible community spirit that they foster in the Dandenong Ranges foothills.

Firstly, I want to give a huge shout-out to Foothills Community Care, which recently achieved an extraordinary milestone at their Ferntree Gully location: 800 community meal nights. Since 2007 Foothills has been providing free meals to those in need while fostering a sense of belonging and connection. This service is more than just about feeding people; it is about bringing them together. Volunteers like Lynne, who has been baking desserts every fortnight for 17 years, embody the heart of this initiative. Local groups such as the CFA, the Rotary Club and schools also play a vital role, offering their support in the form of food, time and resources. Across their Ferntree Gully and Tecoma locations Foothills has provided, this year alone, more than 60,000 meals. One of its greatest achievements lies in creating a welcoming space for people to connect, share a meal and build community. To every person working at Foothills, from the staff to the army of volunteers, I say thank you for all that you have done and continue to do supporting those in need.

Secondly, I would like to shine a light on Halloween on the Green, returning for its fifth year on 27 October at Ferny Creek Reserve. Organised by another great charitable organisation, the Philanthropic Collective, which is dedicated to supporting children, families and seniors doing it tough across the ridge line, this event is a day of affordable ghoulish fun for everyone and an environmentally conscious celebration with zero waste. Tickets are only \$8 each. Come along, everyone.

SmackTalk

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:13): I will be switching off my social media on 24 October in support of SmackTalk. Wayne Holdsworth, the general manager of FDBA in Frankston, is an amazing human being who has turned the heartbreaking loss of his beautiful son Mac into action, preventing others going through the same. I ask everyone in the chamber to look up SmackTalk and look to see what you could do on the 24th to support this great initiative.

Plane crash anniversary

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:13): I also rise today in a shout-out to my friends at the Barwon Heads drop zone who survived a plane crash this time last year. A year ago this Sunday I found myself around this time sitting in a paddock with 17 other people, wondering how I was alive. Big thanks to the emergency services workers and police on scene at that time. Certainly it does give me pause to realise, and a renewed sense, I guess, that every day is a great day to be alive and every day is an opportunity to make change and to make my community and Victoria better. I note that in communications this morning with some of the people in that plane crash that has happened for those people too. They have seen a renewed sense of vigour in the way they embrace life, in the way they wake up in the morning and see life as an opportunity to be grabbed. I would not recommend that kind of experience to everyone, but certainly I shout out to the friendships that have been made through that incident.

Big Group Hug

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (10:14): Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Big Group Hug in my electorate of Tarneit. I met with some wonderful staff and volunteers, including CEO Bernadene Voss and relationship development coordinator Sonal Dang. It was wonderful to chat with you both. Your passion for the work that you do is truly admirable.

This year Big Group Hug is celebrating 10 years of community work. Their work has supported families in their most difficult times by distributing more than 570,000 items right across Victoria. By partnering with health and welfare professionals Big Group Hug has been helping families cover the costs of their kids' basic needs, with everything from toys to nappies, highchairs and even clothing for older kids. I want to say a huge thankyou to the entire team at Big Group Hug. Your work has been making a positive difference in the lives of families across the state.

Thank you to everyone who has donated to Big Group Hug over their 10 years of service. Your donations fuel the work Big Group Hug can do, and if you are able to donate, I highly encourage you to get in contact with them. It was absolutely amazing to be at Big Group Hug's facilities in Tarneit and to see all the fantastic work that the volunteers in my electorate have been doing over the past couple of years.

Local government elections

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (10:16): This month residents in my community will vote in local government elections. Local councils directly impact people's lives, and I want to put a few truths on the record about how the Greens councillors at Darebin and Yarra have conducted themselves in recent years. The Greens have consistently voted on council in ways that hurt our community and make life harder for residents and businesses. Municipal monitors have been appointed three times across the two councils amidst serious concerns about governance, transparency and financial management. Years of dysfunction under the Greens-dominated councils have broken community trust and left locals to fight for basics like clean streets, functional sportsgrounds, kinder security and fair parking.

These are councils that have lost control, lost touch and lost perspective. In recent years they have voted to cut kinder leases to two years, risking closure and privatisation; blocked and delayed critical social housing projects; raised rates during a pandemic, against economic advice; tried to impose drastic 2-hour parking restrictions on local streets; voted against the protection of the Preston Market; neglected sportsgrounds to the point that some have had to close; brutally evicted businesses from Alphington with no notice, decimating the innovation precinct; voted against supporting the yes vote in the referendum; voted against prioritising safe pedestrian crossings outside kinders and schools; and ineptly squandered a \$500,000 grant from the state government to upgrade Bill Lawry Oval, with nothing to show for it. We deserve better.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:17): I am pleased to say that my members statement today was written by two remarkable young people in my electorate, Roqya Husseini and Paris Junnoel Mina, who both recently completed work experience in my office. As part of their work experience I asked them to write me a members statement about two of the most pressing issues in the Lara electorate.

Geelong is a diverse town with many emerging multicultural communities, such as the Hazara community. I have worked closely with the Hazara community, and an issue that they have raised with me is the need for support and recognition of the Hazara community in the Geelong region. The Hazara Shia community is continuously growing, and support is needed for a mosque or a community centre to support this community to thrive in Geelong as they build their lives in our region. A mosque or a community centre would not only provide spiritual support but also foster cultural and social connections. This is particularly vital during the month of Muharram and days of commemoration such as Ashura. These observances hold deep significance, symbolising the fight against injustice, and offer a space for reflection, mourning and unity.

Another significant issue in the Lara electorate is the housing crisis. Almost every day my office is contacted by people who are experiencing the cost-of-living crisis, and people in my community are struggling with increased rents and mortgage repayments.

Thank you, Roqya and Paris, and good luck for your year 12 exams.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee*****Report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes***

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:19): My contribution today is on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes, which was tabled in March this year, in particular chapter 9 on DEECA, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. I note that DEECA leads Victoria's energy, environment, water, agriculture, forestry, resources, climate action and emergency management functions, and I will be focusing on emergency management functions. The department's vision is a thriving, productive and sustainable Victorian community environment and industry, and one of the seven objectives listed is the reduced impact of major bushfires and other emergencies on people, property and the environment. This brings me to the Country Fire Authority, which has been desperately and chronically underfunded. The investment in this area has been very slow. Services and facilities are not being delivered on time, and the government has done very little in this space for small, regional fire brigades. Morale is very low, and we need to reverse this in our country areas where climate change is happening. We are heading into another drought at the moment. Things will be very dry, and we need investment in the CFA. We need the CFA to be fully trained, to have the best gear and to be responsive to protect our communities.

Despite that, we have a number of great things that have been happening at a number of CFAs in my area. Panton Hill CFA celebrated 85 years in mid-September at the Panton Hill memorial park. While this was a big day out for the kids to get to use hoses and check out the trucks, it was also about community awareness and a membership drive. One of the things that I was really impressed with there was that the cake cutting was by Toni Moller. Toni was the first female lieutenant within the CFA volunteers, and that is pretty extraordinary. Toni is getting on a little bit these days and is not actively involved, but it was really great to see her there. There was talk about a new station at Panton Hill, and it would be great if the minister could clarify that for me.

On the weekend Alexandra CFA celebrated their sesquicentenary: 150 years. There are a lot of changes that have happened in that period, but there are some things that have not changed. On Monday 2 February 1874 they conducted their first monthly meeting, and they had 20 members attending. To this day the Alexandra urban fire brigade conducts its meetings on the same day each

month – the first Monday – and the monthly meetings have been conducted continuously since 1874. That is pretty remarkable. They had an event for the town during the day and a dinner at night. The day's event was supported by the neighbouring brigades, and I thank them. We had a lot of life members and past and current members; captain Chris Lynch is at the helm at the moment. They have a fabulous history. There was a hook and ladder brigade that competed in championships from the late 1800s. In 1930 they won a marching event. The belltower next to the library was the way that they communicated with members about whether or not there was a fire and what they needed to do. They have had a brass band. Interestingly, a lot of the fires in the early days were to do with the train for the timber that was milled in the Rubicon bush. They used beaters, and at one point they had 150 beaters. It was only in 1947 that they got their first appliance, and there were lots of references to a merry-go-round.

Hoddles Creek CFA have been waiting for a new station for such a long time, and if the minister visited the brigade, she would see that the level of frustration now is very high. But they will not give up on their push, because of their former captain Leonie Turner, who lost her life last year. In an interview with the *Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria* magazine, Leonie said:

My number one highlight from 2020 was a phone call from North East Region Assistant Chief Fire Officer David Renkin, who told me the brigade would be receiving a new fire station through the CFA capability funding.

That was 2020. They are still no further. Leonie was district peer and captain, she led the juniors and set up the catering team. She is greatly missed. At the most recent dinner she received the CFA Outstanding Service Medal, which was a real coup for her. She got the National Emergency Medal in 2014 and again very recently, and she received CFA life membership for 30 years of service. Leonie did a remarkable job for her time.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Katie HALL (Footscray) (10:24): I am very pleased to make a contribution on the Electoral Matters Committee report relating to its inquiry into the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election. That is perhaps timely as I have been reflecting a little bit on some of the poor behaviour that we have been seeing in council elections that has been well documented in the newspapers in recent times across Victoria. We have a very serious responsibility here. We are seeing across the world that the polarisation of political views is leading to some really appalling behaviour.

The 2022 Victorian state election was a shocker. I know that a lot of the people on this side of the chamber had similar experiences to me. I have never experienced such a distressing election campaign, and I have volunteered for many in my life. Particularly in my electorate of Footscray – many people submitted to the inquiry about this issue, so it was not just in Footscray – we saw excessive numbers of campaigners harassing people as they tried to participate in the democratic process. I had people spitting on my how-to-vote cards. Throughout the pre-poll period – this was at a time when COVID was still a very serious concern – I had sometimes two or three members of the Victorian Socialists trying to prevent me from speaking to people and physically blocking me and touching me the whole time.

At the time of my campaign – I would like to acknowledge the good people of the Footscray branch of the Labor Party, who supported me and acted with dignity and respect to all the other campaigners at the time – it became very clear to me that we had a massive problem. I have been informed since the campaign that the Victorian Socialists had people who had flown in from around the country and were residing in my electorate to participate in the campaign. They had no idea of local issues, none, but were aggressively pursuing people as they were trying to get out of their cars, cross the road and vote on Barkly Street. I think the location of some of the pre-poll venues was really challenging and contributed to poor environments. Anyone who knows Barkly Street in Footscray would know that it

is a very busy high street. To be accosted basically by 20-odd campaigners was like something at university student union elections. I have never seen anything like it.

Multiple submitters to the inquiry observed excessive numbers of campaigners. One of the recommendations was that the Victorian Electoral Commission inform all stakeholders that there is a general expectation that no more than three campaigners for each party and independent candidate be actively campaigning at any voting centre. We need to give people some space and some dignity, especially elderly people or people with a disability. In a neighbouring electorate we saw one of the Socialists knock a voter over on the street and an ambulance had to be called. What sort of an environment is that for us to be managing our democratic processes, of which we are very proud? The VEC do a spectacular job. I commend this report and thank the members of the committee for their work on this important issue.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Inquiry into the Operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (10:29): My report today is the Integrity and Oversight Committee's report on the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982. This was tabled out of session in September. It was a pleasure to work on this, along with the other members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee. I am more than happy to speak to it today. I am sure many members in this place have had dealings with the freedom-of-information process in this state, and if you have, you will understand that it is essentially broken. Among the 100 recommendations that were made in the report, the biggest thing to come out is that it needs a complete overhaul given that the act is 40 years old and has not had significant reform since then. A new-generation Freedom of Information Act is well and truly needed given that in 1984 you were probably using a Commodore 64 computer, if you were lucky to be able to access one, or an Apple IIe. There is no real provision in the act – there is a lot of terminology, such as 'documents', but we know now that if you are trying to FOI certain things, it may not be documents, it may be all sorts of things that have evolved over the last 40 years.

It was very interesting. We heard also about the culture of FOI in this state. Victoria has more freedom-of-information requests than any other state in this country, and that is largely because of the age of this act. Queensland and New South Wales – we heard from a lot of other jurisdictions during the process – are up to their third-generation push model of information. So that was, again, the number one recommendation – that it needs a complete overhaul. It needs complete reform, moving to that third-generation push model and a right-of-information act.

But we did receive 69 submissions. We held six days of hearings, and there were a total of 101 recommendations to improve and modernise Victoria's FOI system and fix that culture issue that we kept hearing about over and over again. Again, if you have had any dealings with the FOI system, whether it has been through trying to obtain medical documents, which is a lot of what we heard – a lot of these FOI requests could be negated if it was a push model, because the bulk of those requests are for information about the self with regard to medical records et cetera. It is people looking for information on themselves.

It was interesting to note, though, that we heard from many, many agencies and also local governments. It was a surprise to me, given my background in local government, that some did not quite get why there would be FOI requests made to local government. I can tell you – and there has been a lot of chat about local governments and councils already this morning – in my time in council there were requests for information that could not be released, or if it was, it was incredibly redacted. But people will spend time and money – because there are application fees associated with FOI requests – requesting all sorts of things. So there are recommendations around that.

Another recommendation was the removal of application fees when seeking information about oneself. However, changing to a third-generation push model and pushing out all of the information that is largely requested anyway will then reduce the volume of FOI requests made each and every

year. That has got to be a good thing, and hopefully that will help negate those extraordinarily long delays and the high fees. Public records too – some of them are not in a great state, and as we digitise hopefully that will get better. But again, it is vital that this sort of act – freedom of information – is modernised given that it is 40 years old.

There were a few other key recommendations that I did want to talk about, but given I have got 12 seconds I will just brush over recommendation 11, which is the limited internal information exception – and that is the Freedom of Information Act.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:34): I rise to continue my conversation on the vaping and tobacco controls inquiry report that has been released by the parliamentary accounts and estimates committee. Where I left off was just talking about some of the revenue implications. Now, of course we as a state have done an amazing job, and those health providers and organisations have done an amazing job in driving down the prevalence of people using tobacco. But what we see, and this goes to the finances of it, is that despite the taxation and excise at a Commonwealth level increasing progressively – and particularly sharply over the last decade and continuing – the revenue itself is dropping substantially.

At the time of this committee report's publication that was estimated to drop from \$14.7 billion in 2026–27 down to \$10.7 billion in 2027–28. That is not because of an estimate that the usage of tobacco will significantly decrease, which is what should be implied by a loss of revenue, particularly when the excise is going up by substantial amount; it is because the black market and the illicit market is taking greater control of the sector. That goes to, in finding 8 of the committee's report, the estimates ranging between 6.1 per cent and 40 per cent of the market being illicit or black market. That is quite an extraordinary range that we are seeing for an industry which for a long time had not seen that level of illicit engagement. I was very glad to observe much earlier this year this government put forward that we will be putting in place a licensing regime to defend against this, and I am looking forward to the government delivering that later on this year.

Some of the recommendations go to what the committee thought were some high-quality licensing regimes in other states. Of course we have the good report by Better Regulation Victoria. It is one of our recommendations that we support the recommendations there. But also some of the learnings that we had as a committee were that we should support a high annual licence fee akin to those charged in Tasmania. That is to cover the cost of the administration and enforcement of the regime, because of course those who benefit from the industry should contribute to the payment of enforcing and administering any controls around it.

There were recommendations on restricting the number of licences granted, including density limits for local government areas. We do see a high proportion in certain local government areas of tobacco sellers. This is obviously on a visual inspection of these communities, because we do not actually have the numbers listed anywhere, which is of course one of those important things that we need to do; we need to understand exactly how many retailers there are and where they are. The recommendation is to prohibit licences within 150 metres of schools, and that lines up with some other regulations that we have about things that we should not have and prefer not to have close to schools. It was a particularly disturbing element of the committee's hearings when we heard that children under 10 had started vaping. That is a really challenging thing to hear as a committee. That is why we need to have some distance between schools and retailers. We did go really to a lot of data collection so that we understood the exact quantum of sales going on across the community.

I have got only a minute left, so I do want to thank before I get to the next topic in this area the committee members that were involved in this committee. Often I am in this chamber with the committee chair Sarah Connolly, the member for Laverton, who provides an extraordinary effort of

work in bringing it all together. The deputy chair is in the other place, Nick McGowan. The members are Michael Galea; Lauren Kathage, the member for Yan Yean; Bev McArthur, who always offers a deal of insights that many of us would not have come to initially, but I actually appreciate the insights that she does make; the member for Gippsland South, Danny O'Brien; Aiv from the other place, for North-Eastern Metro; and my neighbour the member for Clarinda. I look forward to making a further contribution later on.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members to use correct titles.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:39): I am delighted to make a contribution on the report on the 2023–24 budget estimates. Particularly I want to zone in on 9.5.3, 'Renewable energy generation: transmission infrastructure and stakeholder engagement', because it says that one of the ideals here is to 'coordinate transmission planning and investment in Victoria via a fit-for-purpose framework'. I can tell you that people in Meadow Creek do not see their community as a fit-for-purpose place to have a solar factory. I say 'factory' because people call them solar farms, but a farm is where you nurture animals and grow crops. Where you put lithium solar panels, that is not a farm, that is a factory. The good people of Meadow Creek are saying no to this solar factory that is being proposed. We are now in the planning phase and the application has gone in. We had 28 days; we are now down to about 14 days to make sure that everybody has their input, and we are getting a lot of input from the community in and around Wangaratta and of course Meadow Creek.

When we talk about some of the reasons why we should be condemning a solar factory in this location, it is because it is prime agricultural land and the assessment report that has been handed down by the proponent or been done by consultants of the proponent is just wrong. It is false and it is misleading. I had Mr Bob Simpson come and see me recently about some soil tests on a farm not far away that has solar panels. On the land where the solar panels are there were 254 units of lead in the soil analysis, whereas on other land in the region there are only 22 units, so we are talking about a difference between 22 units and obviously 254 units where the solar panels are, which is quite disturbing.

The application is for determining authorities and recommending bodies. NECMA, the North East Catchment Management Authority, is one. They are contradicting the agricultural assessment provided by the proponent, and the regulations state that if a determining referral authority objects, the responsible authority must refuse to grant a permit, and if a determining referral authority specifies conditions, those conditions must be included in any permit granted. Another referral body is Goulburn–Murray Water. Note there are two determining referral authorities, being Goulburn–Murray Water and North East Water, because the Meadow Creek industrial facility is located – wait for it – in a declared special water catchment area, which is to ensure higher quality water for human consumption. The logical question that follows this is: how is placing 2.5 million kilograms of lithium iron on a declared special water catchment area appropriate for providing high-quality water for human consumption, particularly when it has been demonstrated that the lead levels in the ground have increased by massive amounts?

Recently I had the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety the member for Gippsland South come to view the site as well. He was as astonished as I was on that combined agricultural assessment and agrisolar assessment because the gravel road that goes in and the gravel road that comes out suggest it is not the right infrastructure for this solar factory and yet the report states it is a major highway. As I say, this is false and misleading. If you do not come and look at this site, if you just take on face value what the reports are saying, I am really concerned that the Minister for Planning could make the wrong decision. I have the Shadow Minister for Planning making his way up the highway later this week to have a look, speak to the locals, listen and understand their situation, because that is what is really important. It is not about being bloody-minded about renewables, it is about having renewables in the right place at the right time, and Meadow Creek is not the right place nor is it the right time to do this.

That is why I implore the Minister for Planning to still try to come up and visit us to get an understanding and speak to the locals, as the Shadow Minister for Planning will do this Friday.

I do hope that the minister makes the time to come and do it, because if we do not get a full understanding of how these communities think and operate on this prime agricultural land, we will not get balanced outcomes into the future. We are not anti-renewables; I have said that all along. This group is very pro-renewables, but we all know Meadow Creek is not the right place to have it. It is the right project in the wrong location, and that is why I implore the Minister for Planning to come and have a look, as the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety has. The Shadow Minister for Planning is going to make their way up later this week.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (10:44): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee report, that report being *Register and Talk About It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors*. Through reading the inquiry's final report I have learned a great deal on this topic. Although I had some limited understanding of the issue, this inquiry – as all inquiries do – allowed us to unpick further the challenges and the opportunities of a particular issue, in this case organ donation. I learned that despite 81 per cent of Victorians supporting organ and tissue donation, Victoria still has the lowest registration rate in Australian states and territories at just 23 per cent. And among young people that statistic is even lower: just over 10 per cent of Victorians aged 16 to 25 have registered to be an organ or tissue donor. Therefore it really was an important part of this inquiry to understand why registrations are so low and what can be done to encourage more Victorians to register to become a donor.

Organ donation is one of the most selfless acts a human being can probably perform. When we decide to become an organ donor we do decide to give someone a second chance to live. It is a gift beyond measure. I had the absolute pleasure of meeting a constituent earlier this year who came and saw me. He was a recipient of a heart. Ross openly shared his journey with me and described his life before and after the transplant, and Ross has given me permission today to speak a little bit about this in order to raise awareness and understanding of organ donation. I must say that Ross is one of those people that when you meet them you will remember forever, and it is something that stays with me. There was something about his outlook on life – his sense of humour but his seriousness about raising awareness of organ donation and his gratefulness at being able to have a second chance of life.

In September 2022 Ross had a heart transplant after a disease that he had had caused his health to rapidly deteriorate. The surgery for a new heart, as you can imagine, is very taxing on the body mentally and physically. Ross had to be in an induced coma for a couple of days, and he spent time in an intensive care unit to recover. He is, a few years on, very well but now is on a lifetime of anti-rejection medication. When I spoke to Ross he made it very clear that he had concerns about the low uptake, the barriers faced with organ donation and the need for all to be involved, including government, to do all that we can to improve the process and registration rates. He read this final report and made a few suggestions, including to improve the data captured by the Organ and Tissue Authority once someone has registered to be a donor, including that what conversations have taken place with family members or next of kin and on what date ought to be recorded. Ross believes that this would actually have a significant impact in improving those consent rates.

I would like to thank the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee's work in providing recommendations for the government to consider. After reading this final report, it talked to me about the importance of organ donation. It really is a call to action for us to take part in that collective commitment to save lives. The recommendations laid out in the report are more than guidelines; they are a call to action. Signing up to be an organ donor is a simple process. It only takes a few minutes. This inquiry found that donors can help up to seven people through organ donation or 200 people

through tissue donation. But the success of these recommendations does depend on one thing, and that is all of us. Each and every one of us has the power to register as a donor and have conversations with our loved ones to spread the message that organ donations are a profound act of generosity.

I would like to finish on Ross's incredible words. He said:

Being a recipient now has allowed me many things for which I am forever grateful to the donor hero and donor family.

I have seen my son go on his first overseas holiday to Europe in which he loved and now wants to travel more. I have supported my other son turn professional in golf and is now playing on the Australasian circuit And I can fully support my wife ...

All is possible because of the donor. The more we spread awareness can only be a positive.

Bills

Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:50): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024:

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 Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024 (the Bill).

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

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to provide for the appointment of restrictive practices substitute decision-makers for the purposes of the *Aged Care Act 1997* of the Commonwealth (the **Aged Care Act**).

In response to the 2021 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, the Commonwealth Government amended the Aged Care Act to require residential aged care providers to seek informed consent from substitute decision makers to the use of restrictive practices, where a care recipient in residential aged care lacks capacity to make that decision. The amendments were introduced to better protect the rights of people in aged care and create a more rigorous regime for the use of restrictive practices, including that they only be used as a last resort.

As part of the amendments, the Aged Care Act, now requires residential aged care providers to ensure that restrictive practices are only used in relation to residents in accordance with the *Quality of Care Principles 2014* (the **Quality of Care Principles**).

The Aged Care Act sets out requirements for the use of any restrictive practices. The amendments require that informed consent to the use of the restrictive practice be given by the care recipient; or if the care recipient lacks the capacity to give that consent, the restrictive practices substitute decision-maker for the restrictive practice. Accordingly, if a care recipient lacks capacity to give informed consent to the use of a restrictive practice, that consent must be obtained from “a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker”.

Restrictive practices substitute decision-maker is now defined in regulation 5B of the Quality of Care Principles, as a ‘person or body that, under the law of the State or Territory in which the care recipient is provided with aged care, can give informed consent’ to the use of a restrictive practice. To date, there has not been any law to appoint such a person. An interim arrangement, allowing for a legislative hierarchy of decision makers for the authorisation of restrictive practices under the Quality of Care Principles and to give states time to provide for state appointments of restrictive practices substitute decision-makers is currently scheduled to be automatically repealed on 1 December 2024 although the Commonwealth government has committed to extending this arrangement, with a view to repealing it in 2026.

The Bill provides for the appointment of an individual in Victoria that satisfies this definition.

Victoria's role in regulating the use of restrictive practices in aged care is limited to defining who can give informed consent to the use of restrictive practices in relation to a care recipient who lacks capacity – that is, who can act as a restrictive practices substitute decision maker for a care recipient.

The Bill creates standalone legislation to establish a hierarchy of decision makers who can act in Victoria as restrictive practices substitute decision-makers in residential aged care, in line with requirements under the Aged Care Act, before the Commonwealth's interim arrangement expires. It is intended that this will include a framework for identifying a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker, some oversight arrangements in relation to restrictive practices substitute decision-maker, and provision for the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to make certain orders.

Part 1 of the Bill

Clause 3 of the Bill provides relevant definitions, many of which are done by reference to the Aged Care Act or the Quality of Care Principles, for example, restrictive practices and behaviour support plans.

Clause 4(1) of the Bill provides that a person has "decision-making capacity" to make a decision to which the Bill will apply if the person is able to:

- understand the information relevant to the decision and the effect of the decision;
- retain that information to the extent necessary to make the decision;
- use or weigh that information and the person's views and needs as to the decision in some way, including by speech, gestures or other means.

An adult is presumed to have decision-making capacity, unless there is evidence to the contrary. That is, a person's rights to freedom of movement, to privacy and freedom from medical treatment, for example, are to be not engaged by this Bill, unless there is evidence that prompts consideration of whether that person may not have decision making capacity to make decisions about, for example, whether to consent to restrictive practices being used in relation to them

Further, a person is taken to understand information relevant to that decision and the effect of that decision where they are given an explanation of the information in a way that is appropriate to their circumstances, whether by using modified language, visual aids or any other means. In this way, the Bill seeks to best protect the rights to recognition as a person before the law, to freedom from discrimination on the basis of disability and protection of the law without discrimination. That is, a person should not be discriminated against in the assessment of them as to their decision-making capacity.

Part 2 of the Bill

Part 2 of the Bill provides for the nomination and appointment of restrictive practices substitute decision-makers.

Clause 5 provides for a person to nominate an eligible adult to act as a person's restrictive practices substitute decision-maker if the person has decision-making capacity at the time of making the nomination (as defined in clause 4) and understands the nature and effect of the nomination.

Clause 5 provides for certain requirements to be met for a valid nomination, such as the nomination being in writing and signed by the person making the nomination

An eligible person nominated as a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker cannot be an employee or agent of an approved provider that provides aged care to the person making the nomination, nor be a person that has been involved in the preparation of a behaviour support plan for the person making the nomination. In addition, an eligible person cannot be a person who is subject to a current family violence intervention order in relation to which the person making the nomination is an affected family member (within the meaning of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*) or a person who has been found guilty of committing an offence against the person making the nomination (other than a finding of guilt where the conviction has become spent under the *Spent Convictions Act 2021*).

Clause 6 provide that a person may revoke their nomination of restrictive practices nominee, if they have decision-making capacity at the time of the revocation and understand its nature and effect. Again, there are procedural requirements to a revocation to protect the integrity of that process.

Part 3 of the Bill

Part 3 of the Bill provides for the appointment of restrictive practices substitute decision-maker. Where a care recipient has nominated a person as their restrictive practices substitute decision-maker, the nominated person is then, by virtue of clause 7, appointed as the care recipient's restrictive practices substitute decision-maker under the Bill, if the nominated person is reasonably available, willing and able to make restrictive practices decisions on behalf of the care recipient.

If a care recipient does not have a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker (as a result of nominating someone under the Bill who is reasonably available to be appointed), clause 8 of the Bill provides a hierarchy of persons, in a close and continuing relationship with the care recipient, that will be appointed as their restrictive practices substitute decision-maker for the making of a particular restrictive practices decision. As

with a nominated person, the person appointed pursuant to clause 8 must be reasonably available, willing and able to make restrictive practice decisions on behalf of the care recipient.

Under clause 9 of the Bill, a person may apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to be appointed as the restrictive practices substitute decision-maker for a care recipient, if the care recipient does not have one under clause 7 or clause 8.

VCAT may appoint a person as a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker for a care recipient where that person has an ongoing personal or professional relationship with the care recipient and is reasonably available, willing and able to act as a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker on behalf of the care recipient.

Part 4 of the Bill

Part 4 of the Bill provides for the consent to the use of restrictive practices.

Restrictive practice substitute decision-makers will make restrictive practice decisions under section 15FA(1)(f) of the Quality of Care Principles. However, where there is no restrictive practice substitute decision-maker for the purposes of clauses 7, 8 or 9, clause 10 provides that an approved aged care provider may apply to VCAT for consent to the use of a restrictive practice in relation to a care recipient in their care if the restrictive practice is set out in the behaviour support plan for the care recipient.

Part 5 of the Bill

Part 5 of the Bill provides for the making of other Orders. Clause 11 enables an eligible applicant to apply to VCAT for an order in relation to whether a care recipient has decision-making capacity, or not, or had or did not have decision-making capacity at the time of a nomination or revocation of a nomination.

An eligible applicant will also be able to apply to VCAT, under clause 12, for an order in respect of the validity of a nomination or revocation of restrictive practices nominee or the appointment of a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker. The Bill expressly provides that VCAT may declare a nomination to be invalid if it finds that the person who made the nomination was induced to do so by dishonesty or undue influence, or through the use of threats, violence or abuse. In this way, the Bill provides protection against the exploitation of care recipients.

Part 6 of the Bill

Part 6 of the Bill provides additional provisions for VCAT to determine matters under the Bill, including the parties to a proceeding before VCAT on an application under clauses 10, 11 or 12 and the notice that is required to be given to such parties. In this way, the Bill ensures that relevant perspectives are heard and taken into account, consistently with the Charter, in determining whether a person has decision-making capacity and whether VCAT should, or should not, consent to restrictive practices.

Parts 7 – 10 of the Bill

Part 7 of the Bill provides for certain offences in relation to the decisions to be made under the Bill. These are an offence of inducing another person to nominate a restrictive practices nominee, by dishonesty, undue influence or through the use of threats, violence or abuse and an offence to knowingly make a false or misleading statement in relation to another person's restrictive practices substitute decision-maker nomination.

Further, transitional provisions, in Part 9, provide for some nomination or appointments under the interim Commonwealth arrangements in the Quality of Care Principles to continue under the Bill.

In Part 10, there are also consequential amendments to Schedule 1 of the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* to provide a new Part 2AA – Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Act 2024, that will provide for representation and the constitution of the Tribunal for a rehearing.

Charter considerations

Under the Charter, I am required to make this statement setting out whether, in my opinion, the Bill is compatible with human rights and if so, how it is; and, if, in my opinion, any part of the Bill is incompatible with human rights, the nature and extent of the incompatibility. In this statement, I address the human rights implications of decisions under the Bill rather than the human rights implications for posterior decisions, made by aged care providers, under the Aged Care Act in relation to the use of any restrictive practice.

For the reasons I discuss, I consider that the Bill has achieved its aim of better protecting and promoting the human rights of people receiving care in the use of restrictive practices, by enabling a care recipient to nominate a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker and for the appointment of that person to consent, or not consent, to proposed restrictive practices.

The application of a restrictive practice on a person, especially where that person lacks capacity to understand the nature and reason or reasons for that practice, and cannot consent to its imposition on them, is likely to engage and may limit that person's human rights. However, those decisions are made under the Aged Care Act and Quality of Care Principles, which, together sets out a range of protections against the unlawful limitation on human rights so that aged care recipients can experience the full enjoyment of their rights, including if restrictive practices are to be used in relation to them.

This Bill's focus is limited to identifying who can provide consent to a proposed restrictive practice or practices. While the identification of those persons may engage the rights of the person being nominated as a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker and may also engage the rights of the care recipient, that engagement of rights differs from how those persons' rights may or may not be engaged or limited by subsequent decisions to consent to and apply restrictive practices under the Aged Care Act and Quality of Care Principles, or other Commonwealth or Victorian legislation.

Foundationally, the purpose of this Bill is to identify and appoint a person who may then consent to restrictive practices to be used in relation to a care recipient, where that person does not have capacity to do so. If a person's capacity may be declining, the Bill creates a regime for a person to nominate, in advance, a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker. In making this nomination, a person may also set out their preferences or values in relation to restrictive practices.

If a care recipient later lacks capacity to make a restrictive practices decision, the Bill ensures that a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker will be separate from the aged care provider that will impose those restrictions and so the process creates a secondary check on the use of any proposed restriction.

As much as possible, the Bill will enable a person that might be best placed to know a care recipient's known values and preference in relation to restrictive practices, given their close and continuing relationship with the care recipient, to be that care recipient's restrictive practices substitute decision-maker. The Bill provides that a person nominating a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker will be able to record their values and preferences. The Bill will require VCAT to consider a person's known values and preferences in relation to restrictive practices if VCAT is requested to consent to the use of restrictive practices with respect to the person.

This regime will occur within the context of the Commonwealth requirements. Under the Aged Care Act the use of restrictive practices must be proportionate and the least restrictive measure required in the circumstances. This is consistent with the permissible limitation on human rights under 7(2) of the Charter.

I am confident that the requirements under the Aged Care Act and the Quality of Care Principles, including as amended in response to the Aged Care Royal Commission, in relation to the use of restrictive practices better protects the human rights of aged care recipients in Victoria.

Specifically, under regulation 15FA of the Quality of Care Principles, restrictive practices must:

- only be used as a last resort to prevent harm to the care recipient or other persons; and after consideration of the likely impact of the use of the restrictive practice on the care recipient;
- to the extent possible, best practice alternative strategies must have first been used before the restrictive practice is used;
- the alternative strategies that have been considered or used must have been documented in the behaviour support plan for the care recipient;
- the restrictive practice to be used must only be to the extent that it is necessary and in proportion to the risk of harm to the care recipient or other persons;
- the restrictive practice is used in the least restrictive form, and for the shortest time, necessary to prevent harm to the care recipient or other persons;
- informed consent to the use of the restrictive practice, and how it is to be used (including its duration, frequency and intended outcome), has been given by:
 - the care recipient; or
 - if the care recipient lacks the capacity to give that consent – the restrictive practices substitute decision maker for the restrictive practice (which is to be addressed by this Bill);
- the use of the restrictive practice is in accordance with that informed consent;
- the use of the restrictive practice complies with any provisions of the behaviour support plan for the care recipient that relate to the use of the restrictive practice;

- the use of the restrictive practice complies with the Aged Care Quality Standards set out in Schedule 2;
- the use of the restrictive practice is not inconsistent with the Charter of Aged Care Rights set out in Schedule 1 to the *User Rights Principles 2014*; and
- the use of the restrictive practice meets the requirements (if any) of the law of the State or Territory in which the restrictive practice is used.

These requirements are consistent with the protection of the Victorian Charter rights.

Rights engaged

Although the purposes of the Bill are beneficial and aim to promote the dignified care of care recipients, provisions in the Bill are likely to engage the following Charter rights in relation to both the rights of restrictive practices substitute decision-makers and the rights of care recipients and their families: equality (s 8); the rights not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (s 10(b)) or medical treatment without consent (s 10(c)); freedom of movement (s 12); privacy (s 13(a)); freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief (s 14); the right to the protection of families and children (s 17); cultural rights (s 19); liberty (s 21); the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty (s 22); the right to a fair hearing (s 24) and the right not to be tried or punished more than once (s 26). In my view, the Bill is compatible with the enjoyment of these rights, which I also consider are not limited by the Bill.

Equality

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The purpose of this component of the right to equality is to ensure that laws and policies are applied equally, and do not have a discriminatory effect. Discrimination under the Charter is defined by reference to the definition in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (EO Act) on the basis of an attribute in s 6 of that Act, which includes a lack of capacity (within the meaning of disability under the EO Act).

Where a person lacks capacity to make decisions about whether to consent to a restrictive practice being applied to them, the Bill provides for who might be able to make that decision. In this way, it may directly discriminate against people on the basis of their disability. Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats a person with an attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. The provisions will enable restrictive practices substitute decision-makers to make decisions about people without capacity differently from other people on that basis, however those decisions occur under the Aged Care Act. To the extent that there might be a limitation on the right in s 8(3), any limitation would not be occasioned by the Bill. In certain circumstances, where a person does not have a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker, VCAT may decide whether to consent to restrictive practices, and in making that decision may treat that person differently to other people on that basis. In making decisions under the Bill, VCAT would be obliged to give proper consideration to the rights protected by the Charter and to consider a person's right to freedom from discrimination and whether any limitation on that right is reasonable and justified.

Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

The application of a restrictive practice to a person may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment within the meaning of the human right protected by the Charter. The provisions in the Bill provide for the appointment of a person to consent to such restrictive practices. A restrictive practices decision may engage but does not, in my view, limit this right, as the separate decisions on consent and when and how to apply a restrictive practice is made pursuant to the Commonwealth Aged Care Act (and Quality of Care Principles). Those subsequent decisions may occasion conduct that engages this right, including by amounting to inhuman or degrading treatment. This will depend on all the circumstances, including the duration and manner of the treatment, and its physical or mental effect on the care recipient, and the purpose for which the restraint was imposed.

While the appointment of a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker does not limit this fundamental right, I acknowledge the relationship between the appointment (under this Bill) and the later consent to and potential use of restrictive practices (under other legislation). As I have explained, the Aged Care Act requires that behaviour support plans set out proposed restrictive practices and also imbeds requirements on when and how they are used, where those requirements are, in my view, consistent with the protection of and lawful limitation on human rights in the Charter. It will be important that a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker is supported to make an informed decision on whether to consent and to weigh the benefits and risks of any proposed restriction.

Protection from medical treatment without consent

Section 10(c) of the Charter provides that a person must not be subjected to medical treatment without their full, free and informed consent. The right is concerned with personal autonomy and dignity. Restrictive practices are not medical treatment (*HYY (Guardianship) [2022] VCAT 97*). In my view, the Bill does not engage or limit this right, however, I appreciate that if a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker consents to a restraint, that restraint may be deployed to enable the medical treatment of the care recipient without their consent. The Bill's provisions may facilitate the use of restraints, including to provide medical treatment. However, the specific decision to use a restraint to enable medical treatment is not one that is made under this Bill. It would be conflating those decisions, to consider that the Bill's provisions limit the right to freedom from medical treatment without consent, even if that may occur pursuant to consequential decisions under different legislation.

Freedom of movement

Similarly, the application of restrictive practices (such as an environmental or chemical restraint) to a care recipient under the Aged Care Act may engage or even limit a care recipients' rights to freedom of movement, in s 12 of the Charter. Once again, however, the engagement of that right would occur pursuant to the Commonwealth legislation. I am conscious of the implications of this Bill on that right.

The right provides protection from unnecessary restrictions upon a person's freedom of movement. It extends, generally, to movement without impediment throughout the State and a right of access to places and services used by members of the public, subject to compliance with regulations legitimately made in the public interest (*Gerhardy v Brown* (1985) 159 CLR 70, 102, cited in *DPP v Kaba* (2014) 44 VR 526, [100])

Relevantly, the right to freedom of movement will be engaged where a person is required to move to or from a particular place or is prevented from doing the same, is subjected to strict surveillance or reporting obligations relating to moving or directed where to live. Some of the ways that restrictive interventions are likely to be used will limit people's freedom of movement.

Rights to privacy, family and home

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family or home unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. Section 13(a) contains internal qualifications; namely, interferences with privacy only limit the right if they are unlawful or arbitrary. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is clear, precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought. This requires a broad and general assessment of whether any interference on a person's privacy extends beyond what is reasonably necessary to achieve the lawful purpose being pursued (*Thompson v Minogue* [2021] VSCA 358, [55], [56]).

The fundamental values which the right to privacy expresses are the physical and psychological integrity, individual and social identity, and autonomy and inherent dignity, of the person.

The 'family' aspect of s 13(a) is related to s 17(1) of the Charter, which states that families are entitled to protection by society and the State. However, whilst the two rights overlap, they are not co-extensive. Section 13(a) is a negative obligation that only prohibits unlawful or arbitrary interferences with family; whereas s 17(1) is a positive obligation on society and the State.

The 'home' aspect of s 13(a) refers to a person's place of residence (*Director of Housing v Sudi* (2010) 33 VAR 139, [32]). What constitutes an interference with this aspect of the right to privacy is to be approached in a practical manner and may cover actions that prevent a person from continuing to live in their home (See *Director of Housing v Sudi* (2010) 33 VAR 139).

All three aspects of this right are engaged by the Bill, both in relation to the rights of restrictive practices substitute decision-makers and care recipients. The appointment of a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker may engage that person's right to privacy, as it encroaches on their personal sphere and private relationship with the care recipient and requires them to publicly engage with aged care providers, on behalf of the care recipient in relation to restrictive practices. This is in the context of restrictive practices being measures which can be confronting and challenging to understand and the process of weighing and balancing their benefits and risks is not easy. The decision to consent to a restrictive practice in relation to a loved one is incredibly hard, it engages with their own belief system and requires them to weigh the benefits and risks of imposing a restraint, which in usual circumstances would be an affront to a person's dignity and to which the person cannot consent. It is a human decision and a very hard one.

The imposition of a restraint may also affect the ability of families to gather with each other, including the care recipient, and the ability of the care recipient to reside in residential aged care which is their home.

At the same time, the appointment of a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker engages a care recipient's right to privacy, as it removes from them their opportunity to make decisions about how they are treated. This may also occur in the context of that person not understanding that their capacity to make such decisions is impaired. These experiences are profoundly sad, the loss of a person's mental capacity can occur in the context of disease, trauma or other harm. This impacts the person and their family, including each of their rights to privacy and protection of the family.

However, in my view, the measures in the Bill are compatible with the right to privacy and do not limit the right to privacy. As mentioned above, the right in s 13(a) of the Charter will only be limited where an interference with privacy is unlawful and arbitrary (*Thompson v Minogue* [2021] VSCA 358, [57]). The clauses of the Bill which authorise interference with a person's privacy, family or home by the use of compulsory treatment measures will be lawful, by virtue of the clauses themselves being clear, precise and appropriately circumscribed, and not arbitrary, because the protective purpose and safeguards upon the use of the compulsory treatment measures will ensure that their use is proportionate to the legitimate aims sought to be achieved.

Other Charter rights that may similarly be engaged or limited, by the subsequent decisions to impose restraints, include the rights to freedom of religion or belief (s 14 of the Charter), freedom of movement (s 16 of the Charter) and cultural rights (s 19 of the Charter), where chemical, physical and environmental restraints may limit a person's capacity to demonstrate their religion or belief as part of a community, to peaceful assembly and association and to engage in cultural activities. The foundational and elemental rights to liberty (protected by s 21 of the Charter) and humane treatment when deprived of liberty (protected under s 22 of the Charter) may also be engaged and may be limited by the imposition of a restrictive practice on a care recipient.

I have also considered whether the provisions in the Bill that exclude a person subject to a current family violence intervention order in relation to the care recipient, or a person who has been found guilty of committing an offence against the care recipient (clause 5(5) – definition of “eligible adult”, 8(4) and 9(2)(c)(iii) and (iv)) from being a restrictive practices substitute decision-maker engage the rights to privacy (s. 13 of the Charter), the right to families and children (s. 17 of the Charter) and the right not to be tried or punished more than once (s. 26 of the Charter). The right to privacy includes the right not to have family unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. These provisions preventing certain persons who may be family members from being restrictive practice substitute decision-makers for their family member may interfere with family dynamics in that the person who would ordinarily take on the role of a restrictive practice substitute decision-maker is prevented from doing so. However, such a restriction is lawful and not arbitrary, as the restriction is included for a protective purpose and has been included to promote the care recipient's right to life. Similarly, I am of the view that the right to the protection of families in section 17(1) of the Charter is not limited as these limits on the persons who may act as restrictive practice substitute decision-makers for a person promote the safety of vulnerable adults in the family unit.

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which he or she has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right is engaged by the provisions of the Bill which prevent a person who has been found guilty of committing an offence against a person from being appointed as the person's restrictive practices substitute decision-maker (Spent convictions under the *Spent Convictions Act 2021* are not considered for the purposes of this provision). In my view, this right against double punishment is not limited by these provision because the exclusion of such persons from the role of restrictive practices substitute decision-maker has a protective purpose rather than a punitive one, as it is intended to protect vulnerable aged persons.

Having regard to these factors, I consider the Bill to be compatible with Charter rights.

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Minister for Health

Minister for Health Infrastructure

Second reading

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:51): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

This Bill will resolve a legislative gap that exists following amendments made to the *Aged Care Act 1997*. In 2021, the Commonwealth government introduced new legislative requirements for residential aged care providers to seek informed consent from substitute decision makers to authorise the use of restrictive practices where a resident lacks capacity.

As an interim measure, the Commonwealth introduced a temporary hierarchy to guide the identification and appointment of a decision maker. The Commonwealth's temporary hierarchy includes various decision-makers, identified based on proximity and personal connection to the aged care resident.

In Victoria, this temporary hierarchy has been in place since 2022, and has been relied on by aged care providers, aged care residents, and their supporters. This hierarchy was set to be automatically repealed on 1 December 2024. However, the Commonwealth government has committed to extending this arrangement, with a view to repealing it in 2026. Once this temporary arrangement is ultimately repealed, Victoria will need its own legislation in place to avoid creating a legislative gap whereby there is no substitute decision-maker identifiable under Victorian law.

Victoria currently does not have legislation that explicitly identifies and authorises substitute decision makers to consent to the use of restrictive practices in residential aged care. It is imperative that that we address this gap to ensure that there is a clear framework in Victoria to ensure aged care residents receive appropriate behavioural supports in accordance with the Aged Care Act.

This Bill will address this by establishing a clear framework for identifying who can act as a "restrictive practices substitute decision-maker", by prescribing a hierarchy of decision-maker based largely on close and personal relationship to the aged care resident. This approach also builds in appropriate safeguards to protect the rights and interests of people living in residential aged care.

This hierarchy is only engaged when the aged care resident does not have capacity to provide consent for themselves. Under the Aged Care Act, providers will be expected to seek informed consent from the aged care resident first – and only seek out a substitute decision-maker if the aged care resident does not have capacity.

The Bill will allow aged care providers to identify substitute decision makers through a hierarchy. Under this Bill, decision-makers will be identified in the following order of precedence:

1. substitute decision-makers nominated in advance and in writing by the aged care resident;
2. a next of kin which is to be identified based on someone who has a close and continuing relationship with the aged care resident; and
3. a decision maker appointed by VCAT should no other decision maker be available; and if no such person exists, and as a last resort, VCAT can act as the decision maker.

This hierarchy embeds a person-centred approach, by prioritising the person that an aged care resident has identified in advance through a nomination.

If a nomination is not in place, or the nominee is not willing and able to act as decision maker, aged care providers will need to identify a decision-maker in accordance with the subsequent tiers of the hierarchy. Providers cannot move to the next tier of the hierarchy simply because a decision-maker withholds consent. A decision to provide or withhold consent by a valid substitute decision-maker must be respected.

The decision maker must be someone willing to and able to act at the time a decision is required, and cannot be employed by the provider, or have been involved in the development, implementation or review of the aged care resident's Behavioural Support Plan, as an employee or agent of the aged care provider. A substitute decision-maker also cannot be someone that is subject to a current family violence intervention order relating to the aged care recipient, or if that individual is found guilty of committing a crime against the aged care recipient.

The Bill will ensure older people have as much autonomy as possible around decisions that concern them through the nomination function. Nominations by aged care residents must also be made in accordance with requirements prescribed in the Bill (such as to be in writing, and witnessed appropriately), to ensure that there is clarity and consistency around who these decision makers are. Aged care residents will be able to document their preferences for the decision-maker to consider these when making decisions.

New criminal penalties will also be created that will make it an offence for someone to coerce a nomination, or to fraudulently act as if they are a nominee.

The Bill will make minor amendments to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1997 to empower the Tribunal to act in an oversight capacity for the appointment of substitute decision-makers, and to act as a decision-maker of last resort should there be no other decision-maker reasonably identifiable.

Aged care residents will be assumed to have capacity to make, change or withdraw a nomination, unless it is demonstrated otherwise. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal will have jurisdiction to determine whether an individual has the capacity to make, change or withdraw a nomination; and whether an individual is willing and able to act as a substitute decision-maker.

Aged care providers must adhere to the Commonwealth's requirements regarding determining whether an individual has capacity to provide informed consent for the use of restrictive practices, or whether they require a substitute decision-maker.

Aged care providers must make decisions and act in accordance with Commonwealth legislation, including the Aged Care Act and the Quality of Care Principles. This includes section 15FA of the Principles which requires providers to only use restrictive practices as a last resort, in the least restrictive form, for the shortest amount of time possible; and only using restrictive practices after less restrictive strategies have been attempted first.

Under section 15HA of the Principles, providers must assess the aged care resident's behavioural support needs, and if restrictive practices are required, document this assessment and details of the proposed use of restrictive practices within a Behavioural Support Plan. This Behavioural Support Plan must be prepared in accordance with the Aged Care Act and the Quality of Care Principles 2014.

Aged care providers must, under section 15HG of the principles, consult with the substitute decision-maker when preparing, reviewing or revising the use of restrictive practices. In practice, substitute decision-makers can ask the aged care provider questions to satisfy themselves that they understand what they would be consenting to, and whether it meets the Commonwealth's requirements for appropriate use.

Substitute decision-makers will be able to exercise their discretion to consent, or withhold consent, for the use of the restrictive practices. Aged care providers must allow substitute decision-makers to consider the giving of consent without coercion or duress.

This Bill does not change how aged care providers can use restrictive practices in emergencies, such as in cases of immediate threat to life or harm. Aged care providers must still uphold their responsibilities under the Aged Care Act and the Quality of Care Principles, including on mandatory reporting and notification of the emergency use.

When the Commonwealth progresses with its new Aged Care Act, it is expected that these requirements will continue to be prescribed in legislation. Aged care providers will continue to have these obligations placed on them as the Commonwealth progresses with its reforms.

Independent advocacy and support services will continue to have a role in assisting substitute decision-makers to make decisions about their loved ones living in residential aged care – including decisions related to financial matters, living arrangements and medical treatment decisions. As required, Victorians will continue to be able to seek help from organisations such as Victoria Legal Aid, the Older Persons Advocacy Network and Senior's Rights Victoria, as appropriate.

The hierarchy provides certainty and consistency to both aged care providers and aged care residents, by aligning closely with the process used in existing Victorian legislation around medical treatment decision-making, whilst ensuring the use of restrictive practices remain regulated appropriately under the Commonwealth's jurisdiction.

However, this Bill is a standalone piece of legislation, that will operate separate to, but alongside, other legislative frameworks for substitute decision-making (such as the Medical Treatment Planning and Decisions Act and the Guardianship and Administration Act). Having standalone legislation ensures that Victoria has an appropriate framework in place that is compatible with the requirements of the Commonwealth Aged Care Act for a substitute decision-maker to provide informed consent.

Any Behavioural Support Plans that are currently active and consented to at the time of commencement will still be considered valid and will not require new consent to be given. Any Behavioural Support Plan that is created or amended after commencement of this Bill will require consent to be given, with the decision-maker to be identified in accordance with this Bill. This includes any Behavioural Support Plans that are updated as part of regular review.

The Bill provides for a transition from the Commonwealth's temporary hierarchy to the new one. Any individual who has been nominated as a substitute decision-maker in compliance with the Commonwealth's temporary instrument will have that appointment recognised as being an appointment by a nominee under the Bill. This will ensure that any appointments made by aged care residents prior to the commencement of the Bill will remain in place, and ensuring people's choices around who they trust to make decisions for them are preserved.

The hierarchy will be familiar to the sector, aged care providers and family and friends of aged care residents. All decisions made by substitute decision makers will be in accordance with the current and new Aged Care Act, the Quality of Care Principles, the Charter of Aged Care Rights, and the Aged Care Quality Standards to ensure the rights of aged care residents subjected to restrictive practices are safeguarded.

By enabling the Bill, the Victorian Government will ensure people entering or living in residential aged care can make decisions about their future care. Knowing that should the time come, a trusted loved one will be able to act in their interest. This Bill will also ensure all residential aged care providers are able to be compliant with the requirements of Commonwealth legislation.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:51): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 30 October.

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (10:52): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024:

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 Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The Bill aims to expand and strengthen the regulatory powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (**VRQA**) and streamline administrative processes for the VRQA, other entities in the Education and Skills and TAFE portfolios, the entities the VRQA regulates, and school principals.

The Bill will amend the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (the **Act**) to:

- increase maximum penalties for carrying on or conducting an unregistered school or school boarding premises;
- expand the scope of matters in relation to which the VRQA may accept an enforceable undertaking from certain providers;
- allow the VRQA to consider whether an applicant for registration or re-registration as a registered training organisation (**RTO**) under the Act, or a high managerial agent of the applicant, has ever failed to comply with the Child Safe Standards, regardless of whether the VRQA is the integrated sector regulator for the applicant;
- enable the VRQA to issue a notice to produce or notice to comply to entities that it has reasonable cause to believe are required to be regulated;
- remove the show cause process that the VRQA is required to comply with where cancellation of the registration of a non-Government school or non-government school boarding premises is voluntary, or where the school or school boarding premises has ceased to operate;
- clarify the VRQA's information sharing powers;
- provide that school principals may nominate other persons to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements to relieve the burden on principals;
- standardise provisions in relation to board appointments; and
- standardise the resignation requirements for Governor in Council appointed members of various boards.

Human Rights Issues

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- Privacy and reputation (s 13)
- Fair hearing (s 24)
- Presumption of innocence (s 25(1))
- Protection from self-incrimination (s 25(2)(k))

Ultimately, in seeking to strengthen the compliance and enforcement powers of the VRQA in respect of schools and other entities with required standards, including the Child Safe Standards, the Bill promotes the protection of children under s 17(2) of the Charter.

Rights to privacy

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

Information sharing

Clause 34 of the Bill substitutes new s 4.9.4, and inserts new ss 4.9.4A and 4.9.4B into the Act, which clarify the VRQA's information sharing powers, putting beyond doubt that the VRQA may disclose to specified persons or bodies any information that is relevant to the performance of functions of the specified persons or bodies without first receiving a request in writing. New ss 4.9.4A and 4.9.4B set out respectively that the VRQA may request from specified persons or bodies, information relevant to determining if schools or school boarding premises are complying with the relevant minimum standards for registration under the Act, and the Secretary may disclose information to the VRQA, a Commonwealth Department, or a body equivalent to the VRQA in another jurisdiction, where that information pertains to a breach of, or failure to comply with a government training contract for a RTO. These powers are already provided for in the Act at current s 4.9.4.

While these information sharing provisions engage the right to privacy in the Charter, given that personal or sensitive information, including related to children, may continue to be shared between agencies under these powers, I am of the view that the right is not limited. Any disclosure of information is pursuant to a properly circumscribed law that is precise and not arbitrary. The information that must be shared must be relevant to limited and legitimate purposes pertaining to the regulation of education providers, and the provisions are a reasonable measure that seeks to ensure that providers meet legal obligations, including minimum standards that foster a safe learning environment for children and young people. The VRQA must also act compatibly with the right to privacy and give proper consideration to privacy when determining the scope of an information request made pursuant to these provisions.

I am therefore satisfied that clause 34 is compatible with the Charter.

Notices to produce

Clause 51 of the Bill amends s 5.8.10 to expand the scope of the VRQA's powers to issue a notice to produce documents or information. Clause 51 provides that the VRQA may issue a notice to produce to a person, body or school if the relevant document or information is required for the purposes of determining whether that person, body or school is required to be registered or approved under the Act. The VRQA may apply to the Magistrates Court or County Court under current s 5.8.11 for a declaration that the person or body has failed to comply with the notice to produce without reasonable excuse. The Court may then make orders requiring the person, or body, to pay a civil penalty or granting an injunction.

The expansion of powers relating to notices to produce in the Act is relevant to the right to privacy, as these amendments may require personal information, including information relating to children, to be produced by a person, school or other body. I am of the view, however, that the privacy right under the Charter is not limited by clause 51, as notices to produce will be issued pursuant to a properly circumscribed law, to regulated persons and entities for the specific and legitimate purpose of ensuring that relevant persons, bodies or schools are properly registered under the Act and are therefore appropriate institutions to be providing education and other services to children and young people.

Fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter relevantly provides that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The concept of a 'civil proceeding' is not limited to judicial decision makers, but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. The right may be limited if a person

faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court, or where procedural fairness is not provided. However, the entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited.

Notices to comply and notices to produce

Clause 54 of the Bill amends s 5.8.18 of the Act to expand the powers of the VRQA to give a notice to comply to a person or body if they reasonably believe that the person or body is conducting a school or school boarding premises, or providing relevant education services, while not registered or approved to do so under the Act. Clause 55 amends s 5.8.19 of the Act to provide that the VRQA may then apply to the Magistrates Court or County Court for a declaration that the person or body has failed to comply with the notice to comply. The Court may then order that the person or body pay a civil penalty or grant an injunction. Clause 58 of the Bill expands the offence in s 5.8.22 of the Act of ‘failure to comply with a notice to comply’ to apply to persons or bodies to whom notices to comply may now be issued.

The notice to comply provisions of the Bill, along with the notice to produce provisions outlined above, are relevant to the fair hearing right, as they may impact a person’s rights by requiring them to ‘do’ or ‘not do’ a certain thing, and in the case of notices to produce or notices to comply, may be imposed unilaterally on a person. Consequences of non-compliance with these measures also include court-ordered civil penalties and injunctions following an application by the VRQA, and criminal liability may attach for failure to comply.

However, in my view, the fair hearing right is not limited by these provisions. This is because procedural fairness safeguards are already included in the Act, and which operate together with the mechanisms expanded by the Bill. These include judicial supervision of the enforcement of notices to produce or comply, appeal rights to VCAT under s 5.8.32 of the Act, and the provision under s 5.8.24 of the Act of an official warning in respect of a breach of a notice to produce or comply, or the possible commission of an offence. The Act also has detailed content requirements for notices to produce and comply, including in relation to the conduct that has prompted the issue of the notice, and the potential penalties or enforcement action that might be taken for non-compliance. Further, if the VRQA applies for a court order following non-compliance with a notice to produce or notice to comply, current s 5.8.23 of the Act provides that the VRQA must not commence criminal proceedings for offences under the Act for failure to comply with the notice.

I am therefore satisfied that the compliance and enforcement mechanisms expanded by the Bill are compatible with the fair hearing right under the Charter.

Right to be presumed innocent

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that they are not guilty of an offence.

Failure to comply offence

Clause 58 of the Bill amends s 5.8.22 of the Act to extend the offence of ‘failure to comply with a notice to comply’ to any ‘person or body to whom a notice to comply is issued, which has been expanded by clause 54 of the Bill. This offence also contains a reasonable excuse defence and current s 5.8.22(2) provides that it is a reasonable excuse if the person took all actions that were reasonable for them to take in the circumstances, and believed on reasonable grounds that they were unable to comply with the notice. Subsection 5.8.22(3) then provides that a reasonable excuse would include taking the action specified in the notice would tend to incriminate the person.

By creating a ‘reasonable excuse’ defence, the expansion of this offence is relevant to the right to the presumption of innocence, in that it places an evidential burden on the accused, by requiring them to raise evidence of a reasonable excuse, namely that they took all actions that were reasonable, and believed on reasonable grounds that they were not able to take the relevant action to comply with the notice to comply.

However, this offence does not transfer the legal burden of proof. As it is a summary offence, s 72 of the *Criminal Procedure Act 2008* will apply to deem this an evidential burden. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of matters that may establish a reasonable excuse, which will ordinarily be peculiarly within their knowledge, the burden shifts back to the prosecution to prove the essential elements of the offence. Case law has held that an evidential onus imposed on establishing an excuse or exception does not limit the Charter right to a presumption of innocence, as such an evidentiary onus falls short of imposing any burden of persuasion on an accused.

Accordingly, I do not consider that an evidential onus of this kind limits the right to be presumed innocent and clause 58 of the Bill is therefore compatible with the right to be presumed innocent under s 25(1) of the Charter.

Right against self-incrimination

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This right is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

Notice to produce

As outlined above, clause 51 expands the VRQA's power to issue a notice to produce information or documents under s 5.8.10 of the Act. The compulsory production of documents or information may interfere with the right against self-incrimination, as a person might be forced to provide information or documents that might contain incriminating material.

At common law, the High Court has held that the protection accorded to pre-existing documents is considerably weaker than that accorded to oral testimony or to documents that are brought into existence to comply with a request for information. The compulsion to produce pre-existing documents that speak for themselves is in strong contrast to testimonial oral or written evidence that is brought into existence as a direct response to questions. Accordingly, any protection afforded to documentary material by the privilege is limited in scope and not as fundamental to the nature of the right as the protection against the requirement that verbal answers be provided.

Importantly, the relevant offence provision in the Act, s 5.8.15, contains a 'reasonable excuse' exception or defence, and expressly provides at subsection (3) that it is a reasonable excuse for a person not to produce documents or information if they would tend to incriminate them. Accordingly, a person may decline to provide documents or give information where doing so would tend to incriminate them.

In view of the protection against self-incrimination in current s 5.8.15 of the Act (and maintained by clause 51 of the Bill), and given the limitations of the privilege against self-incrimination at common law as it relates to pre-existing documents, I am of the view that the right against self-incrimination is not limited by clause 51 of the Bill.

The Hon. Ben Carroll MP
Minister for Education

Second reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (10:52):

I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

Today, I introduce a Bill to amend the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Act) to improve the regulation of schools and other educational institutions across our state.

The Bill contains a suite of reforms to the Act, including to strengthen the compliance and enforcement powers of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). By providing the VRQA with the powers it needs, we are making it harder for unregistered or non-compliant schools to fall through the cracks to help ensure students get the safe and high quality education they deserve.

The Bill will also allow school principals to nominate others to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements, easing the administrative burden on principals and allowing them to focus their energy on running schools.

This Bill will specifically amend the Act to:

- (a) remove the show cause process where cancellation of the registration of a non-Government school or non-government school boarding premises is voluntary, or the school or school boarding premises has ceased to operate; and
- (b) increase the maximum penalties for carrying on or conducting an unregistered school or school boarding premises; and
- (c) clarify that the VRQA may share information, including documents, with a prescribed person or body without receiving a written request; and

- (d) enable the VRQA to issue notices to produce and notices to comply to a person, body or school that the VRQA has reasonable cause to believe is required to be regulated; and
- (e) expand the scope of matters in relation to which the VRQA may accept an enforceable undertaking from a non-school senior secondary and foundation secondary provider, an institution approved to provide courses to overseas students, or an institution approved to operate a student exchange program; and
- (f) amend various references to 'days' in various parts of the Act to improve consistency of terminology; and
- (g) enable principals to nominate other persons to make work experience arrangements and structured workplace learning arrangements in accordance with any Ministerial Order; and
- (h) standardise and streamline provisions relating to the appointment, fixing of remuneration and fees, and resignation of members of boards; and
- (i) allow the VRQA to consider whether an applicant for registration or re-registration as a registered training organisation (RTO), or a high managerial agent of the applicant, has ever failed to comply with the Child Safe Standards, regardless of whether the VRQA is the integrated sector regulator for the applicant; and
- (j) make various minor and technical amendments to improve the operation and clarity of the Act.

Summary of the Bill

Issuing notices to produce and notices to comply

The Bill will give the VRQA the power to:

- issue a notice to produce a document or information that the VRQA reasonably believes is necessary to determine whether a person or body is engaging in conduct in respect of which they are required to be regulated by the VRQA under the Act; and
- issue a notice to comply to a person or body that the VRQA has reasonable cause to believe is required to be regulated by the VRQA under the Act, requiring the person or body to either apply for registration or approval under the Act or cease engaging in the relevant conduct.

These powers provide the VRQA with the ability to adequately deter providers, including schools and school boarding premises, that it has reasonable cause to believe are required to be regulated from operating without registration or approval. Currently, the VRQA does not have the power to require such providers to produce information or documents, which potentially puts the health, safety and wellbeing of students in attendance at risk. By filling this gap, the Bill will help ensure providers such as schools and school boarding premises which should be regulated are being regulated.

Increased maximum penalties for unregistered schools or school boarding premises

It is an offence to carry on or conduct a school or school boarding premises unless the VRQA has registered the school or school boarding premises under the Act. Unfortunately, the maximum penalties for these offences in the Act are far lower than they should be, at only 10 penalty units. They do not provide adequate deterrence, and there is little value in prosecuting these entities for such a small maximum penalty.

The Bill will increase the maximum penalties to 120 penalty units for an individual and 600 penalty units for a body corporate. This will bring these penalties in line with penalties for similar offences under the *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* and the *Children's Services Act 1996*.

Principals nominating others to make work experience and structured workplace learning arrangements

The Bill also amends the Act to allow the principal of a school to nominate another person or class of persons to make work experience and structured workplace learning arrangements for students in accordance with any Ministerial Order.

School principals are currently required to approve every work experience and structured workplace learning arrangement for students at their schools. This is administratively burdensome, especially in larger schools and schools where a majority of students undertake either work experience or structured workplace learning. We know school principals already have a heavy workload, and these amendments will go some way to help alleviate that.

In allowing school principals to nominate others to make these arrangements, the Bill will provide schools and school principals with the freedom to approve these arrangements in a way appropriate to their school's individual circumstances. Not only will this alleviate some of the workload challenges faced by school principals on a day-to-day basis, but it will also allow for decisions to be made by staff members with the

closest knowledge of matters relating to work experience or structured workplace learning, and the circumstances of each individual student.

Ultimately, the Bill seeks to improve the operation of the Act to make sure students are getting the best education in a safe and supportive environment, and streamlines and simplifies administratively burdensome processes.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:53): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 30 October.

Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 110, page 122, line 27, omit "one year" and insert "six months".
2. Clause 110, page 123, line 7, omit "31 December following".

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:53): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The amendments made to the bill by those in the other place relate to a review of the operation and effectiveness of the act. The amendments before us bring forward the review period to begin exactly three years after the commencement of the bill. The amendments also reduce the time to complete the review from 12 months to six months. While those amendments will reduce the time frame available to conduct a comprehensive review, the government did not oppose them, and I commend those amendments to the house.

Furthermore, just for context, our Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024 does strengthen Victoria's unlawful associations scheme, introduce a new serious crime prevention order and prohibit the public display of gang colours. These are significant further advances on the work that we have done to combat organised crime and serious crime. I appreciate the support of other parties and members both upstairs and in this place. I know that these are directly further strengthening these laws, which both the Chief Commissioner of Police and Victoria Police have sought, and they go further from the work that we have been doing. I thank the Attorney-General in the other place for her leadership and work with Victoria Police and justice ministers and with the Shadow Attorney-General to make sure that we can get some support for these further laws before the house, particularly the amendments as they are supported. We look forward to getting on and making these laws to hold criminal organisations to account and give police the tools they need to hold them to account and keep people safe. I commend the amendments to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (10:55): The opposition supports these amendments because these are our amendments moved in the other place. The purpose of the amendments is to clarify that a statutory review of these provisions should take place after three years of their operation and that a statutory review should be completed no later than six months after that three-year period and also be tabled in Parliament. The government, I think anticipating there was going to be a need for a review of this act, did have in place in the bill in its original format a timetable for review. But the way in which it actually worked is that we could have been looking at five years between the commencement of the bill and the actual completion of a review. Five years is way too long.

This is this government's third attempt – third attempt – to try and get it right when it comes to criminal control orders. The former Attorney-General Mr Pakula had two goes at it, and they just did not work. I do not say there was any ill will in the intention, but the fact is they just did not work. It is why we have had bikies infiltrating unions in this state. It is why we have had bikies infiltrating government building sites in this state. We cannot afford to allow this to continue. The sight of organised criminals running rampant on government-funded sites is just intolerable. Bikies regard Victoria as being the Switzerland of the nation when it comes to being able to ride around and parade their colours. They cannot do it in other states, but they can all do it here, because this government has been too soft for too long when it comes to cracking down on these organised criminals. They are not motorcycling enthusiasts; it is organised crime. They have got more of a sideline in making and selling drugs than they do in riding Harleys.

Let us be very serious about this. This is a bill which is long overdue. It is the government's third attempt at it. I hope the government gets it right this time, but we cannot rely on them getting it right, which is why it is important there be a proper statutory review process. With the passage of this bill today, I do encourage the government to proclaim it and get it into operation as soon as possible. I do know that last weekend, on Sunday, the Crimes Amendment (Non-fatal Strangulation) Act 2023 came into force. I think that the government waited until the statutory period contained in that bill to bring it into force. There is no reason why the government cannot proclaim acts sooner. The reason why there are default provisions in bills is as a safety net; it is a safety net to say that this bill has to come into force at some point. But there is no reason why the government could not have brought Joy's law – as the Crimes Amendment (Non-fatal Strangulation) Act 2023 is known – into force earlier, and there is no reason why the government should be waiting until the default date for this bill to come into force.

We know we have problems with bikie gangs in unions and on Big Build sites, peddling drugs on our streets. We know that problem exists. I urge the government: do not wait, do not let the grass grow under your feet, get this bill into force and let us see if this one works well this time. I do wish the government well, because it is in every Victorian's interest to tackle organised crime, particularly outlaw motorcycle gangs, in this state.

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:59): I rise to speak on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024, and I start my contribution by saying that the coalition supports the measures in this bill. It is not a big bill. The bill itself does not do a lot, but the coalition supports the bill because we have now reached a point in time where we know how dire energy policy and therefore energy reliability, security and affordability are in this state. So when a bill comes to this place, a small piece of work in what should be a far bigger policy agenda in relation to ensuring adequate energy security and supply, the coalition supports that approach. We have looked at the bill in detail and understand the need, because we know the energy market operator has forecast and warned of gas supply shortages from as soon as two years time, and we know we will need very shortly the capacity in this state to store gas to ensure that supply is available to Victorians as it should be.

What this house is considering today is a bill that deals with measures that, frankly, could and should have been implemented years ago. We know the government was aware of not only gas shortages but

also the need for a gas storage measure such as this, and that is what this bill does. This bill effectively will allow a larger storage space, in the simplest terms, for gas to be stored and made available to Victorian households. Victoria is very reliant on gas. We know that over 2 million homes are reliant on gas. Some 18 per cent of gas usage is from homes. Obviously businesses are an enormous part of that gas demand or need, so we should have known as a state that we needed a robust and strong energy and specifically gas policy to ensure that Victorians have the energy supply they need.

Sadly, when you look at the measures in this bill – and we will go through industry’s and the broader community’s response – what we are seeing is an acknowledgement that gas has been so demonised by this government, so ideologically demonised by this Minister for Energy and Resources, that it has affected the broader government’s capacity to properly plan for Victorians in terms of their energy supply. Not only is that recognised by the community but it is recognised by the government, and government members themselves have spoken out against the minister and the minister’s approach. The federal government has spoken out against the minister and the minister’s approach. We have seen in recent times not only a calling out from the federal Labor government of the minister but a slight change in the government’s approach in overruling the minister for energy. And we have seen the minister approve a project for the first time in 10 years. I cannot imagine that that was signed by the minister with any joy; in fact I am sure the minister’s arm had to be moved with a pen in it to have her agree to that brief. I cannot imagine that she has framed that brief in approving that project. I think she would have done so almost under duress.

As I say, as a state we are reliant on gas, and there is nothing wrong with gas. I think what we are seeing both in this state and now federally is Australian people standing up and saying to their governments, ‘Stop demonising gas because of ideology.’ That is what the government here has done for years and the federal government has done, and you saw the federal coalition’s announcement yesterday to extend the capacity investment scheme eligibility to gas projects and the commitment from the coalition that if they were to win the next federal election gas would form part of the investment scheme so that no longer would that scheme only underwrite renewable projects but it could also underwrite gas projects.

The federal coalition understands the need, as we do in Victoria as the alternate government, that Victorians should have and deserve to have reliable, secure and affordable energy. It is something that I know the member for Bulleen is very strong on. As leader he announced a commitment to a domestic reservation policy in 2022, and that was something that showed our commitment at that time as a coalition to ensuring that gas was part of the energy mix for the future. Victorian households would have been guaranteed access to Victorian gas, and that is something that this government has never done. Not only has it not provided any local guarantee but it has demonised and tried to ban gas, and we will deal with a bill tomorrow where the government is seeking to take a significant step towards banning gas in the measures in that bill. In fact in that bill there are very, very sneaky measures that have been pushed into an omnibus building bill, which is effectively the head of power for banning gas to households – sneaky, sneaky measures that were hardly highlighted, of course, by the minister in any of their public contributions. In the last parliamentary sitting week, coincidentally, the Premier talked about Victorians being able to cook with gas two days before announcing and introducing a bill into this place that would ban gas in homes. Talk about talking out both sides of the mouth on gas.

As I said, gas is an important part of our energy mix in Victoria, and the government’s 10-year ideological war on gas has just undermined for Victorians the reliability, security and affordability of gas. And you can see the community’s response to it. Recent polling – not that we should ever look to polling most directly, though I am sure that many on this side have been looking at it this week – in relation to Victoria’s gas phase-out showed strong support from Victorians for gas. Perhaps that is why the Premier has tried to draw a line between herself and the minister for energy – the great gas-banning minister for energy – who is notorious across this country for being the most ideologically opposed in this country and in the Labor Party, which in itself is an achievement. To be thought of as the most ideologically opposed in the Labor Party is quite some achievement.

As soon as this bill was announced there was public discussion about the importance of a local enhanced gas storage supply, and you can look at what people like David Close, the director of the University of Queensland's Gas and Energy Transition Research Centre, said:

There seems to be a growing acceptance that gas supply will need to be imported given the lack of investment in exploration and development for many years in Victoria ...

And further:

Imports are no easy option – existing pipeline expansions, new pipelines and LNG imports all face financing, approval, social acceptance and commercial hurdles. Possibly insurmountable hurdles without a capacity mechanism that includes gas.

Increasing gas storage can decrease the reliance on gas imports during peak demand periods ...

This is just one example, shortly after this policy was belatedly announced, where you could see the sector saying, 'We see a glimmer of hope. We see a small, small glimmer of hope that perhaps the minister's ideology has finally been overruled.'

Further, if you look at other people, Tim O'Brien, the COO of Lakes Blue Energy, said only recently:

We're very bullish about the exploration and have been for some time. It's been a frustrating road, but it looks like reality is finally dawning on the government – we need reliable, locally sourced energy ...

And further:

People are realising we are desperate for gas because renewables are a long way from being able to provide reliable energy.

These are not words of political attack; they are words from an industry who are saying, 'Finally we might see that the government has recognised that security of energy is almost in crisis in this state.' We know that. The experts are saying we have a problem and we need to solve it shortly.

Recent correspondence from the minister to the federal minister on this very bill confirms that the state government was talking to the Commonwealth about the possible project in 2020, some four years ago. How can it be that it has taken four years for the minister to actually do something? Released documents show that the minister was consulting over the policy approach in 2020. One wonders if the community had not spoken up strongly and if the security and reliability and affordability issues were not so strongly felt by the community, would the minister have ever acted? I think we all know the answer to that. There are reports in fact that informal conversations were happening, it has been reported by the media, from 2019. In those reports you can see people like the senior adviser of Royal Vopak Gary Constantine saying how much we need a policy like this. He said:

The conflict in Ukraine has caused nearly all the available floating storage regasification units to be contracted into Europe for security of their gas supply ...

What he is saying is that we need to do more and we have almost missed the boat, as it were. This bill is belated, and as I said earlier, we know of the threats of a lack of supply. The Australian Energy Market Operator, if I can read in a quote, said:

Reduced storage facility delivery capacity may pose a risk to gas supply adequacy in southern jurisdictions on peak demand days during the winter peak demand period ...

You could not be clearer on how much industry and the experts were calling for policy action. We know that the minister for years has been talking – not doing, talking – and the sector has been saying, 'We need action.' If you look at industry and business more broadly, they have been calling out the government's policy failures. Rick Wilkinson, the chief executive of EnergyQuest, has said that the situation is 'very serious' and that we 'need a backup'. Recent Department of Energy, Environment

and Climate Action departmental briefing notes have been reported as saying that shortfalls in 2026–27 could not be met with supplies from other states as it was:

... projected that all southern states will be in deficit and there is limited pipeline capacity to import into Victoria.

A supply gap will remain even if all currently committed and anticipated southern state projects are developed ...

You could not get a more dire warning in a brief by the department. And what was done? Nothing. We are here today dealing with a bill, which we support, but it almost feels like we are close to the end of the road when it comes to energy policy. And we know why. It is because, as the Australian Industry Group's chief executive Innes Willox said, the Victorian government has spent much of the past decade 'demonising gas as a legitimate energy source', and that is true. He said:

The reality is that six-sevenths of our gas use nationally is by industry, not households, and without it big parts of our industrial base face a very difficult future.

It may be that having been warned by energy regulators that it faces a strong risk of blackouts in the years ahead as well as seeing significant parts of its industrial base at risk, the Victorian government has realised that misguided ideological intransigence has real-world consequences.

Well, why did it take so long, especially when, as the Australian Energy Producers director Peter Kos has said:

The government's own Victorian Gas Program found there is up to 830 petajoules of conventional gas onshore – but that's just what we know.

A further quote:

The state has not been explored as much as it should have given the state's long-running anti-gas policies and bans. The political will is missing.

And that has been called out. That has now been seen clearly. In fact not only has it been seen by Victorians but it has been seen clearly by some in this government and certainly in the federal government. There are a number of others who have called out that policy failure. Andrew Richards from the Energy Users Association of Australia has said previously that:

... if we go down this gas approach, if we're using gas curtailment to manage supply–demand balances, that's not the market working.

That's policy failure. Sorry, you can't spin it any other way.

That is plain talking, and we are now dealing with a very small piece of the puzzle in terms of energy policy that has taken far too long to materialise. And it is not just consumers, obviously, that are concerned about the security, reliability and affordability of energy. Of course it is also business. Because as a state we should be ensuring that businesses can operate, can keep providing jobs for Victorians and can keep producing the things we need as a state to operate. We know that there have been many, many instances of business saying there is a problem. If you look at the tomato manufacturer Kagome, CEO Jason Fritsch said:

We are deeply concerned about where energy is going, not only the price, but also the supply ability going forward for us to manufacture ...

Paul Guerra from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

The supply issues around gas need to be solved before we lose the ability to drive the manufacturing sector, and ongoing electricity generation and transmission needs a clear solution before the lights go out ...

These are dire warnings, not just from the experts but also from industry, who keep the state going, who keep people employed and who provide the things that we need. I mentioned before Peter Kos from the Australian Energy Producers, who talked about the political will, and he has further said that:

... the political will is missing and new developments that can put downward pressure on prices and avoid blackouts will not proceed unless the government provides a stable regulatory environment to allow investment ...

We know that every time these issues are raised with the minister, the minister says. 'Well, no-one's popped anything on my desk.' When you are an ideological warrior who demonises gas, is there any wonder that no-one knocks on your door? Why would you knock on that minister's door? In fact you would knock on every other cabinet minister's door and say there is a problem with this minister. And they are. That is why ministers have been speaking out and why the federal government is speaking out against this minister. We have seen, sadly, that over recent times the minister's attitude towards energy policy has clearly put our state at risk. There is no other way to say it – it has put our state at risk. We see the minister recently has clearly been overruled in terms of her position on energy with some extremely unedifying examples, where the federal resources minister went into a Twitter war with the minister. Federal minister King said:

... gas will remain an important source of energy through to 2050 and beyond ...

And what did the minister for energy in Victoria say? 'She is wrong, she is wrong, she is wrong.' Not an ideological warrior with the minister for energy, I do not imagine – not a socialist left warrior. She said:

I'm happy to say that Madeleine King is wrong ...

How unedifying.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

James NEWBURY: Yes, happy to say it. How unedifying. We are talking about people having secure energy supply. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about people having secure energy supply, and our minister, the minister for all of us, sadly, is saying to the federal minister, 'We don't want you to stand up for secure energy supply.' How could you want to do that in a late-night tweet? Bizarre. Minister King called it out further, saying:

... no doubt Queensland is doing the heavy lifting in terms of gas supply for the whole of the east coast.

And the Victorian minister for energy did not stop there with the Twitter rant. She accused the federal minister of behaving 'like a coalition minister' – high praise indeed. There is no higher praise.

Danny O'Brien: There's hope for them yet.

James NEWBURY: That is right. There is no higher praise than accusing the federal minister of acting like a coalition minister, because it is the coalition who will always ensure that people of this country and people of this state have secure, affordable and reliable energy. There is no doubt about that. We saw from the federal coalition yesterday the announcement that gas would form part of the eligibility for the current scheme, which will ensure that gas has a very strong role to play in the future. And why shouldn't future gas projects have eligibility through that scheme? Why should the government be trying to only pick certain projects? I was speaking about the capacity investment scheme. Why should the federal government only pick particular projects? So the coalition announced yesterday, as I mentioned earlier, that gas projects would be able to apply through that scheme.

After the Twitter war between the state and federal Labor ministers, Minister D'Ambrosio simply claimed that there is no gas, which is just factually wrong – 'There's just no gas anymore.' No, the minister does not want to find gas. There is no question when you listen to the experts. Not only do they say there is gas, they do not even know how much gas there is in terms of significant capacity,

because frankly the industry and investment have dried up in this state. If you are in the gas business, why would you knock on this minister's door?

We have a bill before us today which we support. We support what it does, and what it does is it says that we will build a storage supply capacity to help us when we have shortfalls. But it does not solve the underlying problem, because you have got to put something in it. This bill says we will have a storage capacity, but we will need to put something in it, and until the government recognises the need to do something about that, we will continue to have issues with our energy security and supply.

It is little wonder that after the 'coalition minister' comment you saw coalition ministers – National Party shadow ministers – call out the poor behaviour of the state minister, with multiple speaking out. But one federal Labor member reportedly said about the minister for energy, 'On gas, it's always someone else's fault'. You could not say it better: on gas, it is always someone else's fault. That is the story of this minister. It is little wonder that we saw the new Premier trying a little bit of gas talk on radio a couple of weeks ago. The Premier spoke about allowing Victorians to continue to access gas in a very, very limited way, but then was, as I mentioned earlier, caught out two days later after introducing a bill to ban gas in homes. I mean, how can you possibly as Premier say one thing and then allow your government to introduce a bill which does exactly the opposite only two days later?

It is little wonder that you see the Deputy Premier enter the debate. Is it any wonder the Deputy Premier entered that debate and said we have got gas in our homes and for a number of reasons we are keeping it. We knew what he was saying. What he was saying was the minister for energy is wrong. The minister for energy is ideologically wrong. He was saying, 'I'm different.' Now, I do not think he was just saying that to Victorians, I think he was saying that to his colleagues. I think he was saying, 'We need a different approach.' It is interesting that after he said that the Premier decided to speak about gas. Obviously he had his finger on the pulse with his colleagues and the Premier thought, 'Well, I can't be completely outflanked by the Deputy Premier', so the Premier has made some recent comments too.

When it comes to energy policy, it is not words, it is actions, and we have seen inaction. There is proof positive in the number of instances I have raised that the government has not acted to secure energy supply. This bill is a very small step towards ensuring there is a storage capacity, but it will not do what this state needs. This state needs secure, reliable and affordable energy, including gas, and that will only happen when we have a minister who does not demonise gas and who does not spend their time ideologically waging war against the gas that she ideologically is opposed to. Industry knows it, Victorians know it and we know it.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:29): We have just heard the opposition spend a lot of time slagging off the Minister for Energy and Resources, but I did not hear many solutions – zero solutions at all – so that was not terribly inspiring. I think we have to be careful when we are looking at the question of ideology versus geology, because it is actually geology that matters in this context. Specifically, the facts are that our once cheap and plentiful sources of fossil gas are now fast declining and increasingly expensive. I note they did refer to the expensive nature of gas. New gas production in Victoria will not happen at sufficient scale or speed to change the overall trajectory of the sector. Why? It is a matter of geology, not ideology, unless they are talking about fracking, and we have course enshrined the banning of fracking into the constitution because we know that it is not good for the agricultural sector and it is certainly not good for our environment. I do not know if that is the trajectory they are going on when they are talking about all these mythical, mystical and magical quantities of gas that they can tap into, because they talk it up. They talk a lot about the mythical and magical quantities of gas that are all there, abundantly waiting to be tapped, but we are not seeing any detail in that aspect.

I do want to contrast some of the discussions that were raised with regard to commentary – and I should say objective commentary – on this industry and energy as a whole. I am going to quote the

Grattan Institute's Tony Wood and the former chief scientist. We know the opposition are not terribly fond of scientists, but in any case, I am going to persist:

If there was a lot of gas, these companies would be taking it seriously ...

And secondly, I am quoting the chief scientist of 2021:

There are currently no proven and probable ... onshore conventional gas reserves in Victoria.

So this does present a challenge. Nevertheless I should say, if we are referring to the context of this particular bill that we are discussing, the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO, noted the critical role that deep storage will have to play across the east coast through the renewable energy transition. It was also interesting that not at any point did we hear any discussion from the opposition about the need for transition, the imperative for transition on so many fronts. Hence in fact we enshrined the SEC into the constitution, because we know that they would blast it away in a nanosecond if they were to be given the opportunity, because they have absolutely no faith or genuine conviction when it comes to the transition to a cleaner energy future for Victorians.

When we are looking at the gas supply situation, what are two key elements that are fundamental in the discussion here? The two key elements are: we must do whatever we can to support Victorian families and businesses that are able to, to get off gas, slashing their power bills in the process – that is one; and two, we must bring on a new transitional gas supply. I want to emphasise the transitional nature of that. The bill deals with the latter, while there is another bill before this place that deals with the former.

This is the clearest evidence yet that the Victorian government is the only political party in this state with a pragmatic gas policy. On the one hand we have the opposition, who are living in the past and talk about mythical gas supplies. Who knows – I do not know where they are, but they have this magical, mystical little reference point that they talk up all the time, with no detail. In any case, that is fanciful. On the other hand we have the Greens political party, which simply says, 'If you hold up a banner and say "no gas", the transition is done.' Magic – just like that, it is all done. Wouldn't we love that? We absolutely would, but we are dealing with human beings and real-life situations, and of course we have to actually transition Victoria, which is exactly what we are doing. But at the same time pretending there is some plentiful source of conventional gas that has been locked up by the government, as the opposition does with reckless abandon, is just a myth. It is not good enough to keep peddling out those tired old tropes. It is not helping anyone in Victoria, and it is also not assisting with the transition to a cleaner energy future. It is a delicate balance to straddle, no question, and it is not only Victoria. It is nationally, it is globally an issue for all communities far and wide, because energy is obviously critical to our human existence and for industry as well.

If we are looking at what Victoria has been doing actively to assist when it comes to helping them to make the transition, it is not coercion – Victorians actually want it. I talk to Victorians every day who want a cleaner energy future and who want to transition, hence they voted for the SEC. I do not want to dwell too much on that particular matter, because we did discuss it yesterday in the bill quite openly and we transacted it in a very forthright way in the community. No-one resiled from that position on any front. We were proud and we are still proud to lead on that front. So let us not get buried in arguments that do not make sense in this regard. Nevertheless, if we are looking at the Victorian energy upgrades scheme, it reflects the will of Victorians themselves to be part of this transition. In 2023 more than 506,000 homes and 24,000 businesses received upgrades through the program. More than 2.4 million households and businesses have taken advantage of the program since 2009. On average households and businesses that undertake efficiency upgrades under the program save \$110 and \$3700 respectively on their annual energy bills. Victorians can see this. They are actually seeing the savings but also feeling good about the fact that they are contributing to lower emissions and to a cleaner energy economy. Even those who do not participate will save on their bills, with households saving \$150 and businesses saving \$870 due to lower network costs. Lo and behold, there are benefits for wholesale electricity prices when you do invest in the renewables sector.

I can go further. Solar Victoria has supported over 360,000 installations in Victoria. Solar Victoria has supported over 280,000 installations of solar PV in Victoria, and 7500 solar PV systems have been installed at rental properties. The program has surpassed an energy-generating capacity of 2 gigawatts – bigger than the Yallourn power station. Isn't that interesting?

This shows real action on the part of the government. On the one hand we have this very pragmatic legislative element which is dealing with storage capacity, but on the other hand we also have fellow Victorians who are actively participating in the transition and becoming more energy-efficient. They can see the value in it. I do not know why the opposition do not and why they are not on board with it and why they do not want a cleaner energy future. They spend all their time bagging out the minister. If only they would put more energy into some vision and into some real energy policy, that would make for a much more interesting discussion. But nevertheless we are happy to lead the way on this, as we have been for many years.

Solar Vic supported the installation of over 30,000 hot-water systems. The Solar Homes program will create over 5500 new jobs, and 30 per cent of rebates are going to regional Victorians – what, regional Victorians getting on board with cleaner energy? Who knew? Actually, they are. And 57 per cent have gone to those with an income lower than \$100,000. I am not surprised at all. I just think that the opposition undervalue some of their regional constituents. I think that is what it is. The program is helping Victorians slash their bills each and every day. Solar Homes will help Victorians save more than an estimated \$500 million a year on their electricity bills once the program is complete. These are meaningful savings back in your pocket. In 2022–23 over 38 per cent of electricity generated in Victoria came from renewables, more than three times the 10 per cent we inherited in 2014. You can see real and significant advancement in that regard. Since 2014, 59 projects providing 4471 megawatts of new capacity have come on line. That is not ideology, okay? That is reality. There are nine projects currently under construction which will provide 1314 megawatts of capacity. I commend this bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (11:39): I am very pleased to rise to support the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. As is often the case when it comes to energy legislation in this place, it directly affects my electorate. In fact whilst this is a generic piece of legislation for the Victorian offshore area, the 3-mile zone between the beach and offshore in the Commonwealth waters could effectively support any gas projects anywhere in that area. As I understand it, the only one currently proposed is the Golden Beach energy project in my electorate, so certainly I am pleased to support it.

But in rising to speak on this I do want to respond to the member for Albert Park, who wanted to throw a whole lot of bombs at us about gas onshore. She asked, if I am not mistaken, 'Where is this mythical gas that we talk about being available onshore, and why don't we listen to scientists?' It does not take too much to do a quick search online, and I found a letter to then Minister for Resources Jaclyn Symes. The author of this letter says:

- Victoria is prospective for onshore conventional gas, with amounts estimated to be in the range 128–830 petajoules.
- Development of onshore conventional gas would create jobs and benefit regional communities and economies. Up to 242 jobs, \$312 million in gross regional product ...

Whom would this letter have been from, member for Albert Park? You told us that we should listen to scientists. That letter was written by Dr Amanda Caples, Victoria's lead scientist in March 2020 and addressed to then minister Jaclyn Symes, as I said. Indeed you could go to the Premier's website and look at a media release dated 16 June 2020 from the then Minister for Resources Jaclyn Symes, headline 'Onshore conventional gas restart a green light for jobs'. It states:

Production of the estimated resources could generate as much as \$310 million annually for regional economies and create up to 6,400 jobs over the lifespan of these projects.

We keep hearing this from the current minister, and we have now heard it from the member for Albert Park: there is no gas. I can only assume –

James Newbury interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am not a geologist, member for Brighton, or a scientist in any way, but I can only assume what has happened is the gas that was there four years ago must have evaporated. Is that what happens? No, gas does not evaporate, so perhaps the gas is still there and there has just been a political change of view on this. Four years ago the government was spruiking the gas that was available. The lead scientist was spruiking the gas that was available. I would not reflect on the Chair, but Acting Speaker Marchant was on the panel at the time. The government knows full well that there is in fact gas onshore. I think the lead scientist's comments in the letter to the minister make the point that this is not a panacea to our gas woes, but it certainly will contribute, which will bring me back to the bill at hand.

As I said, this project is Golden Beach energy in my electorate of Gippsland South, specifically off the shoreline at Golden Beach. There is an existing basin with gas in it that GB Energy intends to develop. They will pull the gas that is in there out. I think it is about 14 months of supply that they will be able to produce, that gas, and they will be left with what is I understand an exceptional reservoir that will be perfect for storing gas. This is not new. It is not new technology. It has been done around the world for in fact a long, long time. We already do it at Iona in the Otways where there is a gas storage area – an existing storage onshore I believe Iona is. It has a capacity of about 24.4 petajoules, or 570 terajoules, a day. GB Energy would expect to have about 18.8 petajoules, or 375 terajoules, a day, so it will be an important addition to the capacity of gas storage and therefore supply in our region.

GB Energy has been around for a number of years now. I must commend them in terms of engagement certainly with me as the local member, and I know with Golden Beach and the community around there as well they have done a lot of work. They have certainly been involved in talking to me. I think it is at least five years that I have been hearing from GB Energy, possibly longer, and it is a shame that it does take that long to get these projects up. I think they have done the bulk of their environmental approvals.

They have got an offtake agreement, if you like, with Origin Energy. Origin Energy is contracted to buy the gas from them and store it. This legislation was necessary because, as I said, we have got legislation regulating onshore and we have obviously got Commonwealth regulating offshore waters. It is that narrow stretch of state waters in the 3-mile zone there, and as it happens the Golden Beach reservoir is in that zone. In terms of the local impact there will be very little physical impact because there will be a pipeline underground at the crossing of Ninety Mile Beach, as there is already for I think at least seven oil and gas pipelines coming in from Bass Strait to Longford, where the gas and oil is processed and sent on. This will be one additional one, underground and to a subsea wellhead on the seabed floor, so in this case, unlike the existing oil and gas production by Esso, there will not be rigs or platforms that you will see from above the water.

Basically, once the gas that is in that reservoir is expended there will be the opportunity for GB Energy to purchase gas at different times of the year, put it back down the well and then use it at the times it is needed. Obviously, that will be at times in the middle of summer when there is excess gas and the price is perhaps a bit cheaper. They will be able to put it into the reservoir and then bring it out again when it is required in the depths of winter, when it is cold and Victorians need that gas for heat. Again, this is not new technology. In fact Esso has done it in Bass Strait in the past. I cannot recall which field it was, but at one of their fields I know they previously have done that. They would produce gas and put it back down at various times until they needed it.

That actually brings me to another point. I think the member for Brighton made the point that it must have hurt the minister to actually introduce this piece of legislation. It must have really hurt. But I also find it ironic that the minister is introducing this legislation and is quite happy to support us taking gas,

putting it back in a natural undersea reservoir in Bass Strait and then taking it out again when we need it, because it will be safely stored. What is the difference, in principle at least, of doing that with carbon – of doing carbon capture and storage? Yes, it is technically a bit different and there are differences in the composition, whether it is gas, methane or CO₂, but what is the difference in principle of doing that? The minister seems to be strongly opposed to the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project in the Latrobe Valley, which would take brown coal and produce hydrogen. As part of that hydrogen process the CO₂ is actually taken off, and the CO₂ would then go to CarbonNet or to Esso's proposed CCS project. I say: why is there a problem with doing that?

I know Labor's friends up the back here in the Greens are vehemently opposed to this. They call it a coal project. I just do not understand the logic. If the problem with coal is the emissions, then if you are taking the emissions from out of the ground and then putting them back in the ground through CCS, what is the issue? The issue is just, as the member for Brighton has said, ideological. I know there are people on the other side in the government who do support the HESC process and the HESC project. That would be a great project for the Latrobe Valley and for Gippsland because – and this might be pie in the sky – potentially in future at a time when we have offshore wind farms there is the prospect that during the day, when the sun is shining and the wind is blowing, we actually could turn some of that excess power from the offshore wind farms into hydrogen via electrolysis. If we get the HESC project up and going, it gives us the skills, the technology and the infrastructure for a green hydrogen economy in future.

This GB Energy project is very important for our gas future. It will be good for Gippsland in the main. There are some issues my colleague the member for Gippsland East will talk about with the fishing industry that we do need to be cognisant of and that need to be addressed, but I am very happy to support this legislation.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (11:49): I rise to make a contribution on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024, a bill which amends the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010. The amendment clarifies that holders of petroleum production licences are authorised to carry out underground petroleum storage operations. Essentially this bill is a proactive measure to address the declining amount of gas and gas supply shortfalls in Victoria. Victoria is facing gas supply shortfalls, which are forecast by AEMO to occur potentially as early as in 2026 and grow in 2027 if we do not take action. Enabling the transfer of existing onshore gas supply to a natural offshore reservoir helps the retention of supply when needed to meet high demand, especially during the winter. This means that when required Victoria will have access to stored offshore underground gas, stabilising any shortages that may occur.

Victoria has had a similar process for many years onshore. By introducing this amendment bill, offshore gas storage can be done in an efficient and stable manner. Just to clarify, this bill does not allow for new production of gas or impact the current bans in Victoria on fracking or other non-conventional types of gas. Additionally, the bill will ensure that underground petroleum storage operations include the highest standards of compliance monitoring, record keeping and enforcement of these requirements to those who have or are permitted to have a petroleum production licence.

We need this bill as the supply of onshore gas is declining. Addressing imminent risk of gas shortfalls is critical in Victoria to prevent gas price rises and the impact that they will have on households. The bill enables the critical Golden Beach energy storage project to go ahead. The project will create the key storage infrastructure to transfer onshore gas, which will be injected into a reservoir in the offshore gas field. It is anticipated that the Golden Beach project will produce an equivalent amount of gas in a year to around a quarter of the Victorian household and small business gas consumption from the winter of 2027. The Golden Beach project is vital to securing Victoria's future gas supply.

We have heard the energy market operator reiterate the point that deep storage of gas is a very important part of the transition to renewable energy. If we do not act now, the future demand will outweigh supply and put significant upward pressure on wholesale energy prices in the gas and

electricity markets. The bill is a key step forward in securing Victoria's energy future while at the same time enforcing safeguards to protect Victorians and the environment.

Our government recognises that our continued reliance on expensive fossil gas is not sustainable for our future, and that is why we are committed to supporting families and businesses to transition away from gas appliances. This will free up supply for those who need to keep using gas. Due to the unavoidable supply decrease I have spoken of, gas just simply is not as cheap as it once was. The typical Victorian residential customer is now paying over \$500 more for gas than they did less than two years ago, an increase of 35 per cent.

We just need to look at our own gas and electricity bills and compare them to see this problem in real time. The *Gas Substitution Roadmap* that this government released late last year mandates that all new homes be fully electric and simplifies the process of transitioning away from gas appliances. The government has made a number of incentives and discounts available to support Victorians to upgrade to electric appliances. It is simply cheaper to be gas free. Existing households can save \$1700 a year or up to \$2700 a year with solar installed. That is a 60 per cent reduction in bills, and as I said, we just need to compare our own household bills to see that this is the case.

I am in the process of transitioning my own home from gas to electricity. I have just gotten rid of my gas ducted heating and I have put in an electric heating and cooling system. I have got rid of the gas appliances in the kitchen – I am going induction – and I have got solar panels. The only remaining gas appliance I have in my home is the hot water service, and very soon I will get rid of that one as well. The reality is that while I am doing that now and while I am paying for those new appliances now and making that capital outlay, I know the savings from not having a gas connection are going to pay off what I have invested in making my home a fully electric home, and I have done that proudly.

I also just want to talk about some of the opposition attacks that we have heard from the last two opposition speakers, particularly the member for Brighton. The member for Brighton spoke for about 30 minutes as the opposition's lead speaker, and he probably spent 25 of the 30 minutes slagging off the Minister for Energy and Resources, which I found quite objectionable, to be honest, because I have a great deal of respect for our minister for energy. In fact our minister for energy is Australia's longest serving minister for energy. It is because of our minister for energy that – I mean, picture this –

Matthew Guy interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: I hear from someone who quite possibly might come back for a third go as the Leader of the Opposition – his name has been mentioned in dispatches – that that is an indictment. Well, let me tell –

Matthew Guy interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: That is all right, I will not stay for your speech, member for Bulleen. As much as I like you, I will not be staying for your contribution. Maybe I will stay for a minute or so, member for Bulleen. We will see. It depends on how good it is in the first minute; I will make my decision then. I will just say that when the minister for energy became the minister for energy the proportion of renewable electricity in Victoria was 10 per cent. Today it is over 38 per cent. Frankly, member for Brighton, you are not worthy of carrying her bags.

The last opposition speaker was talking about a letter from the lead scientist. Well, it was not hard to find the letter from the lead scientist, because we are not trying to hide it. Onshore conventional gas exploration is permitted. It is allowed. That means if industry thinks there is money to be made, they are free to knock on the minister's door. The lead scientist was clear that there are no proven or probable onshore resources. There might be gas dotted around the state, but it is not there in commercial volumes – no-one will go near it. I think that puts to bed the claims from the previous member.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Nick STAIKOS: Well, member for Gippsland South, the chief scientist said in 2021:

There are currently no proven and probable ... onshore conventional gas reserves in Victoria.

Here in Victoria we have the lowest wholesale gas prices on the east coast, and we intend to keep it that way. Indeed from the start of this year, residential gas bills were 60 per cent lower than Queensland and 21 per cent lower than New South Wales. However, our commitment to ensuring a stable, low-cost gas supply for those who need it will not get in the way of our ambitious target of 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035. I have got to say, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier I do get to meet a lot of visiting dignitaries, ambassadors, high commissioners and consuls general, and one thing that I am always asked about is our transition to renewable energy, because it is a strong transition. It is one enshrined in law. It is something that this state leads Australia on, and there is interest in it globally. Our minister for energy, who brought this bill to the house, has proven it can be done, because she is doing it. We can see it in real time. I commend this bill to the house. I wish it a speedy passage. I am looking forward to hearing from the member for Bulleen.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (11:59): I too rise to make a contribution on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. I note some of the excellent points raised by the member for Brighton and the member for Gippsland South. I think our point of view on this side of the house is we support the concept contained in this bill. We are saying, as the member for Gippsland South did, the concept behind this is one that should have been given clarity and investment some time ago. There is no doublespeak from this side of the house when it comes to gas and gas policy. In fact we have been very clear in support of the gas industry in Victoria, and we believe that gas as a commodity is something that our state has in abundance and should be used into the future. The politics of fear have crept into this debate. We have had it in spades, accentuated by the Minister for Energy and Resources, who has done a huge disservice to her own portfolio by providing uncertainty for those who want to invest in gas and gas exploration in Victoria. It is really quite disgraceful.

Victoria does have major gas reserves, and this is not being said by politicians – this is being said by people with decades of experience in the industry. It is not just a point on political cheat sheet notes to come in here and say there is no gas or there is gas. It is a point of fact. I note that the Minister for Energy and Resources recently and the member for Bentleigh and the member for Albert Park before have come in with the same political points about Victoria having no gas, this line that Labor runs for the simple fact of trying to secure Greens' preferences. They are just running that line in here with no facts. Again, as I have said before, and the members for Gippsland South and Brighton have both said, the energy minister has said plenty of times there are no new gas reserves, there is nothing in the system, there is nothing that can be found, but yet Cooper Energy chief executive Jane Norman says Victoria does not have a gas shortage. She says Victoria 'has enough gas resources to meet current demand for at least 25 years'. Who should we believe: the minister who comes in here and demonises gas for the sake of Greens' preferences or the CEO of Cooper Energy or the CEO of 3D Energi, both of whom are putting money into it, not government or taxpayers money but company money because they know this is fact?

Let us go back a step. Who is the CEO of Cooper Energy? She has a bachelor of science in chemistry and pure mathematics, she has a bachelor of engineering with honours in chemical engineering and a postgraduate diploma in management and economics of natural gas. This is no dummy. This is someone with serious experience in this industry who is saying the state has plenty of gas. The minister is playing politics. Who would you believe, a woman with that experience who is clearly exceedingly well educated and knowledgeable and has decades of experience in her own field or Lily D'Ambrosio? I know who I would believe. Let us go further. Noel Newell, the CEO of 3D Energi-ConocoPhillips, who are seeking to develop production fields, says clearly:

The regulatory side of things, both state and federal, is a nightmare. It can take up to six times longer than it should ...

This is the reason that Victoria does not have the gas supplies that it needs in the immediate period, because the gas supplies that are there cannot be extracted because the state, in particular, regulatory burden is hindering this industry.

Who is Noel Newell? Again, let us go back. We have seen the CV of the previous CEO. Well, this fellow has been the CEO since 2003. Most Labor speakers on this were probably in high school at that stage. He has had 30 years experience in oil and gas, both at Petrofina and BHP Billiton. He was the head of geotechnical at Instinct Energy. Geotechnical search for the gas; he has been the head of it for the last 12 years. This is a guy who has been head of geotechnical for 12 years saying Victoria has plenty of gas. Again I ask: who would you believe, that man with all his experience or a Labor minister seeking Greens' preferences at a state election?

It is not a point of contention to those in the industry. Two incredibly well educated, incredibly experienced CEOs in this industry, Jane Norman, the CEO of Cooper Energy, and Noel Newell, the CEO of ConocoPhillips, both say the biggest hindrance to gas supply in Victoria is the government. Why wouldn't it be? Because after what we have seen from the minister who runs political lines – that is all she knows what to do, how to run a political line. She cannot run a line on fact or on genuine reality, it has always got to be politics.

Right now there are nine licences. Nothing is stopping any of those finding gas. Well, actually two CEOs are saying, 'Yes, there is – you. You're the one stopping it.' And the reason for this is geology: 'We're running out of gas. That's the reality.' Two CEOs – and I could read a whole bunch more – are saying, 'No, we're not. The issue is the government. The issue is regulatory slowness, and if you want us to find it, we can.' So we do not oppose this bill; we actually say this bill has got some very good points to it. Proper consultation with the fishing industry through Lakes Entrance is very important, because it is one of our biggest fishing industries and they deserve to have their voice heard.

I heard the member for Albert Park say, 'But you've got no solutions.' Actually, we have had three elections now in a row offering them: using gas, not denying gas, getting regulatory approvals sped up, using it in exploration, using it in general supply and a gas reserve policy like in Western Australia for domestic supply. Western Australian Labor can provide a domestic reserve policy. Why can't Victoria? Labor in Western Australia brought in a domestic reserve policy which keeps prices for domestic supply down. The 15 per cent reserve was a Labor idea in Western Australia. If they can do it in Western Australia and it worked successfully, why can't Labor in Victoria do that? Rather than demonising this industry, why doesn't Labor allow those licences to proceed and bring that gas to market? Two CEOs are saying, 'You've got more than 50 years on current supply of gas reserves that can be used.' Bring that to market. Put in a reserve for domestic supply, which will have a cap on it, and keep domestic prices low for Victorians, who are facing huge cost-of-living pressures, and you actually have a reasonable solution. When those speakers get up and ask what you are going to do and what your solution is, there it is.

We have been very consistent on this. The Liberals and Nationals believe gas is part of our future. The Labor Party and the Greens play politics. CEOs of gas companies, multiple of them, say we have enough supply for decades. For God's sake, stop playing politics. Just use it for the sake of cost of living, for jobs and for getting us off coal and using gas in electricity supply. We have enough gas in this state. It is mad that we are not using it. It is simply politics from a useless minister. My point is very clear –

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: 'Oh, goodness, it's derogatory!' Have you heard what you say to people over here? Grow up.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): When you say 'you', you are reflecting on the Chair and that is not appropriate, so please do not refer to 'you', because you are reflecting on me.

Matthew GUY: No, I am certainly not reflecting on you, Acting Chair. Some members of the Labor Party need to grow up. If you want to come in here and throw insults at people, be prepared to take it back. If you come in here and sling off jibes at everyone, be prepared to take it back. I did not interject on anyone. If you come in here and interject on me, you are going to get it in return.

The simple point on this matter is we have provided on this side of the house solutions – real solutions, sensible solutions – to gas policy and gas development in Victoria. The Labor Party plays politics with a hopeless minister, an out-of-touch minister, a minister that is contributing to cost-of-living pressures in Victoria, a minister that is allowing our gas supplies to go unused when Victoria could be powering itself and the east coast off its gas supplies. So say CEOs of gas companies, who are putting their own money into investment in Victoria and exploration in Victoria, not taxpayers money. They are not seeking Greens preferences like the Labor government is. They are putting their money where their mouth is to get gas to market to make life cheaper and more affordable for Victorians. That should be our aim. But it is not the aim of a government obsessed with politics, and Victorians have finally woken up. They have finally realised cost of living ain't getting better. Ten years on, life ain't easier. In fact it is a hell of a lot worse, and that is why Labor is at but 30 per cent in the polls and will need those Greens preferences to win.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:09): I am so pleased to rise and speak after the member for Bulleen. The member for Bulleen asked us, 'Who would you believe?' I tell you what, I would not trust any of them on that side of the house, not a single one. They have offered up two CEOs of companies. We have heard about the ConocoPhillips CEO, who tells us, through the member for Bulleen, that it is regulations that are hindering the industry. One way to hinder an industry through regulations, I would have thought, is to put a moratorium on it, which is exactly what those opposite did. It was those opposite who hindered the most by putting a moratorium on onshore conventional gas exploration in 2013. That was those opposite.

The member for Bulleen offered up another CEO who tells us that we have got enough gas for 25 years. All right, so let us just not do anything. Let us just pack up and go home. Apparently it is all going to be okay. But we will not rest just on the words of two CEOs. We trust in AEMO. We have bodies in place, experts who tell us about gas supply in Victoria. They tell us that there will be a reduction in gas available in coming years, and this government is acting.

To set a bit of further context, a bit of reality after we have been hearing from particularly the member for Brighton – I do not know where he has been living for the last while, but in all of his going back through history he did not mention the moratorium that those opposite put on onshore conventional gas in 2012 and 2013. There were people who were really against it at the time. I am quoting from an article at the time about gas:

Former Howard era union-buster **Peter Reith** and union leader **Paul Howes** have joined forces to accuse the Victorian government –

it was an LNP Victorian government back then –

of putting jobs and living standards at risk because of a reluctance to ... lift a ban on the industry.

What industry is that? Onshore gas. When we talk about issues around gas supply, when we talk about regulation hindering, there is no greater than this, and the frustration of Mr Reith towards then Premier Denis Napthine was so strong that he released statements with Paul Howes. Premier Napthine's response about the urgency of acting to avert a looming gas crisis, according to the paper, was:

I think I have a different approach to Peter Reith on that.

What did we see the approach being? To do nothing, and then not 10 years later to stand up in this place and say that it is our government that has impacted gas supply in Victoria when it is very clearly those opposite that have impacted it the most.

What is the gas supply issue in Victoria? We have heard from AEMO that the fact is that there is less gas and it is more expensive to extract and to use, and that means that there are less production fields and there are less companies that are producing gas for our market. The reason why that is so important is because we do not want a single family in Victoria to face any gas shortages in their lives. Everyone deserves to be able to put on the heater in winter and be warm and to cook their meals. We are taking action. It is this government that is supporting families and supporting the industry, and one of the ways that we are doing it is by bringing forward this bill.

This bill is providing investment certainty for GB Energy, who are working to develop and store gas offshore in Victoria. The GB Energy gas project will provide a lot of gas for Victoria, and having a storage facility, which would be enabled by this bill, will further strengthen certainty around supply of gas, which is what we are working on and what is important to this government. Without this proposed legislation projects like the Golden Beach energy and storage project would not have legislative certainty that the storage component of their project would be able to go ahead. What this government does not want to do is impact investment decisions that are made on projects in Victoria for energy supply, because we know that causing uncertainty for investors can disrupt things into the long term.

We heard from the member for Bulleen that their policy is to use gas and to have a reserves policy, but really we know their overall energy policy is absolutely lacking. All that they are doing – because of their lack of policy, because of their lack of vision for how Victorian families will keep warm and feed themselves, because it does not seem they have turned their minds to it – is just following the tide and the winds of the federal Liberal Party, marching us towards nuclear power. In the statements and in the policy grab bag that we are hearing from Canberra Liberals, they are creating uncertainty for investors in renewable energy and in the energy sector more generally in Australia. They are refusing to say what percentage of renewable energy will be in the mix under a Liberal government. That, I am afraid to say, means that investors in renewable energy have pause for thought because they are seeing a possible future, God forbid, under a Liberal government where renewables are no longer important and where the idea of nuclear is somehow the most important.

There is nothing more uncertain than the cost of nuclear. We know that for sure. For Hinckley C in the UK, it seems that every month there is a new article about the increased costs of that project. That project has gone from £18 billion to £50 billion, and they are seeking funding from sovereign wealth funds to help cover the gap. The China General Nuclear Power Group, a state-run company, which was already investing in the nuclear power plant in the UK, has said it does not want to invest any more because it does not get to lead or operate it. They are not given permission to lead a nuclear project in the UK. I wonder what the rules will be for the nuclear power projects that those opposite are planning with their federal colleagues for Victoria? What will the rules be for the multiple power plants in Morwell? Who will be the owners of those? If those opposite cannot get the money together to pay for the construction, which takes over a decade, which countries are they going to go to to ask for funding to run nuclear power in Australia?

At the end of the day, for our government it really comes back to families and cost of living for families. Under our fantastic minister we have the cheapest energy in Australia. That is not by accident. It is because we have been focusing on real solutions – real renewable energy – and those opposite might like to consider that the useless ones here are not on this side.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:19): I am actually delighted to speak on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. It is a bill on a sector that I have quite a bit of interest in, and it is a bill that the coalition supports. Having said that, we do seek assurances from the government that that there will be no impact from this bill on fishing grounds. It has been very interesting listening to the debate, because half of the members of the government who have got up to speak sounded as though they were arguing against their bill, which is really quite extraordinary, whereas we are the ones arguing for it. But I will go into that a little bit later.

This bill that we have before us is driven by the industry. The industry get it, and they are actually putting a practical solution to us to go forward. There is a project in the pipeline, the GB project at Ninety Mile Beach. It is quite a substantial project of possibly around \$500 million. To get this project off the ground the government need to change the regulations, because at the moment this part off the coast, the 3 miles, is in the Victorian jurisdiction. If it was beyond that, it would be Commonwealth; if it was onshore, it would be Victorian. So we have got the facility that is proposed by GB, that gas storage facility, but one thing about having it there is that we have also got to get gas to it. They have a project which is initially to harvest about 30 petajoules of gas in 2027 and then use that site as storage, and that site would have a lesser capacity of about 19 petajoules.

The bill is designed to bring the regulation of underground natural gas storage in Victorian waters in line with the Commonwealth regulation for the offshore storage of gas and the Victorian regulation for onshore underground natural gas storage and, as I explained, there are differences in jurisdiction. I have mentioned that the coalition will be supporting this bill and note that AEMO, the Australian Energy Market Operator, forecast a peak gas supply shortage from as early as 2026 and which will grow in 2027. With the tightening of supply and demand, there is this balance here, and the supply inadequacy would place upward pressure on wholesale energy prices in both the gas and electricity markets.

I want to go back to how the underground storage would work. The proponents of any project would need to establish essential storage infrastructure that can transfer onshore gas to be injected into a reservoir in the offshore gas field to be made available later for coverage. It is like you have got storage there, you put something in and later on you will extract that for peak demand. The project that we are talking about specifically will use gas that is extracted from a cavern. I mentioned how much they were looking at getting by 2027 – 30 petajoules – and I want to just put that into a little bit of perspective. A petajoule is equivalent to 1000 million megajoules – this is not megajoules, it is megajoules – and in 2020 the average household gas usage in Victoria was almost 50,000 megajoules. So we are talking quite large quantities of gas here, gas that we certainly need.

It bothers me trying to listen to and understand the government's position on gas, because the minister would refer to gas as fossil gas. The word 'fossil', which was used to demonise gas, has dropped off a little bit. I think the government have realised that there are shortages, that they are going to run out and that they do need to do something a little bit different and think outside the box. It is lucky that the private sector have come with an opportunity and a solution that will help in this way.

I have listened to many of the government contributions here so far. The member for Albert Park referred to mythical and magical supplies of gas – where is it going to come from? I was convinced she was speaking against the bill, and I thought certainly that they had been drinking the Kool Aid over there. The member for Bentleigh actually talked about demand outstripping supply, and this is important. The government members are led to believe that we do not have gas storage, despite evidence that it does exist from the chief scientist Amanda Caples. You can easily find the letter that she addressed to the Honourable Jaclyn Symes when she was Minister for Resources in March 2020, and it talks about the enormous quantities of gas that could be available should government regulation allow.

The member for Bulleen talked in detail about a number of companies that have done research and made statements about the quantities of gas that are there now. The minister really does not like this. I understand that there was a nine-month exchange of letters between her and the Commonwealth ministers. The minister in Victoria just did not want to do this and wanted to kick it over to the Commonwealth but finally realised that it is in her jurisdiction. Whilst we have a transition – and I heard the government talk about this transition – to renewables, you cannot just bolt ahead. You have to have this transition. The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Hawthorn, talks often about the need for transition.

One of the things that is also neglected by the government is that no-one is out there looking for gas. They are not out there looking for gas for a reason, because the government is saying ‘Gas is demonised. Don’t come and look for it in Victoria. Go elsewhere.’ As if they are going to apply to put all of this money and investment into exploration to identify it – ‘Great, we’ve got it’ – if they are not allowed to use it. There is no point in them doing that. This is a barrier to exploration. It is a barrier to people applying for licences. It makes perfect sense that that is why they are not doing it. Gas is vital, and we do have that undersupply, and it is difficult to try and follow the government’s position.

I want to talk just briefly on manufacturing and the need for gas, and it is not small quantities of gas that you might use in a home. Manufacturing and gas-fired furnaces need consistent and extreme heat – heat into the thousands of degrees. I know that the big gas producer out at Dandenong, for example, is a 24-hour operation, and if they need to service the equipment, it takes a day to cool down so that they can do that when the gas is turned off, and then it takes another few days to gently heat that back up when it is turned on. It interrupts that gas supply, and the chopping and changing is damaging for the glass and can really impact on the supply there. Gas is used extensively in making bricks as well. It is so important to understand that they need consistent extreme temperatures to transform all of the raw materials into durable building products. We need houses, we need bricks, we need windows and we need glass. It does not matter what we are building, we need gas to be a very important part of it. When you are growing horticulture – tomatoes or flowers, for example – gas is an important component there.

With homes and hospitality it is actually quite interesting, the government’s position there. The government wants everybody to transition to electric and away from gas. I rely on gas bottles. We do not have gas mains, and I live off grid. If I had electric heaters, I would not be able to have the fridge on or turn the lights on. There are some places where you definitely do need this. In the hospitality industry they rely heavily on gas for cooking. You get a much better product when you are using that quick, fast heat rather than induction heating. I do have an apartment in Melbourne with an induction cooktop, and I absolutely hate it compared to the gas.

Members interjecting.

Cindy McLEISH: I am not a fan. Absolutely, it is terrible. It is so slow. You have got to allow an extra 20 minutes when cooking. I do not have an extra 20 minutes. At the same time, this is one of the things that the government has said here. They are forcing households to replace gas heaters and hot water systems when they reach end of life, but it is not the same for cooktops. You are still allowed to have cooktops that rely on gas. So you are allowed to have gas come into your home for the cooktops, but you are not allowed to have it for hot water or gas heaters. I do not think the government has really thought about this. They are a bit all over the place, but they have finally realised that there is a shortage of gas and that they need to do something.

Members interjecting.

Cindy McLEISH: I would expect greater protection from you, Acting Speaker, from the appalling behaviour of those opposite, but I know those opposite do behave appallingly.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Order! I remind the chamber to just pause, please.

Cindy McLEISH: As I have mentioned, this is something that we support. I am not sure that the government support their own bill.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (12:29): I would like to come back to the contribution by the honourable member for Eildon maybe a bit later in my contribution. But I am delighted to rise today to speak on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. This is another very important bill before us here today, one that is critical to addressing the imminent risk of gas shortfalls in southern jurisdictions, including Victoria, and will be critical to avoiding significant adverse economic and social outcomes. As we understand, transitional gas supply, including deep

storage, is needed to support the energy transition to renewables, including to support gas-powered generation of electricity. This is consistent with the strategic direction outlined in the Victorian *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, which sets out a pathway and actions to decarbonise the gas sector through electrical appliances, energy efficiency and increased uptake of renewable gas. However, this will take time and cannot occur fast enough to address the imminent shortfall risk. So this is an important bill for my community and for Victorians, along with the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, which is a particularly important initiative for my community.

Given the cost of living, cheaper power is extremely important for my community in Clarinda, and it is something that my constituents raise with me on a consistent basis. Cost of living, as we all know, is front of mind across my electorate. Utility bills, everyday bills and balancing the family budget are constantly on the minds of families in Clarinda and across the state. This is particularly important in the City of Greater Dandenong, which is right up there in terms of Victoria's most socially disadvantaged local government areas. Given this pressure in my community, across our state and across the country, it makes absolute sense that our focus is on cheap, clean and reliable energy.

We are extremely fortunate in Victoria with our world-class wind resources. Just recently here in this place we had before us the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, which I was proud to make a contribution on along with many of my colleagues on this side. A large focus of that debate was on the cost of living, and how we are utilising our renewables is good news for bills and cost-of-living pressures. Again I will make the point that cost-of-living relief is so important for those doing it tough. For those on fixed income support, for pensioners and for those doing it tough, every little bit helps, so this debate is really important. The Allan Labor government is and has been delivering real and meaningful help: free kinder, free TAFE and also many more initiatives. We are helping Victorians and Victorian families in big ways and in small ways, because every bit adds up. We are making sure that we capitalise on and utilise our world-class renewable wind energy and abundant sunshine, which really make use of the global renewable energy powerhouse to deliver cheap, clean, reliable energy, and that is really important.

That work continues here today with this bill. The bill has three main objectives. Namely, the bill will amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 to allow holders of the petroleum production licence to conduct underground petroleum operations. These operations involve the injection and storage of the onshore petroleum in a natural offshore reservoir for later access. Secondly, the proposed amendments will clarify the underground petroleum storage system (UPSS) activity authorised under the petroleum production licence and appropriately regulate it. This will remove a legislative barrier and promote investor confidence to facilitate the establishment of the \$750 million GB Energy gas production and storage project in Gippsland.

Thirdly, the GB Energy project could help mitigate peak day gas supply shortfalls forecast by the Australian Energy Market Operator to occur potentially as early as 2026 and going into 2027. The GB Energy project could potentially go live in winter 2027 and, together with the phase 3 project, could mitigate the gas shortfall risk for that year. There are only very limited new supply options that are available in that timeframe. The GB Energy project is one. Additional deep storage capacity is also forecast to be increasingly critical in energy reliability over the medium term. These are important and targeted objectives aimed at addressing the imminent risk of gas shortfalls in southern jurisdictions, including Victoria, and they will be critical to avoiding significant adverse economic and social outcomes and ensuring affordable and reliable energy for Victorian families and businesses.

These objectives will be delivered through several amendments. The first of those will enable the permitting of underground petroleum operations through the granting of a petroleum production licence consistent with the onshore UPSS framework. Further, the bill will ensure that the amendments apply to new and existing petroleum production licences. It will also maintain the existing consideration of significant risk of a significant adverse impact framework for impact on or from operations under a petroleum production licence, which is quite relevant. Finally, once again, it will ensure the entire offshore framework contemplates UPSS operations, including through record-

keeping requirements, compliance monitoring and enforcement requirements. These are very important amendments, and the intended outcomes of these amendments are very important for my community and for reliable, affordable energy for all Victorians.

I would like to make a point on the importance of our transition and its consequences, particularly for cost of living and energy bills. As we know, the electrification of Victorian homes will provide cost-of-living relief and lower bills for all Victorians. As we have heard from others, all-electric homes cost less to live in and are better for the environment than dual-fuel homes. Efficient electric appliances are available now and can deliver immediate bill reductions for all households. In terms of money, residents of a new, all-electric detached home can save up to \$1000 per year on energy bills compared to a dual-fuel home. These savings rise to more than \$2200 a year with solar installed. Imagine all of these savings against the cost-of-living pressure that we are having. Every bit helps. I know this exactly, as in my community in the electorate of Clarinda we have single-income earners, pensioners and those who struggle with affordability.

I would like to come back to the contribution by the honourable member for Eildon. It is apparent to me that the only government that understands gas is the Allan Labor government. It is the political party in this state with a pragmatic gas policy. The opposition want to pretend that we are living in the past, flush with abundant fossil gas to power the next industrial revolution. They have got no idea. We have heard their contributions but, dare I say, do not take my word for it, just listen to these quotes from the Grattan Institute's Tony Wood and the former chief scientist:

If there was a lot of gas, these companies would be taking it seriously ...

That was Tony Wood.

Currently, there are no proven and probable ... onshore conventional gas reserves in Victoria.

That was the chief scientist in 2021. On that note I would like to conclude my contribution.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:39): It is a pleasure to rise and talk on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. We understand the purpose of this bill is primarily to allow for offshore underground natural gas storage, and it will involve the transfer of existing natural gas to an offshore reservoir in Victorian waters, to be located off the coast of my neighbouring seat of Gippsland South in the Golden Beach area. Probably the only issue I want to focus on in my contribution today is one that has been touched on by speakers previously, but I want to provide a little bit more detail on it, and that is around the potential impacts on the commercial fishing fleet that operates in the south-eastern waters of this state, primarily out of Lakes Entrance fishing port, and put some concerns that those operators in that industry have on the record. As I said, some other speakers have touched on it, but I would like to provide a little bit more detail. I did ask some questions on these areas of concern that have been raised with me in the bill briefing, and I was to get some responses back in relation to those concerns, which I am sure I will. But they have not been forthcoming as yet. Hopefully we can get those between houses to get some better understanding of that.

I would like to go back over some of those concerns and put them on the record in *Hansard*, and if we do get the opportunity to go into committee in the upper house, hopefully we will have a chance to prosecute some of those responses and some of those answers. But this is what the Lakes Entrance commercial fishing fleet want to know: under the proposal, will there be any seabed infrastructure located off the coastline of Golden Beach? We assume that there possibly will be, so the follow-up question to that is: will it have any impact on the commercial fishing fleet, or can the infrastructure that goes there, whatever it is, be fished over the top of, considering that these trawl nets are very wide and fish very, very deeply on the sea floor? Will the area have exclusion zones put over it? Because if there are to be exclusions zones, that will impact on commercial catches and the ability for fishermen to catch their quota.

Of most particular concern is the lack of consultation that has occurred with both the Lakes Entrance fishing fleet operators and the South East Trawl Fishing Association. There has been some small amount of consultation taken and engaged in historically but certainly nothing of any recent times and nothing with any level of detail that is providing the answers that these people want, and we are talking about people's livelihoods here. What we need is some in-depth consultation, hopefully to occur between houses, that can produce one of two outcomes. It can either say, 'Yes, we do have an issue. There will be infrastructure on the seabed, there will be exclusion zones and that is going to impact on your commercial catch, so let's have a discussion about it,' or it will put their minds at ease that there will be no exclusion zones and net fishermen can fish over these areas without any risk of damage to their gear. We do not want that tangled up on the sea floor.

If there is to be an exclusion area and if there are to be issues around being able to fish in these locations, then discussions need to take place on what compensation will be paid for loss of fishing grounds because, and I will get onto this a little bit later, this commercial sector has over past decades had an enormous amount of grounds continually taken off it for a number of reasons. Why is it so important that we look after our commercial fishermen? There are a whole range of reasons. First of all, it is not only critical to the economy of my electorate – I think of a town like Lakes Entrance, which is primarily based on commercial fishing and tourism; it is a huge employer in the town and a huge part of our industry – but it is also very important to the Victorian economy. It is a sector that kicks the tin when it comes to generating income, wages and jobs in our community. Then of course we have got the overriding situation that we have to feed ourselves.

Fishermen are often referred to as farmers of the sea, and many will be surprised to know that, Victoria being a coastal state and Australia being an island nation, we are a net importer of seafood. It is incredible to think that we are a net importer of seafood. And it is not just a little bit. We import 60 per cent of the seafood we eat in Victoria. We only harvest 40 per cent of our own catches nationwide in Australia. Those figures are not exactly transferable to Victoria, but they are not dissimilar. So when we talk about the potential loss of more fishing grounds as something that we need to consider, it alarms me to some degree that we have not had consultation take place with Lakes Entrance Fishermen – that is actually their official business name – but also in-depth discussions with the South East Trawl Fishing Association, who I have been in contact with this week. They have confirmed that there has been very, very little discussion going on, either to tell them of the ramifications of this proposal or to put their minds at ease that there will indeed be no issues.

Why do we need to have a look at this? Let me go over some of the impediments that have been put in front of our commercial fishers over past decades. First of all, we had the oil and gas fields off that area of coast, which took away massive, massive areas of prime fishing ground. The industry learned to work around them, and the industry learned their exclusion zones there. The fishing industry reformed the areas that it targeted. But we are now talking about decommissioning some of those oil and gas fields, and that is going on right at the present time. One of the proposals is to leave some of that seabed infrastructure in place, whereas the intention was always going to be, when we had the decommissioning of the oil and gas fields, that that infrastructure would be removed and those areas would be returned to commercial fishing. That is possibly not going to be the case. They will not be returned, because those structures will be located on the seabeds. If you can picture nets that are 100 metres wide fishing deep, with a tide change or tide movements or wind movements, they need a fairly big exclusion zone wherever there is an impediment on the sea floor.

On top of this, we have an increasing push for marine parks, which have taken away fishing areas around the country. There are not any recent ones off the coast in my area, but there is talk of that, which makes the commercial fishermen very nervous. Quite often the marine parks are prime fishing grounds, because that is where the fish are. When more marine parks are introduced, they lose more fishing grounds. In addition to that, you then have species closures. Where a species is under threat, they will be told, 'You can't fish this area for this period of time.' Now, on top of all that, we have got wind farm proposals coming in. Fishermen are very, very nervous about where these windfarms will

be located off the Gippsland coast, because invariably they will impact on their fishing grounds. Then, just to put the icing on the cake, we have got this going in, where we are storing gas under the seabed.

The most disappointing element about this is they have not been spoken to. I hope that that will certainly take place very, very shortly and they are spoken to, and hopefully they are given some comfort that there will be no impediment and they can fish over these areas. But if that is not the case and there are to be restriction zones, we need to sit down with the commercial fishing industry and ask them what species are impacted and what the compensation is going to be, because they are just getting squeezed out. They have pretty much had enough of being squeezed out, but especially without being spoken to. Hopefully we can get some answers to those questions. They were not forthcoming in the bill briefing. Maybe some speakers on this side of the house can stand up after my contribution and put some minds at ease if there are to be no impacts at all on the commercial fishing sector. They cannot be taken for granted, and they should be included in the key stakeholder meetings and briefings on any legislation that relates to offshore development. In this case clearly they have not.

Hopefully we can get those answers and continue our support for this bill in the upper house, but we really need speakers who are following to stand up and give them some reassurance or get some questions answered or be ready when we go into committee in the upper house, because it is not good enough that they have not been spoken to about the potential impacts on their sector.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (12:49): I am going to talk about the full issue around this amendment bill. I just want to say the Allan Labor government is a supporter of the fishing industry in Victoria. I have a number of ex-scallop fishermen in the Thomastown electorate, and from what they tell me, it was the Kennett government that actually got rid of scallop fishing in the bay. There was no compensation, and that was after dredging the sea floor. I think it is a bit rich to be trying to accuse the Labor government of not caring when in fact the evidence is the opposite.

Getting back to this bill and the main point of it, which is the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010. This has come about because the Australian Energy Market Operator is forecasting a shortfall of gas supply in Australia as early as 2026. This and the skyrocketing price of gas are due to global factors – not the actions of the Victorian government – that we do not have any control over. But of course we as a government are responsible for doing what we can to ensure prices stay down and that there is energy as required for households and for industry. This legislation is being introduced to help address the issue of the shortfall, predominantly by facilitating the storage of gas for times of peak demand. These amendments do not authorise the production of new gas or affect bans on fracking. That is not the purpose of this bill; that would be separate legislation. This is about facilitating in the main the storage of gas.

On this side of the Parliament we are very proud of the work and achievements in transitioning to renewable energy, and we are very proud of the work from the Minister for Climate Action. We are leading the nation. We need to transition to renewable energy for the sake of our climate and future generations, and it is also critical in providing a cheaper supply of energy to both businesses and households. The opposition, who even now refuse to accept the need to move to renewables, have consistently spread mistruths of gloom and doom and the sky falling in as a way to oppose renewables, using their usual negative scare tactics. However, this legislation demonstrates that when problems arise, when there are legitimate and evidence-based concerns about energy supply, there are ways to address them. That is what the Allan Labor government is doing. We are looking to find solutions to problems rather than just trying to negatively say that there is nothing to be done and therefore do nothing and accept the status quo and the changing climate. This legislation is also a good example of using legislation to overcome obstacles and of the need to have the flexibility of legislation to be able to regulate and to provide a responsive and quick way forward when we come up against problems. As well as doing that of course we want to continue to push for more renewables.

The specifics of this bill, the amendments, allow petroleum production licence holders to conduct underground petroleum operations, and this allows the injection and storage of onshore petroleum in

a natural offshore reservoir for later use. These amendments apply to new and existing petroleum production licences, and they also provide regulatory requirements and a framework, such as record-keeping requirements and compliance, monitoring and enforcement requirements.

While the legislation is general – it is about storage into the future – it has actually been prompted because of the need to cover the shortfall but also to facilitate the establishment of the Golden Beach energy gas production storage project in Gippsland. This again is another example of legislation that is required to cover a specific situation which existing legislation does not accommodate. It shows how the Allan Labor government are active in ensuring that they find solutions, take action and introduce legislation when needed in order to move forward and to ensure that Victoria continues to grow. The Golden Beach project could help mitigate peak day gas supply shortfalls, which are forecast to occur in winter 2027, as I have said. It is expected to deliver natural gas production of up to 30 petajoules. That number does not mean a lot to me, but it is about a quarter of Victoria's annual household and small business consumption. This means that onshore garden-to-ground gas storage is permitted in Australia and enables gas to be injected into the system during periods of high demand.

But of course our real focus and effort need to be on renewable energy. This is the only way that we are going to bring down energy prices and help address cost-of-living pressures. Residents in the electorate of Thomastown are doing their bit and also seeing reduced costs when using renewable energy. As at August this year we have received a total of 5290 Solar Victoria rebates, mostly for solar panels but also for hot water systems and batteries. In addition to this, residents have taken up subsidies and rebates to replace gas heating with electric and they have seen hundreds of dollars in savings. This is what renewable energy can do if people pick it up and we do not have all the negativity and doom and gloom from the opposition trying to stop people looking after their interests and actually looking for lower prices.

I am not going to get into the debate about whether we have got gas or we have not got gas or whether Labor wants to extract it or we are stopping the extraction, because in the end we need renewable energy and we need to meet our targets, and the only way that we are going to have cheaper prices is by using renewable energy. I do not think there is any expert in any area that does not say that renewable energy is cheaper than fossil fuels, and we need to get away from fossil fuels. But in saying that, I just want to add that the company Beach Energy has started producing only this year, and of course that has been done with the agreement and support of the Allan Labor government, which seems to fly in the face of what the opposition is saying around this total opposition and trying to stop and hinder gas production.

As I said, yes, we have renewable targets. We want to see renewables supplying Victorian households and businesses, and that is the only way to cheaper prices, so if you want to constantly go on about gas, you are talking about higher prices, as we have seen throughout the country and in fact throughout the world. Another side to that is the absolute commitment that Labor has made in terms of reducing energy prices and also reducing cost-of-living pressures with the popular Labor government subsidies and also the power saving bonus, which of course did have real effects in allowing people to have a little bit more money in their pocket to do things and not have to use all of that on their power.

We know that some industries are dependent on gas. There are the big freezers and fridges in the food industry, for example, that need a lot of gas, and there has not been a lot of transition from that to some of the renewable energies. Of course it is particularly difficult if you are renting a factory as opposed to owning a factory if you want to start putting solar panels on roofs. I know in Thomastown, again, some of the big food service companies we have helped and supported to move to solar panels, and they are saying that they have saved thousands of dollars a year in doing that and not having to rely on gas as much as in the past. When you look at what is going on in industry – we are talking a lot about households and the subsidies and support provided to households around cost of living and trying to reduce energy bills – in 2023 there were also more than 24,000 businesses across Victoria that received upgrades under the Victorian energy upgrades program. There have been savings of up to \$3700 annually on their bills.

Recently the Minister for Energy and Resources and I visited Automatic Heating, which is a local business in my electorate, and again we are providing support for these businesses that are coming up with some really innovative and exciting ways in which to move to renewable energy. Their automated heating processes and units are all about providing energy sources for businesses transitioning out of gas and using electricity through heat pump systems. So there are many things that are coming up. I think we are finding solutions where there are shortfalls, but that can only be done when governments lead, provide support, provide encouragement and provide a market in which businesses can move to better energy sources.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (12:59): I am delighted to rise to make a contribution on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. I do want to make a couple of comments about the member for Thomastown and her comments about renewable energy and what I would call this government's bloody-minded approach to renewables. Of course we are pro renewables in regional Victoria. However, as people in Thomastown are a beneficiary of renewables, they need to understand what is actually happening in the regions. These solar factories that I talk about –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I will interrupt the member for Ovens Valley to break for lunch but look forward to him continuing the next time we are debating this.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Metro Tunnel

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Treasurer. Today the Treasurer said that the additional \$837 million blowout on the Metro Tunnel will 'have an impact around the state's debt position'. Will all of this blowout be added to Victoria's debt?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:03): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He should have finished the sentence of that quote. I did then go on to say 'unless certain other actions are taken'. What are those certain other actions? If you are taking money out of the Consolidated Fund, one of the things you might want to draw down on might be contingency, and can I assure the Leader of the Opposition that there is more than adequate contingency allocated to this project such that there will not be any adverse impact upon state debt. I love the fact that those opposite will never miss an opportunity to criticise the Melbourne Metro project, a project that they would have stopped had they had a chance.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer is debating the question, and also on relevance I ask that he be drawn back to the question about debt.

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer was being relevant to the question that was asked. The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): The Treasurer also said he was looking at finding 'offsets' to cover the Metro Tunnel blowout. What government services will be cut?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:05): I thank the Leader of the Opposition once again for demonstrating his lack of understanding of how the balance sheet works. One of those offsets may well be a reorganisation of the contingency that has been allocated for this project. In practical terms what that means is that this government has done what any prudent government will do, and that is put aside adequate provision for projects so that they can adequately –

Members interjecting.

Tim PALLAS: There is no contingency deep enough to pull you out of the hole you are in.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: The Treasurer will come back to the question. The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc is warned.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): The Victorian community know that this Labor government they can trust to deliver the projects that Victorians voted for, despite some headwinds from certain members of the community – for example, in Caulfield. We removed level crossings in Caulfield of course in the face of opposition from the local member. Of course the member for Monbulk knows that we removed two level crossings in her community despite opposition from the member for Evelyn.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Evelyn is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN: Of course the member for Carrum and the member for Mordialloc know that we have removed level crossings on the Frankston line as we have gone about making Frankston level crossing free against the opposition of some. Of course the member for Box Hill knows just how bitterly opposed the removal of those two level crossings in his community were, and now that community has safer, less congested roads as a result of those removals. Then of course the member for Box Hill – speaking of the great member for Box Hill – the member for Ashwood and the member for Glen Waverley all know that we are delivering the project that their community voted for in delivering the Suburban Rail Loop.

But we have had a secret plan revealed today. The zombie project has reared its head up again. The east–west link lives as long as the Leader of the Opposition is in the chair. The east–west link is back. Victorians cannot trust this Liberal opposition with projects.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will not be warned. They will be removed from the chamber without warning.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bentleigh, you can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Bentleigh withdrew from chamber.

Planning policy

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Planning. Can the minister confirm that the government is considering mandating a minimum height requirement of four storeys for both the Niddrie and North Essendon activity centres?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:09): I thank the member for his question. If those opposite perhaps were less focused on themselves and caught up over the last four weeks in particular, they would know that probably one of the most pressing issues facing Victorians right now is housing affordability and finding a home and that the focus of the Allan Labor government is on ensuring that Victoria continues to lead the nation in building more homes and approving more homes in the places that matter, close to transport, places like Niddrie –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very direct. The minister is responding generally rather than dealing with the specific subject matter, and it was a very specific question.

The SPEAKER: The minister has had 20 seconds to respond. She has still got 2½ minutes. I ask the minister to come back.

Members interjecting.

Sonya KILKENNY: I heard a member say that we live in hope. In fact that is what the Allan Labor government is focused on, and that is delivering hope and positive outcomes –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Berwick is warned.

Sonya KILKENNY: listening to what matters to Victorians, which is finding an affordable home in a location that is well connected to public transport, to jobs and to services. That is our focus. One thing I would like to remind the opposition of is that if we are to deliver more homes for Victorians –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be direct in answering the question. She is halfway through answering and is yet to deal with the substance of the actual question. If it assists, I am happy to provide the government's plan to the minister which sets it out.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Planning will come back to the question, but I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question. She is being relevant, but the minister will come back to the question.

Sonya KILKENNY: I am setting the context for those opposite about what needs to happen in terms of being able to deliver more homes for Victorians and addressing a very pressing issue that is facing Victorians right now, and that is housing affordability, and that is ensuring that we are unlocking capacity for more homes in the areas where Victorians want to live.

The member has presented the consultation report that has been prepared, presented and put to community for engagement. In fact since March this year we have been engaging with communities on the activity centre pilot work and we have been engaging with local governments on the activity centre pilot work. Community consultation has in fact just closed, and I am delighted to say that after about 230,000 pieces of correspondence and communication were sent out to community members we received over 10,000 submissions, which we are now reviewing. It is exactly what we wanted to see, this kind of community engagement and community response, which goes to the very heart of the issue that this is an important issue for Victorians, ensuring that we are building more homes in the areas that Victorians want to live.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will show respect to members on their feet.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:14): Will the minister accompany the opposition leader and me to a –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarnait can leave the chamber for half an hour. I do not like to have to repeat myself, but members will show respect to members on their feet.

Member for Tarnait withdrew from chamber.

James NEWBURY: Will the minister accompany the opposition leader and me to a community forum in Essendon North this Sunday to answer the questions of local residents concerned about the government's plan, which will mandate a minimum of four storeys across the activity centre?

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:14): What I do want to point out is the mischief that continues to be peddled by those opposite. It does not support community. It does not enhance this –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Evelyn can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Evelyn withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is entirely inappropriate for a minister to attack a community for holding a forum. Outrageous!

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Sonya KILKENNY: I am reminding the opposition that in dealing with communities they need to be truthful. They need to make sure that the information they wish to project is also accurate and factual. No, I will not be attending the forum with the opposition. I would remind those opposite that the engagement process that has taken place, as I said, has generated more than 10,000 submissions, and I am delighted that we have received that kind of community engagement, which we are now working through. It is an indication of the relevance of this matter, the importance of this matter, to communities.

Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:16): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's commitment to the Suburban Rail Loop. This fantastic project will radically change how we move, how we work, how we study and the communities we live in. By 2050 Melbourne will be the size of London: 9 million people. Our public transport system will need to manage almost 12 million extra daily trips. We will need thousands more homes in the right places – near schools, hospitals and universities. This will not be possible without the Suburban Rail Loop, and those opposite want to scrap it.

What the member for Caulfield needs to realise is that you cannot just switch on public transport the way you switch on the record button on your phone. You just need to build it. On this side of the house we are putting in the work today, building for our future. Thanks to the SRL, a student travelling from Traralgon to Box Hill TAFE will save 26 minutes on their commute. A nurse travelling from Frankston to Box Hill Hospital will save an hour on their commute. The first stage of SRL alone will enable 70,000 new homes, which will mean our kids and our grandkids have a better chance of living near their families, their schools and their jobs.

Those opposite put all this at risk. They always look for the easy way out. They had their four wasted, miserable years in office when they did not deliver a single major project. It is clear that those opposite are more focused on themselves, their court case and their secret recordings –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Malvern is warned. I had said I was not going to warn people, so you are lucky.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I refer you to page 160 of *Rulings from the Chair* and Speaker Brooks's rulings that it is entirely inappropriate for a minister to use ministers statements simply as an opportunity to attack the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to his ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

Danny PEARSON: We are the only game in town when it comes to delivering major transport infrastructure, and we are getting on and delivering. Those opposite are more focused on themselves. They do not trust themselves, and Victorians simply should not trust them when it comes to delivering transport infrastructure.

Melbourne Market

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:18): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Why is Labor forcing hardworking fruit and vegetable stall holders at the Epping market to pay more in rent than it would cost to rent office space in Collins Street?

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:19): Can I thank the member for her question. I do also question the figures that have been put to me, but what I will say is that I am aware of the Melbourne Market Authority increasing the rents – over a period of 10 years, I might add. They will still be below market rate for 10 years. They are currently below market rate. They will stay below market rate for a 10-year period. The valuer-general has determined what the value ought to be, and the Melbourne Market Authority are taking the advice of the valuer-general.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:20): Will the minister accompany me to the Epping market –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Melton, that is very disappointing. The member for Lowan on a supplementary question, without assistance so that I can hear.

Emma KEALY: Will the minister accompany me to the Epping market tomorrow morning to meet with frustrated fruit and vegetable stall holders to explain why their rents are increasing by 100 per cent?

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:21): Can I thank the member for her question. As much as I like the member for Lowan, I am spoken for, so I do not need any more dates. I am terribly sorry that you do not like your own enough to go with them. I have actually visited the market. I have visited the market previously. I am sorry I am going to decline your offer of a date, but I can let you know that the Treasurer will be meeting with them.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:22): I rise to update the house on the work the Allan Labor government is doing to build more homes for Victorians. Yesterday I updated the house on how Victoria leads the nation on building more homes – thousands more homes than any other state. And it does not happen by accident. We have not wasted a minute, working hard to build more homes in places that are well connected to public transport, to jobs, to services and to schools, family and friends.

This last month has been a particularly busy time. Whilst others might have been caught up and focused on themselves, the Allan Labor government has been focused on delivering more homes for Victorians. In the last four weeks alone we said yes to 915 homes in Docklands, right on the doorstep of Melbourne's CBD; we said yes to 538 new homes in North Melbourne, right on the tramline and close to the uni, parks and shops; and we said yes to 365 homes in Hawthorn, not far from the Leader of the Opposition, close to parks, close to the train line, close to Auburn Primary and – do you know what else? – right next door to another 206 social and affordable homes built by this government.

Every home approval is a potential new home for a Victorian, but every time you block an approval you are denying a new home for a young Victorian or a Victorian family, a good-quality home in a terrific location that is well connected to public transport and to the services and the things that people

need to lead their daily lives. Those opposite have made it their purpose in life to oppose homes for Victorians. You cannot trust them.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:24): My question is for the Premier. Labor says that the public housing towers cannot be upgraded – that demolishing them is the only option – but a new report from architecture firm OFFICE proves that upgrading the Flemington public housing estates and building more public housing not only is feasible but would keep residents in their communities and save us \$350 million. Premier, in 12 months Labor has been unable to provide a shred of evidence to back up its plan, but OFFICE has advice from experts – from architects, engineers and building surveyors – that proves that these buildings can be upgraded, with wider doorways, balconies, heating and cooling, accessible units, double glazing, better ventilation and an increase in the number of public homes, without privatising them. Here is the evidence that there are alternatives. Where is Labor's evidence that justifies their plan?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I thank the member for Richmond for her question. It is great to see her in the chamber this afternoon, back at work, ready to go. I am delighted to answer a question from the member for Richmond about how we are undertaking the biggest urban renewal of public housing in this state, and we are doing this because public housing tenants deserve respect, they deserve modern homes and they deserve to have accurate information provided to them. Quite disappointingly, we have seen an ongoing pattern of behaviour from the member for Richmond and her Greens political colleagues to provide misinformation and disinformation that is all designed to drive fear among some of our most vulnerable Victorians. I condemn that approach because what we should be doing –

Sam Hibbins: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was specifically about the government's evidence to justify their public housing demolition plans, not to debate the question or to debate what the Greens are saying.

The SPEAKER: Order! A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. There was a very long preamble to that question, and the Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: There was, and it is important that we provide factual information. Indeed the government is already on the record as providing the information that it is estimated that it would cost \$2.3 billion over 20 years to keep these current towers in a habitable condition. When you are faced with that information and when you are faced with an opportunity to not only provide modern homes for public housing tenants but actually build more homes for more Victorians at the same time, we have chosen to build more homes.

We have chosen to build more public, social and affordable homes for vulnerable Victorians, who deserve modern facilities. What they do not deserve is the misrepresentation that is coming from the Greens political party. I mentioned a pattern of behaviour from the member for Richmond, who opposed social and affordable housing developments in Collingwood. We reject that approach from the Greens political party. We are determined to support those Victorians who rely on the government to build a home, to put a roof over their head. We will work with those public housing tower residents. We are prepared to work hard every single day of the week, but that work is made just that little bit harder because of the misinformation and disinformation, the deliberate campaign that is being run by the Greens political party. We will continue to work constructively with public housing tenants. It would be great if the member for Richmond could get on board with that opportunity.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:28): Let us talk about the facts that we do have, Premier. The facts are that when the government demolishes homes, they have to displace over 10,000 people –

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Richmond, through the Chair.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Let us talk about the facts, and the facts are that when a government demolishes homes they have to displace over 10,000 people, and leaked information coming out today shows that Homes Victoria is stockpiling private rentals in Melbourne suburbs, offering premium rents just to accommodate the public housing residents whose homes they are demolishing. When the private rental market is under such strain, when the impact of displacement on public housing residents is so great and when we have proof that the buildings can be refurbished, it just does not make sense to press on. Premier, it is not too late to change course. This was your predecessor's careless plan. Will you now stop the demolition and privatisation of public housing?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:29): The member for Richmond has exposed that she is all about the politics and not about supporting vulnerable Victorians by making reference to privatisation. There is no privatisation going on here. Whilst the Greens use fundraising efforts to support these sorts of reports and while they go on with those sorts of disingenuous approaches, what we are focused on doing is, yes, working through the public housing tower refurbishments. Yes, we will have to provide temporary accommodation for those residents because we are building them new homes. Like through our \$6.3 billion Big Housing Build, we are building homes right across the state. Yes, we are, where the opportunity arises, in a very modest way, looking at properties on the private rental market, because we are supporting vulnerable Victorians to have a roof over their head.

Ministers statements: economy

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:31): It really gives me great pleasure to update the house on the state's stellar jobs growth. More than 862,000 new jobs have been created since the Labor government was elected in 2014. We now have a record labour force of 3.78 million Victorians in work. Indeed Victoria has created more than 130,000 jobs over the last 12 months, more than any other state over this time. Unemployment remains at historic lows, more than two percentage points lower than when we came to office. For those playing at home, that is what we inherited from those opposite. So it is no wonder that Deloitte Access Economics projects Victoria to have the strongest economy over the next five years. It is good news for anybody who might be looking for a new job – anybody in close proximity who might be looking to retrain and upgrade their skills.

The news is just as good in regional Victoria, which has benefited from the government's preferential payroll tax rate and a record \$45 billion worth of investment over the past decade. More than 150,000 new jobs have been created in regional Victoria alone since this government was elected, a 22.9 per cent jump, the highest growth of any state and a dramatic improvement compared to the anaemic four years of jobs growth that occurred under those opposite. While those opposite squabble about their jobs, we are focused on the jobs of Victorians, and in a very emphatic way we can demonstrate to Victoria that we are materially shifting the dial and creating jobs.

Housing

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:33): My question is to the Premier. A leaked report shows that between June and December 2023 the number of public homes managed by Homes Victoria –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the House!

Richard RIORDAN: Start again?

The SPEAKER: Yes.

Richard RIORDAN: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. A leaked report shows that between June and December 2023 the number of public homes managed by Homes Victoria fell by an incredible 446. Why has this government failed to build extra public housing, as promised?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:34): I thank the member for Polwarth for his question and his hasty rewrite after the Greens nicked the question he was actually going to ask. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to talk about our ongoing investment that we are making in building more public and social and affordable homes in Victoria. The member for Polwarth asked me a question about data.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The minister will leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Frankston is warned again.

Minister for Employment withdrew from chamber.

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I was not seeking the Premier to rehash her failed housing statement, I was looking for the reasons for her inability to fulfil the housing statement.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sunbury can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier has been on her feet for less than 30 seconds. She was being directly relevant to the question. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order and that you ask the member to sit in his place and listen to the answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! Thank you for your advice, Leader of the House. Member for Polwarth, the Premier has had just over 30 seconds to answer. We will give her an opportunity to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying before the member for Polwarth made his point of order, I was referring to the member for Polwarth's question. He asked me about data, and I am delighted to be able to share with the member for Polwarth. This is real data, not fake data, just so we are clear for the benefit of the member for Polwarth. We are talking about real homes for real tenants, not fake patients in Polwarth, just to be clear. As part of our Big Housing Build of investment, and this is building homes right across the state, under the program to date 10,000 homes are underway or complete and nearly 5000 households have moved into brand new homes. We are working hard at every stage and at every level to build more public, social and affordable homes and work with the private sector.

If the member for Polwarth wants to grab an opportunity, we have been given some invitations today from some people opposite looking for some friends. They have reached out across the aisle looking for some friends. They need some support. I say this to the member for Polwarth: come on board and say to your colleagues, 'Stop blocking housing projects.' Come on board. If the member for Polwarth is fair dinkum about supporting our efforts to build more social, affordable and public housing –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold that point of order, but the Premier will come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was referring to the member for Polwarth's apparent interest in building more social, affordable and public homes –

A member interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: extra, absolutely – which is why I hope the member for Polwarth has raised with the Leader of the Opposition his opposition to public and affordable housing in his electorate and with the member for Brighton, who opposed projects in his electorate –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being directly relevant to the question. She was not debating the question. She was responding to the issues that were raised by the member for Polwarth, and I ask that you rule the Manager of Opposition Business's point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I thank the member for Polwarth for the opportunity to remind him and the house of the ongoing investment that we are making in building more homes across Victoria, and I would hope that with his new-found passion for this policy area he comes on board and opposes those in his own party room – you have been doing a bit of that lately – who try and block these efforts.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:39): Property Investment Professionals of Australia chair Nicola McDougall said:

Rather than sneakily siphoning properties out of the private rental market to fix a quagmire of its own making, the Allan government should instead start addressing the fundamental reasons why investors are selling up in droves, which is its new land tax regime ...

Why is Labor so incompetent at building public homes that it has to crowd out the private rental market in order to fix its shortfall?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:40): The member for Polwarth is wrong, and it again demonstrates that you just cannot trust the member for Polwarth and the Liberal Party when it comes to building more homes for more Victorians. You just cannot trust them. He has not condemned those fake patients in Polwarth, and we will see that he has not condemned his own Leader of the Opposition.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is again debating the question and just being nasty.

The SPEAKER: The Premier answered the question at the beginning. I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Even Bev McArthur thinks the Liberal Party has a problem with women, and you have just demonstrated it once again, my friend. We are getting on –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: As if we needed any more evidence. We are going to get on and build more homes. You cannot trust those opposite, but Victorians know they can trust us to build more homes.

The SPEAKER: I am really disappointed in the disrespectful behaviour to members on their feet today. Member for Polwarth, do you think that is funny? I would like you to apologise.

Richard Riordan: I apologise.

Ministers statements: regional healthcare workforce

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:42): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's ongoing work to support our regional healthcare workforce. Victorians know that unlike those opposite, who went to war with our nurses and ambos, on this side of the place we have backed both those workforces in and we have grown that workforce by 40 per cent. Now we are building more homes in the regions to continue this growth.

Healthcare workers are not immune to some of the challenges of finding an affordable house to live in, and that is why the Allan Labor government has stepped in. The Regional Worker Accommodation Fund is supporting health services to deliver accommodation for workers and their families. This is a

huge boost for regional Victoria, with 10 health services set to deliver housing, including in Wonthaggi, Colac, Timboon, Omeo, Bairnsdale, Hopetoun, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Kyabram and Kerang. And there is more. The \$790 million Regional Health Infrastructure Fund has already delivered more housing and more upgraded worker housing in Castlemaine, Maryborough, Mallee Track, Robinvale, Seymour, Boort and Swan Hill, with even more projects in the planning stage.

While we are busy delivering record funding to support our healthcare workforce and delivering record funding into our health system, those on the other side of the place are too busy recording one another. And as for their housing policy, I am sure an eight-year-old could write one for them that would be better than their existing one, if they have one.

Constituency questions

Sandringham electorate

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:45): (840) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Over the past four weeks many residents have written to me voicing concerns regarding the construction of a 2-metre-high cyclone fence along the rail corridor between Hampton and Sandringham from Crisp to Bridge streets. This fence was installed without community consultation and has frustrated locals. One resident likened the fence to that of a prison. Others are upset that the fencing hinders the ability of volunteers to conserve the local environment. Residents have questioned the need for this fence given there were existing barriers to discourage people from crossing the tracks. At a time when the Allan Labor government's debt is on track to surpass \$188 billion, my constituents have the view that this is a waste of public funds. I therefore ask: will the minister explain the rationale of this fence, given legitimate community anxiety about the preservation of the local environment where volunteers can no longer access the area?

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:45): (841) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. As the minister knows, just a few weeks ago we announced some fantastic news: the state and Commonwealth Labor governments will invest \$63.5 million to kick off planning works to rebuild Sunshine station. This work is critical to creating a rail connection to Melbourne Airport and more frequent and reliable services in Melbourne's growing west. Not too long ago Sunshine was upgraded as part of our government's regional rail link project, which delivered massive benefits to my electorate of Laverton and allowed trains to take commuters in Tarnait and Truganina to the city via Sunshine. This game-changing investment will make Sunshine station the number one transport interchange in Melbourne's west, a super hub, if you will, along with being the first step in delivering Melbourne Airport rail. The new Sunshine station will unlock capacity for additional services, very importantly, from Wyndham Vale, and allow for future electrified trains to run from Melton. My question is: how will this investment deliver benefits for commuters in Melbourne's west?

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:46): (842) My constituency question is to the Treasurer in this National Carers Week, and the information I seek is whether he has any reforms planned for the State Revenue Office to assist those with a disability accessing their land tax exemptions. Last week we had the mother of an adult daughter contact my office saying she has been forced to yet again prove her daughter's disability to the SRO to gain a land tax exemption. Despite her daughter having been in receipt of an NDIS package for quite some time and having a recognised disability signed off by various agencies for quite some time, the SRO demanded another doctor's letter, which had to be accessed by booking a double appointment in this time of doctor shortages. This delay has meant she missed the deadline for her appeal, meaning that she has got to pay up-front in the hope of getting it back down the track, which is money she cannot afford. The system needs reform, and I ask the Treasurer if he has any plans to do that.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:48): (843) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. On behalf of residents I ask the minister if she can provide me with further information about the recently announced \$964 million road maintenance blitz and how it will benefit road users in the electorate of Thomastown. Following extreme weather events that are more frequent due to climate change, residents are noticing and reporting to me sections of road that are in great disrepair. As we know, roads are so important to getting around, accessing services and getting to work, school and more. The Allan Labor government knows we need to maintain existing roads as well as get on with the big projects that have been undertaken in Thomastown, such as the removal of the Keon Park level crossing, the duplication and connection of O'Herns Road to the Hume Freeway, the duplication of Epping Road and the removal of roundabouts.

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:48): (844) My constituency question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. The Country Fire Authority is a central part of our great state, with Victorians directly supporting this vital service through the payment of the fire services levy. This levy has seen an increase of between 40 and 64 per cent, which has been implemented without broad community consultation. Shoreham CFA recently contacted the minister and my office regarding the mystery around where the additional \$186 million raised from this increase will go. In fact while the fire services levy has increased, there has been a reduction of over \$60 million in CFA funding. Shoreham CFA is one of many stations in Nepean crying out for more support, so, Minister, when will the CFA stations in my electorate get the increased funding support they need?

Pakenham electorate

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (14:49): (845) My question is for the Minister for Housing: how many homes have been completed or are under construction as part of the Big Housing Build in the Pakenham district so far? I know the state government is making great progress in the construction of social housing, ensuring people on low incomes having difficulty securing a private rental or unable to purchase their own property can still have a place to call home. In June this year suburb trends put Pakenham in the top 10 suburbs experiencing the worst rental pain. It is also one of the state's fastest growing peri-urban suburbs, with a predicted influx of another 30,000 residents within the next 20 years. The Big Housing Build is a positive example of the Allan Labor government working on its commitment to achieving our goals in the housing statement.

South Barwon electorate

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (14:50): (846) My question is to the Minister for Environment. I welcome the government's announcement made last weekend to provide free camping on Parks Victoria land from 1 December 2024 until 2025. My question is: given how popular camping has become in Victoria, will the minister look to expand the number of campsites made available to Victorians this coming summer?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:51): (847) Just like the fantastic member for Pakenham, my question is also for the Minister for Housing, and my question is: how many homes have been completed or are under construction in Preston and Reservoir as part of the Big Housing Build so far? We both share an interest in that very important area. As the minister knows from her visits to our area, one of the great things about our social housing developments is the very high quality of the builds. Certainly we were out doorknocking last week, and unfortunately you can tell the mid-century government builds as soon as you open the gate, because they did not have the investment in quality and design that we might have liked. However, that is not true for our builds. It is a huge credit to everyone involved that they are indistinguishable from those built for the private market. Unfortunately, an upshot of that, if you like, as the minister knows, is that the community perhaps

cannot as obviously see the huge investment that we are making in local social housing developments in Preston and Reservoir, and as such any information the minister can provide will help us have that conversation with the community.

Shepparton electorate

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:52): (848) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the information that I seek is: when will the minister provide more funding to fix the appalling condition of the roads in my electorate? In the announcement this week the minister announced some road-repairing funding that only included 1.4 kilometres of road repairs in my electorate. The Echuca–Mooroopna road is only one of many roads in my electorate that are in desperate need of repairs and urgent attention. I recently attended a road safety community forum run by Victoria Police. The appalling condition of our roads was raised as a matter of urgency. RoadSafe Goulburn Valley were in attendance and also raised their concerns with the unsafe condition of our roads. Our community has experienced a significant rise in road accidents and fatalities in recent months, and we must do all we can to ensure that our roads are safe to drive on. Currently they are not. My office is inundated with concerned constituents calling for repairs to our roads. Our unsafe roads are crumbling and filled with dangerous potholes, and our broken road service is putting lives at risk.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:53): (849) My question is also for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I noted with great excitement her announcement this week that the Allan Labor government is rolling out a \$964 million road maintenance blitz across our state, rebuilding, repairing and resurfacing roads impacted by flooding rains and the wear and tear of increased traffic volumes. Alongside this road maintenance blitz, which represents the largest single-year investment in road maintenance in Victoria's history, I know that the department's crews and contractors are out conducting seasonal maintenance of roadside verges across Victoria, and I want to thank the minister and her team for their responsiveness to my regular advocacy on behalf of community members who share my deep concern about illegal dumping along our key arterial roads, including Somerton Road, Oaklands Road and Mickleham Road, which are often in environmentally sensitive areas abutting beautiful areas like Woodlands Historic Park in our valuable green wedge land. On behalf of the communities across my local Greenvale, can the minister please advise me how the Victorian government's \$964 million road maintenance blitz will help to deliver smoother, safer and better roads in suburbs like Roxburgh Park, Craigieburn, Somerton and Greenvale?

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:54): I have reviewed the constituency questions from yesterday. The member for Eildon asked a broad policy question that was not explicitly linked to her electorate or constituents, so therefore I rule the question out of order. The member for Monbulk also asked a broad policy question that was not sufficiently linked to her electorate or constituents, and I rule that question out of order. The member for Rowville asked the minister to provide information to an organisation in his electorate, which is in effect requesting an action from the minister, and I therefore rule the member's question out of order.

Bills

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (14:54): Before lunch I had just started on my contribution. I was busy talking about the contribution of the member for Thomastown and talking about renewable

energy and their passion for renewable energy, which is common across both sides. However, they are the recipients of the renewable energy that is produced in our regional areas, and that is why I was saying that you need to consider the thoughts and the businesses of the regional areas when you are building these solar factories or wind farms that Melbourne clearly is a beneficiary of. I just urge them to continue to consider those communities, which they are certainly not doing up my way at Meadow Creek.

This is the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. If there is an issue that is all over the place with this government, it is certainly gas. The Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources, who clearly hates gas and has said that on numerous occasions, is determined to stamp out gas, which is a cheap energy resource –

A member interjected.

Tim McCURDY: No, no. I think there is still plenty of gas around. Is that why you are doing this bill, so that you can store gas that is not there? It is a cheap source of energy. The minister, who clearly does not understand the cost-of-living crisis that mums and dads who are counting every dollar are going through, is not concerned about cheap energy for our communities, and gas is one of those. We know the Premier has been handed a ticking time bomb with the gas issue, and she has certainly flip-flopped with the gas process over the last few weeks. I think there were a few journos who ended up with a bit of egg on their face when they believed that the Premier really had backflipped but she had not and then she changed her mind and they did not know where they stood. But there was a bit of egg on some of the faces of the journos.

Victoria and Victorians do not know whether they are coming or going. The bill is a commonsense bill. There is no doubt about it. Building infrastructure to have gas storage at Golden Beach is a commonsense solution: storing gas locally for future use. Banning gas or not banning gas – that argument continues on in cabinet, and we are now storing gas for future use. What has changed in the gas debate? I do not think there is that much change in the debate itself. It is just good old-fashioned polling, and when the polling shows the government is in a bit of trouble, all of a sudden they need to backflip on a few ideas and start to look at commonsense issues like this to make sure they can remain in power. They are governing to remain in power, not governing for all Victorians, which we always hear them say. There are some examples of that.

I spoke earlier in the day and yesterday about the Queensland fruit fly program up in my area. That is about governing for Victorians, that is about giving support to communities where fruit fly from towns affects fruit growers who manage fruit fly on their own farms. But again they have ripped this funding away. and that is an example of communities that are just going without. While the government says that they govern for all Victorians, we know they do not.

Meadow Creek solar farm is another example. It is a solar factory that nobody wants in Meadow Creek. Of course we all support renewable energy, but who in their right mind would put 2.5 million kilograms of lithium iron in paddocks when that are going to end up with greater lead storage in the soil and in good waterways. It looks good on TV in Melbourne, but it does hurt the communities that are affected by it.

This bill will establish a pipeline and infrastructure to transfer onshore gas to offshore reserves for future use. Victoria does face gas shortages as early as next year. Normally that would not worry Labor at all because it is a fuel that they want to see not used in Victoria, but of course when you have got an election a couple of years down the track it changes things. All of a sudden you need to be seen to be supporting communities because energy is one of the biggest costs, our communities are telling us, in their cost-of-living concerns. As I said, all of a sudden, once we are two years out from an election, somebody says, ‘We’ve got to turn this ship around. It’s time to try to win some people back, because certainly the pendulum has gone too far to the left.’

This flash of common sense at Golden Beach natural gas storage involves filling it in the summer and drawing down on it in the winter, and again I suspect we will see the same thing in future generations with these solar farm factories that I have been talking about on prime agricultural land. Meadow Creek have invited the Minister for Planning to come. She says she cannot make it, which is an awful shame, because she needs to understand what these communities are saying, how they feel and the landscape, not just the reports that have been given, which we know are very inaccurate. Down the track I suspect future generations will say, 'We can't feed our nation, but we've got all of these solar panels on prime land. What will we do?' In the meantime generations of farmers like the Conroys at Bobinawarra will get squeezed out of food production, and they will disappear.

Solar factories cannot feed a nation. They will grow and they will be a scar on the landscape and a stain on our countryside. Young kids who want to be farmers, who dream of nurturing animals and growing crops, which is the true definition of a farm, will be resigned to moving away and working in town, because the farming sector and prime agriculture like Meadow Creek are demoted or downgraded to lithium ion panels. Not only do the government stand by and watch, they actively endorse and encourage this when we know these reports are so wrong. As we are in this planning phase and this application, I sincerely hope that the minister does consider all the submissions and be serious about making decisions that are going to be the best thing for the community – and Victoria, I get that. But it also has to be the best thing for that community.

As I said earlier, I have seen soil tests on farmland that has no lithium ion solar panels on it that show up to 22 units of lead in the ground, and where there are solar panels, underneath those solar panels there are up to 252 units of lead in the ground. They are issues that need to be taken into consideration. I think the damage that can be done will be irreparable. As I said, if you are going to govern for all Victorians, we need to consider the people of Meadow Creek, because that decision will be made in the coming months. That will not just decide Meadow Creek; it will be the foundation, the building block, and decide the future of tens of thousands of acres or hectares in the next three to five years.

When we talk about this bill, good governments should listen, understand and act. This Victorian Allan Labor government listen – they listen to friends, families, donors and supporters – but they do not listen to the local communities, the communities that have been affected, and businesses get hurt. And the government understand – they understand personal agendas. They understand political climates and outcomes, but they do not understand ramifications five or 10 years down the track and the families that are affected. And they do act – they act in the interest of themselves, beneficial to Labor ideals, but they do not act for all Victorians. They do not consider the long-term effects; they are just thinking about the next election.

This gas storage bill will have benefits for Victorians. However, it will have ramifications for local fishermen, and we heard that from the member for Gippsland East – Lakes Entrance fishermen. I do urge the government to listen, understand and act on the issues and the concerns that the Lakes Entrance fishermen have, because those local communities and local businesses are the ones that are affected the most when these programs and projects take place. I heard the member for Sunbury yesterday when he was speaking on one of the bills, talking about showing leadership and responsibility for all Victorians. Well, it is not too late for the Premier to show some leadership, meet with locals, consider our views, act accordingly and start governing for all Victorians.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:04): I am pleased to follow on just after being mentioned and to have the opportunity this afternoon, after question time, to contribute to debate on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. This bill of course forms part of a wider package of investment and reforms that have been delivered by this government over a substantial period of time. The Minister for Police, who is at the table, is ever signing cards. I am yet to receive one of those cards, but I live in hope. This is a significant and important bill. It is a piece of legislation that has come to the house that goes to our security and storage and making sure that we provide for provisions within our state to know and understand what is happening, both within the market and of course within the context of energy supply within our growing state.

As other members in this house have mentioned, I have had the opportunity to speak on a number of bills over a significant period of time now that go to what is significant investment in terms of the transition. We know and understand, and it is in many ways incredibly disappointing, that we lost close to a decade of federal leadership in this space when it comes to energy supply across our country. What was incredibly disappointing I think for not just Victorians but people right across our great nation was indeed that lack of investment and leadership from what was previously the federal coalition government. What of course we needed in this space was leadership. I am very pleased, and I think that the vast majority of Victorians are very pleased, when we move about our local community as local members and speak to local residents about solar panels on roofs, about the delivery of factories and about the investment in wind technology, knowing of course that this market is something that is undergoing significant transition and is indeed a very important part of the equation that comes to supply. As I mentioned before, it is a dynamic, changing market that is in need of constant checks and balances.

This bill relates to gas storage by amending the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 to clarify that offshore underground gas storage is permitted in Victoria. This comes after a significant piece of work, a large body of work that has been done, to ensure that the technology, the provisions and the legality around storage are indeed provided for by this piece of legislation. It is not meant to be seen as a standalone piece of legislation that does not fit in with the wider narrative, with the important framework that is being delivered as part of energy within our state.

I have heard many references to the minister responsible for the portfolio. I do just want to say, as I think the member for Bentleigh said, that the minister is the longest-serving energy minister in the nation. I just want to put on the record my thanks for and acknowledgement of the work that has been done by the minister, her office and relevant departments and agencies, because what is incredibly important is that the government is listening to local communities, as I mentioned earlier, but also providing those options and opportunities for people to assist with what is a really important transition. That transition comes as there are challenges right across the globe with supply and of course challenges with cost. I do not think any member of this house or any member in the other place is by any stretch saying to local communities or under the assumption that this space, this sector, is not undergoing significant transition. Those pressures that are within communities are around cost and supply and the dynamic nature we are seeing within the energy market.

Not so long ago we had what was yet another severe weather event. These events not only harm the network and create increasing and ever-demanding issues within the transmission lines to get energy to where it is needed right across communities but increase costs when they happen. What we want to do as a team is ensure that we have got those provisions in place that go to both storage and delivery and the use of new technologies, whether it is solar and wind or batteries, as I mentioned earlier – those opportunities to make sure that we have got what is in many ways a nimble, flexible, dynamic way to generate and supply all of our communities right across our state safe, reliable and cost-effective energy.

It is incredibly important to understand that it is in all of our interests to make sure that all of the technology is used within this space and all of the investment in, as I mentioned before, if you think about it, what is a rapidly transforming environment. Think about what the debate must have been like even, dare I say it, 10 years ago or 20 years ago in this space, and think how far we have come in terms of a local community level but also from a network perspective. Using those technologies is of course incredibly important. I know when I studied science at uni many of the technologies that are in place today were never heard of. If we can think about what governments can do in terms of levers and in terms of opportunities for the next decade and of course many, many years after that, I think what we will be able to do is set in place a really important framework that will ensure we as a state are transitioning in a very effective way.

This bill is just one piece of the puzzle. It is one area which we know and understand, when it comes to gas and the pressures, and has been very well canvassed by the minister and others. This is an

opportunity for storage, but as I said before, you can look at the challenges before us as a large piece of the puzzle. I am really proud to say that we have been part of a team that is absolutely transitioning in what is a very, very, very good way. That is not to say that everything is perfect, because of course it never is. We are making sure that we are working with communities and we are listening to and understanding, as I mentioned before, key partners in industry, and the advances in science and tech are of course an ongoing conversation that we are always prepared to have. Our door needs to constantly remain open, and we need to keep investing, whether it is through the budget process or whether it is through projects, programs and initiatives.

I have to say that when I move around my local electorate – Acting Speaker, I hope it is the same for you and all members of the house – having an opportunity to talk about that transitioning market is really important. There are challenges, and those challenges are exacerbated by severe weather events and by supply and storage, which of course can be a challenging situation with what is a growing population. But what we remain constant on is our determination to bring more renewables into the mix, to work with industry and to work of course with our partners on the delivery of the SEC, making sure that we are providing those opportunities for communities and –

Members interjecting.

Josh BULL: It has taken 9 minutes, but they have just fired up over there. They have gone from zero to hero over there, those three.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Josh BULL: I am excited that you are excited, member for Polwarth. I am excited that you are excited about our energy transition. There are all sorts of skits that I could see looking at you three, but I am not going to be drawn, not with 30 seconds to go. There are all sorts of references about the three – I am not even going to go there. This government remains focused on and committed to ensuring that we are transitioning in a safe, effective, reliable way. If it was up to those opposite, we would not be where we are today. I very proudly commend the bill to the house.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (15:14): I would also like to make some remarks on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. Victorians are terrified, and they are right to be. We are watching on our TV screens hurricanes decimate entire towns in the US, a stark reminder of the floods, the extreme weather and the bushfires that we ourselves have experienced here in Victoria and are very likely to see decimate our towns in the future. The climate crisis is here and it is here now. These impacts are what we are seeing at just 1.5 degrees of warming. Imagine what 2 degrees, 3 degrees or 4 degrees would do to our beautiful state of Victoria and our lives. The earth simply cannot afford a single new coal, oil or gas project. You cannot put out a fire by pouring more fuel onto it. It is that simple.

But both our federal and state Labor governments continue to open the floodgates for new fossil fuel projects. They continue to support and approve new fossil fuel projects, and it is no wonder that people are turning away from Labor and from the Liberals in droves if they will not do anything to protect our future from the impending climate crisis. This is the context in which this bill is brought before us. The United Nations, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and even the International Energy Agency have said that no new fossil fuel developments can possibly be allowed if we want to avoid worsening climate disaster. Yet this bill that the Labor government has put forward is precisely about allowing new fossil fuel projects. By enabling new offshore underground gas storage, the bill will facilitate more gas drilling, production and consumption.

To explain this we just need to look at the project the bill has been designed to facilitate: the Golden Beach gas project off the coast of Gippsland here in Victoria. The Golden Beach gas project has two phases. Phase 1: GB Energy drills the Golden Beach gas field 3 kilometres off Ninety Mile Beach in Gippsland and pumps out about 40 petajoules of gas – that is about a quarter of Victoria's annual usage. Phase 2: GB Energy converts that site into a gas storage facility, which it then plans to refill

with gas to store for a rainy day. Essentially this bill is enabling the storage element of this project, but in doing so it also enables the gas drilling, which probably would not happen and probably would not stack up financially for the gas company without the storage part being allowed afterwards, which is what this bill is all about facilitating.

Both gas drilling and storage create all sorts of immediate safety and environmental concerns now and into the future. We know that oil and gas pipelines leak all the time. We have had three leaks off Victorian waters this year alone, and it is October. We are so worried about it that Parliament just passed an inquiry into how we decommission that ageing, rusting infrastructure which is leaking. Who knows what drilling the ocean and then refilling, pumping and refilling the wells again could lead to in our oceans. GB Energy plans to operate this site for 40 years, so that is 40 years of immediate risks to marine environment and 40 years of continually pumping gas into a climate that cannot afford it.

But the other thing is Labor's plan to store offshore gas is not happening in isolation. We have had three oil and gas leaks in Victoria's oceans in this year alone. They were all leaks from old wells and pipes run by Esso – or ExxonMobil as they used to be known. But just a month ago the Labor planning minister in Victoria gave approval for Esso to start another dodgy fossil fuel project, a new carbon capture and storage project off the Gippsland coast, without even assessing its onshore environmental impacts. That is right: Labor in Victoria has approved another fossil fuel project without needing a proper environmental assessment.

For anyone unfamiliar with carbon capture and storage, it is a failed, dangerous, multibillion-dollar Trojan Horse for the fossil fuel lobby to keep them in business. Instead of shutting down a coal plant or a gas mine and moving to solar and wind and clean energy, companies have said, 'Don't worry. Instead we can spend a ton more energy to capture a small fraction of our emissions, pump them offshore using leaky old gas pipelines and bury them in used wells under the ocean floor.' I mean, what could possibly go wrong? Well, actually, a lot. Projects have tried to do this around the world and have failed miserably to store the carbon that they said they would. There is no guarantee that these emissions will not leak into the ocean and leak into the atmosphere. And yet this Labor government is exempting this project from environmental assessments. No wonder we are in a climate crisis with the Labor government here in Victoria making decisions like this.

Unfortunately, it is not the only dodgy thing that is happening with climate change in Victoria right now at the hands of this Labor government. Near Geelong the community is having to fight to stop a gas terminal in Corio Bay, a project that has been rejected once already and now has reared its ugly head again. This is a project that threatens to destroy Ramsar wetlands in order to import even more gas into Victoria. The project is completely baffling. There is no reason Australia should be needing to import gas. We already export more than we could ever use. More than 80 per cent of our gas is either sold overseas or burnt and used in the process of processing and then exporting that gas overseas.

The thing is, Viva's terminal has already been rejected. Viva's shoddy environment effects statement was comprehensively rejected by Geelong communities and environmental experts in 2022. Last year it was officially knocked back by the Minister for Planning, and communities thought this farce was over. But as Labor has now started rolling out the red carpet for gas companies, Viva is now giving it another crack. So again it falls on our coastal communities, climate experts and First Nations groups fighting for sea country to put their valuable time and energy into stopping these climate disasters again and again, one by one. The Viva gas import terminal is a disaster, but our movement is strong. The community have stopped it once before, and they will stop it again.

The context of this bill is very important. It comes at a time when scientists tell us that we should be getting off gas as soon as possible, that it is potentially even more polluting when it comes to climate change than coal. Yet Labor are enabling more offshore gas storage and approving onshore carbon capture and storage projects, and their actions are now also encouraging the possibility of another zombie gas terminal – and all this for billion-dollar fossil fuel companies who pay next to no tax in Australia, companies who continue to fight climate solutions tooth and nail and companies who ship

80 per cent of our gas offshore and force Australians to pay inflated international prices for our remaining 20 per cent.

It is true that here in Victoria we use more household gas than any other state. We also drill a lot of gas. We drill so much that we are still an exporter of gas to New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia. Everybody wants to make sure that households have enough energy to heat and cool their homes and their water and to do everything that they need in their homes. But the thing is, the government are now worried about medium-term gas shortages, which they say is the rationale for this bill – a problem which they could have seen coming. I am sure they did see it coming, but they avoided dealing with this problem, which they could have dealt with by reducing our reliance on gas over the last years and over the last decades, over which time we have known very much about climate change. We have known for a very long time the dangers of burning gas, and it is only in the last few years that the Victorian government has attempted to do anything to reduce our gas use. For decades the government has resisted calls to help households electrify. To their credit, the government in Victoria are now finally doing some of this electrification, and that is a very good thing. But it is late in the game, and it could have been happening years ago. It could have been happening decades ago, when we knew the dangers of gas, and right now it could be happening a lot faster to avoid the need to open new fossil fuel projects.

I am sure that Labor will say that this is unrealistic, but let us look at the receipts. Years ago I got up here in this place many times and called for the government to ban new homes from connecting to gas and to make them all electric. The Labor planning minister stood here in this place and laughed at me and belittled me, and a few years later what happened? Labor adopted the policy. Imagine the position we would be in now if thousands of homes had not been connected to gas in those intervening years. Years ago we called for incentives to switch homes to electricity and away from gas, particularly as more evidence came out –

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: I am sure those opposite would be very interested to hear this evidence about how bad gas is for kids in their homes, leading to huge increases in childhood asthma.

If you do not care about climate change, I hope you care about kids' health and childhood asthma. While we really welcome all of Labor's actions in their *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, unfortunately what has happened in the last little while is that Labor have been spooked by the Liberals and the gas companies running a scare campaign, and it has meant that Labor have backtracked on key pieces of their gas policies. They will continue to allow new gas cooktops to be installed in homes when old ones break down even though we know that induction electric cooktops are safer, healthier and should be now encouraged. For years we have been calling out the dangers of burning gas for the climate while Labor has continued to talk about the need to keep gas as a transition fuel but actually done very little to transition away from it – in fact it has had policies to encourage its uptake and use, such as connecting new suburbs to gas.

We should also lay blame squarely where it belongs, at the feet of greedy fossil fuel companies, who have captured governments and created this situation. We have an incredibly irresponsible and dangerous smear campaign from the Liberals against transitioning homes to electricity, and then we also have their gas lobby pals trying to scare people into using this deadly product.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Ellen SANDELL: It is deadly, member for Gippsland South. Just look at the Australian Gas Networks sponsoring *MasterChef*, when *MasterChef* around the world has moved to electric cooking and induction cooking because of the efficiencies, because of the incredible way that you can use induction for cooking and because of how fast and efficient it is. Instead, here in Australia we are so far behind the times that *MasterChef* is accepting sponsorship from Australian Gas Networks and then pulling out of moving to induction. Or look at the barrage of gas company ads that we saw during the

AFL Grand Final broadcast. I was absolutely gobsmacked watching the AFL Grand Final and seeing gas ad after gas ad after gas ad. They know that they are on a losing wicket. They know that their product is dangerous, and they are holding on, tooth and nail, to try and keep their market share. But how absolutely dangerous and irresponsible.

Instead of helping with the urgent transition that we should all be working on together, gas companies are spending millions of dollars lying to people, trying to trick people into thinking somehow that gas is clean, when we know the science is incredibly clear on how much it contributes to climate change. We know that it is a deadly fossil fuel that is fuelling the climate crisis. This is akin to asbestos companies advertising during *The Block* or tobacco companies sponsoring *Play School*. It is deeply irresponsible, and history will not look back on them kindly. Gas companies know their product is on the way out, and they are desperately advertising to keep it alive, even if it kills people, even if it causes climate change, even if it causes childhood asthma in the meantime. It is disgusting, and I do not think that Labor should be giving in to these scare campaigns.

We could be here today passing a bill that requires all homes to be electrified faster so there is no gas shortage and then allocating resources to ensure that households have the resources they need to do that transition, because we are all in this together. It would take stronger leadership – that is true – it would mean taking on the gas companies, it would mean standing up to the Liberal scare campaign and it would mean facing down the *Herald Sun*, but it could be done. We could even make the gas companies, which pay very little in tax in Australia and which are responsible for this crisis, actually pay for it. We could even force them to electrify their liquefied natural gas plants, like some have done in Queensland, to free up supply. So much of our gas goes to just processing and exporting our gas. What a waste. If we say there is a crisis, why don't we electrify those LNG plants, as can be done – because it has been done in Queensland – and then save that gas? But no, we do not have those options before us today. Before us today we have a bill that keeps the industry alive for longer and gives certainty to gas company boardrooms. And then Labor throw up their hands and say, 'We're sorry; we had no other choice.'

We get that this is complex. We get that there needs to be a transition, but we are simply not seeing the scale or the speed of transition that is needed in our existing homes, that is needed to avert the worst of the climate crisis and that is needed to keep our kids safe and healthy. So the Greens will not be supporting a bill that locks Victorians into a polluting, expensive fuel that we should have started to get off decades ago and that we could start getting off faster today. We have a principled position, and that is that we cannot support anything that adds fuel to the fire that is global climate heating. We cannot support even one more fossil fuel project, and I cannot believe that Labor and the Liberals are entertaining supporting even more than that.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (15:30): Sorry, I was nodding off over here. It is always a pleasure to follow a contribution by the Greens where they take credit for something that they had absolutely nothing to do with. What was the quote from Bob Hawke? I think it was something like, 'Soon they'll be taking credit for floating the dollar and creating the Prices and Incomes Accord.' It was quite a journey. We started on track, then we moved to creating new fossil fuel projects, which of course this is not – it is a storage project – then we got down to a storage facility down in Geelong at Viva, which is also about storage. I mean, it was quite a journey. I would suggest perhaps to the Greens to stick to TikTok or perhaps even rock up to work a little bit more frequently so they can have more speaking slots, and then they can speak on things that are actually relevant. That would be a fantastic outcome as well. Sorry to digress and start on a bit of a negative note.

It is a real pleasure for me this afternoon to stand up and contribute on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. This bill is being presented as part of a broader initiative to ensure the security and sustainability of Victoria's energy supply. To move off the Greens and on to the opposition, if you were to listen to some of those opposite and some of their contributions and indeed just some of their rhetoric and narrative more broadly in this place, you would think that there is a gas ban here in Victoria. Of course we all know that that is, to channel Matthew

McConaughey, fugazi. It does not exist, and we have been up-front all the way through about our incredibly ambitious renewable energy targets, the most ambitious in the country. We do not shy away from that. But we have also been really up-front with the Victorian community and with this Parliament that gas will play a role in the future as part of that energy transition. Particularly at times of incredibly high demand, perhaps during those winter months, gas will play a role as part of that energy transition, and we have been up-front about that with the Victorian community and indeed with the opposition as well.

During my contribution on the SEC yesterday I said with respect to the member for Brighton's contribution that the Victorian Liberal party room in respect of energy policy is an empty shell. It does not have one. It has not communicated an energy policy to the Victorian people, just that it would love to use more gas. I mean, it is really not much of an energy policy. I can understand why they are a little bit gun-shy in that respect, because they have got a federal party and a federal leader that want to create and build some nuclear power plants down in the Latrobe Valley, and, while the member for Polwarth is at the table, you can bet your bottom dollar if that were to come to fruition that they would also have to build one in Anglesea.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Yes, you would, because there is no way that you can get the amount of stable power from nuclear energy that you would need just by doing it in Gippsland, and the only other option in Victoria is in Anglesea. The member for Polwarth is more than welcome to sit at the table and scream at me; that is all good. But how about you just come clean with your community? Although I can imagine, member for Polwarth, that it is probably a part of your electorate that you do not spend a great deal of time in, because I cannot imagine that they are overly fond of you.

There has been this narrative that there is somehow a ban on gas, which is just absolute and utter nonsense. What we do know is that there have been opportunities for gas companies to create new projects for the last 10 years since we have been in government. The member for Brighton wants to say the reason they are not doing that is because they do not like the minister. I have never met a company CEO that is against making money for their company because they have got a problem with a government minister. I am not quite sure I have ever seen that before, and I am not quite sure any of us will ever see it in the future. The reality is that there are diminishing gas reserves in Victoria. That is a reality: there are diminishing gas reserves in Victoria. It has been said that in fact there is no onshore reserve that is actually worth creating a project for from a financial perspective.

Let us take the Otway Basin, for instance, which is close to the Polwarth electorate. It may be in the Polwarth electorate. The Otway Basin near Port Campbell has been a source of plentiful gas reserves for a significant period of time. Indeed it provides 30 per cent of southern Victoria's gas during those higher demand times in winter. Recently there has been a project by Beach Energy, which is the gas company down in the Otway Basin. I refer to a *Sydney Morning Herald* article from earlier this year – the headline reads 'Shock downgrade hits new Victorian gas field, worsening risk of shortfalls'. Essentially what has happened is there has been a new project commissioned down there which has been significantly downgraded. To quote managing director Brett Woods of Beach Energy:

Disappointingly, over recent weeks we have observed pressure decline at Enterprise, which is consistent with a smaller reservoir.

To my point, there are diminishing gas reserves here in Victoria. It is a reason why there have been diminishing gas projects here in Victoria, because they are far less financially viable than they have been in the past. It is a reason why gas is now more expensive than renewable energy. Apart from the obvious environmental benefits from moving to a renewable energy future, we are also doing it because it is the cheapest option available.

In saying that, this is a fantastic piece of legislation because what it does do is give Victoria's energy supply certainty during those peak periods as we move through a renewable energy transition. It allows

us to move gas from onshore into offshore reserves, which can then be used during peak periods or during down periods of renewable energy production throughout that energy transition. It is a really important piece of legislation. Like I said, we have been up-front with the Victorian people and we have been up-front with this Parliament that we are going to have gas as part of that energy mix for years to come throughout our transition. Victoria is facing some energy complications, I guess you would say, which are driven by the forecast decline in gas production and the increasing demand for energy during peak periods with a growing population. AEMO has projected a significant shortfall in gas supply by 2026, with the shortfall likely to worsen by 2027. That is what makes this policy so important, so we can store that energy there for times that we need it most.

Just quickly, in the last minute that I have, there has also been a lot of nonsense chatter about us banning gas in people's homes, which just could not be further from the truth. What the Victorian government is doing through the Victorian energy upgrades is allowing homeowners to transition from what is now becoming an incredibly expensive energy source to the cheapest energy source here in Victoria, which is electricity, more and more of which is being produced by renewable energy. That is a fantastic program, the Victorian energy upgrades, and I know that so many constituents in my electorate have taken advantage of it. This is commonsense policy. This is good policy. It is going to make sure that in those peak periods we have got energy, and I commend it to the house.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:40): I rise this afternoon to talk about the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. Like other speakers today, of course you cannot talk about this bill without discussing the implications for the gas industry and gas supply here in the state of Victoria. Anyone with any knowledge of history understands for much of modern Victoria – its manufacturing base, its wealth, its prosperity and its sheer quality of life for many people in the coldest mainland state – the benefits that gas has delivered and will continue to deliver for quite some time in the state, even as we undergo some form of poorly managed transition by this current state government.

When I talk about a poorly managed transition I talk about the endless mixed messages this government gives out not only to the gas industry but to business, and there are many manufacturers. In my own electorate 30-odd per cent of Australia's construction timber, for example, comes from one plant that relies very heavily on gas drying. Currently in the world there are no alternatives for the drying process. They very much need gas. But they have to sit there and make long-term strategic economic decisions for their business. They employ thousands of people all around Australia. They are a significant supplier of the most critical and crucial product for a modern first-world country in construction timber, and they have to make ongoing decisions, and they are left completely confused about where this government stands with gas. Eighteen months ago we had the minister responsible standing in the Parliament talking of the evils of gas, talking about fossil gas. I note the phrase 'fossil gas' has not been used in recent months by this minister, which is interesting, because they were on a unity ticket with the Greens a little bit on an extreme anti-gas agenda. There is absolutely no doubt there has been a pivoting away from the completely anti-gas rhetoric that we heard so much of. We had announcements of banning gas there for a while. Many Victorians thought you were not even going to be able to have a barbecue in the backyard. The days of a decent steak were going to be a thing of the past. But we have now moved a little bit.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: That is right, the former Premier relied on AI and the magic of social media to cook a steak on a barbecue that had not been turned on. More importantly, this bill presented today of course is just another one of the Hekyll and Jyde – give me a hand here –

Members interjecting.

Richard RIORDAN: whichever – the mixed personality of this government. Laurel and Hardy, whatever – the mixed messages that this government sends. And the mixed message is, for so long it was all –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: Jekyll and Hyde. That is it, thank you very much, former parliamentary Lions member. I am getting helped out by the government.

This policy is another sign of where we are getting mixed messages, because this is actually a useful process in ensuring Victoria has an ample supply of gas when and where we need it. The technology involved in underground storage and reusing gas to come out of expelled wells is a well-known technology. It is a safe technology; it has been used extensively. In my own electorate in Polwarth down in the Port Campbell region storage of gas in off-peak times to be used in peak times has been well used for a long, long time. In fact it is a major reason why we have not run out of gas in recent years here in Victoria. It makes sense to have that same extra storage capacity on the east side of the state as well, which is what this bill seeks to facilitate. While the storage in the west of the state is actually onshore, in expelled gas caverns, this one is to access the same geological formats but offshore, so it makes sense that they do that.

But more importantly, this package needs to come together with a more coherent view on the role that gas can play. We have at the extreme end the Greens, and we heard the Greens talking today. Quite seriously, I think they are almost blaming the massive, skyrocketing youth crime rate here in Victoria and the incredibly dangerous roads on the use of gas. I think they blame the use of gas for just about every woe in society, but the reality is gas is the most useful transition fuel that we can use.

One of the things this government has to be clear about is that there is a narrative out there that we are running out of gas in Victoria – well, we will run out of gas in Victoria if we do not keep allowing and encouraging companies to explore for it, and that has clearly been a major problem here in the state of Victoria for quite some time. We had a nearly 10-year hiatus, where companies were just not given permission to continue to explore and develop existing, known supplies of gas. That has been lifted, but it is now complicated with environmental, cultural heritage and other provisions; this government is making it even more difficult. One of the points a government speaker made was that companies are not wanting to invest in this sort of process here in Victoria. The member was quite right, and the reason is that Victoria has the worst reputation in the country for resource development and harnessing. Victoria was founded on the gold rush. It was founded on a good supply of natural resources, and to this day we still have some of the world's best supplies of all sorts of natural resources, from gold to gas to rare earths and minerals and other things, and yet this government has a regulatory and management regime that simply does not allow for the proper and safe development and exploitation of them.

We can even talk about things in the timber industry. This year we had one of the great natural assets and resources of this state locked up, and the irony is it is a bit like this gas thing. Banning gas and phasing out gas does not mean Victorians will not still need and want and demand energy, just as when we close down our forests it does not mean people are going to stop buying timber or stop having wooden floors and benches. No, it just means we get it from somewhere else, and that is the dilemma we have here in Victoria. It is because we are shutting down our local supply, and then we will have the Greens and other extremists in the Labor Party saying, 'Oh, well, we're sending all this gas overseas. We've got plenty of gas.' The only problem is you have got to get it to Victoria. To get it to Victoria you need import terminals, and this government has not been facilitating them. You need mechanisms to bring gas from far north Western Australia and mechanisms to get gas in decent supply from the basins in Queensland, and these opportunities are not being facilitated by this government.

So on one hand we are seeing a policy position here in the bill today that is actually rather sensible, which is unusual for this government, but it is a sensible bill, and it is a bill that we will be supporting,

but it flies in the face of the rest of the components for a sensible energy transition. One wonders whether the genesis of this bill was that the government realised it was going to be in a mess. The member for Gippsland South here is regularly updating the house on the parlous state of the way we are managing our existing coal-fired generators, and it is becoming ever so apparent that Victoria is not in position if they shut down tomorrow. If they finish, break down or stop providing energy, we will rely more than ever on gas.

It would seem to me that this government is sort of trying to hedge its bets. It is trying on one hand to make sure we are going to have capacity for gas, but on the other hand it is sort of misleading the people of Victoria into believing that we can have this gas-free future. Ultimately we may be able to, but there is just not the generating and energy provision available in this state to keep our world-class manufacturing and processing industries alive. There is certainly not enough to keep many, many communities warm and functional throughout what is the coldest mainland state. Certainly in south-west Victoria, where I am, there are at least three to six months of the year when most households still rely very heavily on the instant heat and warmth that a product like natural gas provides to households. There are simply not the electrical connections available.

I think it was the member for Bentleigh who was very proud of his solar panels and all his new induction heating and all sorts of electrical appliances. I can tell the member that for many people in regional Victoria there is not the power supply going down many of our country town streets that would enable everyone in those streets to transition. Transition is not happening in a hurry. It is going to happen over time, and this government needs to be much clearer and have a much more strategic approach to the transition away from natural gas and fossil fuels to a new future. That new future is not there yet – it certainly will not be there within the next 10 to 15 years – and this government needs to be honest with Victorians and it needs to continue to allow and facilitate a structured, sensible, logical transition away from the energy base that has delivered so much wealth and prosperity to Victoria over the last hundred years.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:50): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on this bill following the member for Polwarth's contribution and his diverting digression into the works of Robert Louis Stevenson. I do agree with him that this is a sensible bill, and I am certainly rising to support it. The fundamental purpose of the bill of course is to amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010, the offshore act, and in doing so to clarify that the holder of a petroleum production licence is authorised to carry out underground petroleum storage operations whereby the existing gas is transferred from onshore to an offshore reservoir to be stored for later access.

I am not a petrochemical engineer or a geologist, self-evidently, but I find this actually remarkable, the capacity of industry to effect the transition, as it were, and the movement of gas supplies from an onshore situation into an offshore reservoir so that we can manage the transition that Victoria is on and we can manage seasonal spikes in demand, noting, as the member for Polwarth said, that Victoria is Australia's coldest mainland state and gas remains a core source of household heating as well as of course of industrial energy. There is a need to manage that transition. We are at the vanguard of renewable energy technology in Australia, but gas retains its role as a firming source of energy generation and of course of industrial usage. This government is taking a strategic approach to managing the transition to ensure that there is an adequate supply of gas through things like offshore storage. Of course we already have the offshore storage facility of Iona in the south-west of Victoria, but pipeline constraints exist there, which means that we still need that extra storage capacity to help meet seasonal demand.

I presume that Longford is in the member for Gippsland South's electorate, but the example of September, October or thereabouts of 1998 when the fire and explosion at Esso's plant at Longford significantly and immediately interrupted gas supplies into metropolitan Melbourne and across Victoria I think gives an insight into what can happen if that transition is not managed effectively, if we are in a situation where there are not those adequate supplies of gas to provide gas both to households and to industry. That is why it is so important that this bill has come to the house to effect

the regulatory and legislative changes that are needed and which do not currently exist to provide explicit provision for underground petroleum storage operations to be undertaken as a standalone activity.

One of the significant consequences of these amendments is to enable the Golden Beach energy storage project being developed by GB Energy to proceed with establishing essential storage infrastructure whereby, again, onshore gas can be transferred out into a reservoir in an offshore gas field and then made available later during peak demand periods. We do have peak seasonal demand in Victoria through the winter, which is contingent in many respects on how cold the winter is. But of course there is also a continuing need for gas within Victorian industry.

The member for Polwarth talked about the extractive history of Victoria, and he is quite right – the genius of General Sir John Monash in unlocking the Gippsland coalfields in the 1920s and establishing the SEC, which again was enshrined in Victoria's constitution this week in a rather new form. But that provided the basis for Victoria's industrialisation and manufacturing capabilities through the mid part of the 20th century, and subsequently the gas fields of Bass Strait were a significant driver of industrial prowess through the postwar period. But those gas fields are declining. Exploration work is underway and has been underway in those areas, but they are not yielding significant new finds to compensate for the declining fields of Bass Strait. Those opposite may wish to engage in conspiracy theories that it is an issue of sovereign risk in that respect, but the simple reality is that those who are engaging in that exploration work are not finding the compensatory gas fields which would offset the decline of those existing fields that have supported Victoria for so long.

There is a need to have offshore storage to enable the gas that is being sourced, whether it is in Gladstone or in the north-west shelf of WA, to be brought into Victoria for those seasonal peaks. AEMO has flagged that those peak-day and seasonal gas shortfalls are going to become more acute if we do not do this. It is imperative that we support that transition with the firming capacity that gas provides. There is no confusion on this side of the house.

As I said, gas retains its important role within Australian industry, supplying, I believe, at least within the manufacturing sector, about 26 per cent of the manufacturing sector's energy requirements. Seventy-four per cent of that industrial gas consumption is for heat, and industrial heat is an incredibly important part of so many dimensions of the things we take for granted every day, whether it is steel production or other forms of industrial activity. So there is a need to ensure that we have a legislative basis for gas storage to occur. As I said, I find it incredible that this is geologically possible, but it has been a well-established part of Victoria's energy mix for some time with that Iona basin, and this legislative change will ensure that there is the capacity for GB Energy and other potential market operators to do similar things.

But of course Victoria does not exist in isolation. We exist in the context of a national regulatory picture and an east coast gas market that was subject to nine years of Liberal government in Canberra through those Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison years. We are in a scenario as a consequence where we are without an east coast gas reservation. Western Australia has a domestic gas reservation, so it is insulated from the vagaries of global supply and demand to a very considerable extent and the price increases occasioned by the war in Ukraine – effectively the turning off of Russian gas into Europe, which has created a massive distortion in the global spot market. But without that domestic reservation and without the security of east coast supplies we are in a position where Victoria and Australians on the east coast more generally are buying back gas at global spot prices, which has been, significantly, a driver of inflation, a driver of industrial processes becoming more expensive and a driver of construction prices becoming more expensive.

So for those opposite to talk about failures of government I think is a bit rich when, as I said, those opposite were in power in Canberra for those nine years when effectively nothing was done to counteract those distortions in the gas market to ensure that, despite having a burgeoning gas export industry, which is very important for Australia's competitive international position and our export

revenues, it was also complemented by, in effect, domestic security. To be in a position where we are only using on the east coast 26 per cent – around a third, roughly – of the gas that is produced on the east coast domestically and yet be in a position where we need to buy that back on the international market is I think a failure of regulation in many respects.

That is a slight diversion, though, from the work of this bill, which enables us to smooth those seasonal and even peak-day fluctuations in demand on those really cold days when households are still using gas, and it is one of the reasons why there are incentives for households to move away from gas. I think if an event like Longford in 1998 was to happen again, there would be fewer people who would be as acutely exposed to it because of the work this government has done to incentivise the take-up of other forms of household heating, water storage and so forth. The fact remains that gas remains a significant part of our energy mix. It supports that really bold and aspirational transition to a cleaner, more environmentally sustainable form of energy generation and usage across the economy. But to do that we need the security of gas as a firming dimension within that market, and that cannot be done without adequate storage capacity. As I said, Iona has done that to a very considerable extent in the south-west of Victoria, but there are those pipeline constraints that mean there is a need for additional storage capacity.

The work of the minister and her team in consulting extensively with industry to understand what their needs are and where the limitations are in the existing regulatory framework, the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010, for example, which does not explicitly allow for that offshore storage, is really important. It is future-focused. It is part of a considered strategic approach to energy transition that ensures that Victorians are able to have confidence in their energy supplies without compromising the really important commitments that we have in relation to the Paris agreement, for example, as a nation, but also just the need to ensure that –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the grievance debate.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Road maintenance

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (16:01): The topic that I am raising today in the grievance debate is the significant neglect of roads in my community across the Yarra Ranges and right across the state of Victoria. This Allan Labor government has left our roads in a dismal state, and it causes significant grievance for those right across my community. Two weeks ago our community confronted another dreadful day of serious road trauma on local roads, and condolences to the family of the Berwick man who lost his life in Yellingbo. My thoughts are also with the families involved in yet another serious crash on Warburton Highway in Seville East in my community. I thank, and I am always thinking of, our emergency first responders, who attended both accidents. There were two serious and significant accidents on the one day. Our emergency services are already stretched – many are volunteers – and they did an amazing job to attend both of these serious accidents on one day.

Our Yarra Ranges police, our local CFA fire brigades, the Lilydale State Emergency Service, SES, and our ambulance paramedics experience traumatic scenes and traumatic situations at accidents firsthand, but these emergency first responders do everything that they can to help save lives and to console residents at the site of the accidents and stay back to clean up in the aftermath of the serious road trauma. I thank our emergency services for their tireless efforts. They are truly valued in our community. I had the opportunity to attend the Yarra Ranges police road safety forum recently. Also, many of the emergency services band together for the Yarra Valley teenage road information program, TRIP, which provides our community with a stark reminder of the ripple effect of road trauma.

Sadly, severe and traumatic accidents on Yarra Valley roads is not a new phenomenon, and it is not good enough for the Allan Labor government to merely blame driver behaviour. Certainly driver behaviour is a factor, and drivers must be careful; they must be vigilant and they must drive to road rules. But a major factor too, a significant factor, is the inadequate road infrastructure in Victoria, particularly in my community across the Yarra Ranges, and our community in the Yarra Ranges is totally fed up with Yarra Valley roads being neglected. Budget after budget after budget this Allan Labor government has failed to allocate a single cent to significant road safety upgrades across the Yarra Valley. There are so many notorious and known dangerous roads in the Yarra Valley that absolutely require road safety upgrades. It is common sense to make these roads safer for motorists and pedestrians, with the increase in population, the increase in transport – horse floats, earth-moving vehicles, tourist vehicles, all of these – and with the increase in traffic across roads like the Warburton Highway, the Maroondah Highway and the Melba Highway and also some of our smaller roads like Hereford Road, Clegg Road and Monbulk Road. These are all roads that have a significant amount of traffic but there are significant road infrastructure problems and flaws that the Allan Labor government for a decade now have failed to do anything to fix.

As I mentioned, the known dangerous stretch of the Warburton Highway in Seville East is something that together with the community I have been campaigning on for a long time. Our community grieves the fact that this government just turns a blind eye each and every time the community raises this with the Department of Transport and Planning and I raise this matter in Parliament. All we get from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who was at the table now, is ‘Thanks for your feedback. We’ll consider it, but we’re not doing anything about that dangerous road.’ That was a significant accident that we had at Warburton Highway in Seville East just two weeks ago, a significant accident in terms of the massive trauma that was caused – those cars were completely crushed – and it is something that we have been telling the government for a very long time. The point of the road has low visibility; it is on a crest. There are bus stops either side. It makes no sense that they are located in that location. In fact in this particular accident two weeks ago one of the community members that I have been campaigning with, who is actually a road safety police sergeant Andrew Sands, was in this accident. He has long been advocating to make road safety changes to fix this dangerous stretch of road, mitigate the safety concerns and reduce the number of serious accidents that occur here. But so far it has fallen on deaf ears in the Allan Labor government.

This is the stretch of Warburton Highway in Seville East between Sunnyside Road and Peters Road. We know there is that double crest, side roads, turning traffic in and out for people who live at Seville East, merging lanes and, as I said, the bus stops. We know that the government did an investigation a couple of years ago, but it has so far kept that investigation and report secret. Our community deserves to know what is in that report. We think that the pure fact that the government has kept this secret is because they know that the recommendations in that report were to invest in upgrading that road and make it safer for residents, motorists and tourists alike. Dangerous intersections, potholes, road camber issues, degradation on the sides of roads and a lack of safe turning lanes really expose the infrastructure that is no longer fit for purpose on roads across the Yarra Ranges. The Labor government will never admit that their harsh budget cuts state budget after state budget are a contributing factor. They have severely stifled the ability to upgrade and fix roads in the Yarra Valley, and the Yarra Valley is continually overlooked.

Two weeks ago we saw an extraordinary revelation resulting from a Victorian Liberal–Nationals freedom-of-information request. I pay tribute to my colleague the member for Gippsland South for his efforts as the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety because with this freedom-of-information request that the Liberals and Nationals in Victoria obtained we found that the Victorian Labor government has been disgracefully siphoning off \$1.6 million of federal black spot program funding to pay bureaucrats and protect overruns instead of spending it on roads. The federal funding for black spots is meant to be spent on fixing dangerous black spots on roads, but this government is so strapped for cash that it is siphoning off money from this fund just to pay for back-office costs and project overruns. It is an absolute disgrace.

Further, the Allan Labor government seeks to blame the condition of our roads on repeated flooding. We know through the Yarra Ranges region we have had significant flooding in recent times. But this is right across Victoria, and every time, in recent times, the government says it is flooding that has exposed potholes and so forth. These roads were in poor condition prior to the significant floods that we have experienced in the last couple of years. The statistics and the numbers are black and white in the budget that today's road maintenance budget is 16 per cent lower than it was in 2020.

In a time where there is widespread acknowledgement of how poor the condition of our roads and road infrastructure is, this Labor government also plans to sell off its government-owned road repairer and disband Regional Roads Victoria. We all know that this is because state debt under this tired Labor government is soaring to \$188 billion and we have had \$41 billion of cost blowouts on inner-city Big Build projects. The roads in Yarra Valley and our community are paying the price for Labor's financial incompetence and Labor's complete and utter ignorance of addressing road safety upgrades that are absolutely critical to the safety of residents in my community in the Yarra Ranges. No more neglect – it has caused too much grief for our community for too long. It is time that the Allan Labor government properly funded road safety upgrades across the Yarra Valley.

Labor has been in massive spin motion recently when it comes to all of the crumbling roads that we have got not only across the Yarra Ranges in my community but right across Victoria. They made a desperate announcement this week, really just to cover up their failure, about poor road maintenance. They said that there was record funding and a road maintenance blitz. We know this is not a new announcement. The government is trying to make out that this is a new announcement. This is money that was allocated in the budget; it is not anything new. This is money that is allocated in the budget each and every year because, quite frankly, the state government has state roads that are state assets. These are government assets that they should be maintaining, making sure that they are safe and fit for purpose. This is a bucket of money that happens in every state budget, but the difference under this government is that it decreases the amount of money available to maintain roads.

The blitz on road maintenance decreases year on year on year, and now Victorians are paying the price, and we see that. No amount of spin or media grandstanding will cover up the fact that, as Victorians know, our roads are in an absolutely appalling state. Labor just cannot manage money, and our roads and Victorian motorists and pedestrians are paying the price. They are suffering the consequences of this appalling state of the road network across Victoria: the massive amount of potholes, the degradation on the side of the roads – it is quite crazy. The Labor government's own survey of Victorian roads showed that 91 per cent of roads were in poor or very poor condition. You would think that the Labor government would actually take notice of their own survey data and do something about it, but all they do is cut the budget.

Labor, as I said, has abolished Regional Roads Victoria at the worst possible time, and in recent times has been forced to patch 700 potholes. That is only going to touch the surface. It will be like a drop in the ocean because there are probably 700 potholes just around the few roads where I live in Wandin in the Yarra Valley. We have potholes on Hull Road in Mooroolbark, and Hull Road in Mooroolbark has the double whammy: not only is it riddled with potholes, it also has the significant, serious safety issue of the single-lane bottleneck congestion under the rail bridge there at Mooroolbark Road. We have got potholes on Hull Road in Mooroolbark, potholes on Warburton Highway and potholes on Melba Highway. From Yering in my electorate right through to Yea in the member for Eildon's electorate the Melba Highway is riddled with potholes. The government will say they are spending some money on the Melba Highway potholes, but as soon as they fill a pothole, guess what, the next week it is there again or another one has popped up. That shows that the infrastructure is no longer fit for purpose and a significant structural change needs to be made. Filling potholes is not fixing the issue. Maroondah Highway has potholes. Hunter Road in Wandin; Clegg Road in Mount Evelyn; Main Street, Lilydale; Maroondah Highway, Lilydale; Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road; Monbulk-Seville Road from Silvan through to Seville; Monbulk Road from Silvan through to Mount Evelyn – that is just to name a few roads that have significant potholes.

Labor's complete and utter failure at structurally upgrading roads that are aged and no longer fit for purpose is shown by the fact that they have to fill so many potholes. This Labor government celebrate the fact they are filling potholes. They should be ashamed of the fact that the roads have got into such a poor condition. It is an extraordinary number of potholes that they have had to fill. In the last year they have been forced to fill around 220,000 potholes, an extraordinary number, and what that means is they are only patching them up; they are not actually structurally fixing these roads. That means the potholes being filled equate to more than one pothole for every 100 metres of state government roads. And they are not filled properly, mind you. You just have to come out to my community to see that they are filled one day and, whether it is in a residential area like Hull Road in Mooroolbark or the more country area of Hunter Road in Wandin, the very next day they are massive holes again.

Filling these potholes is not something to be celebrated. Any road engineer will tell you that potholes are a symptom of failure to maintain the roads. It is not a success. The Allan Labor government are pulling the wool over Victorians' eyes when they are saying, 'Oh, we've got this blitz to fill potholes.' It is not a measure of success at all. They should actually be fixing the roads structurally, and they should stop blaming other things like floods or probably the war in Ukraine – who knows. They should actually stop the neglect of our roads and upgrade them properly once and for all.

Opposition performance

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:16): I grieve today for Victorians if the dysfunctional Liberal–Nationals opposition was ever to get in charge in Victoria. Goodness me, what have we seen recently? I know the member for Evelyn wanted to talk about potholes, but I think there is a huge amount of potholes that need to be filled in the Liberal leadership in our state. What an extraordinary time that we live in when we see, literally, the Liberal Party tearing itself apart when it should be an effective, united opposition holding the government to account, which is such an important segment of democracy. All they do at the moment is hold each other to account in backgrounding and in courtroom appearances the likes of which we have never seen before. We have not seen anything like this before. You would pitch this for a TV miniseries like *The Killing Season*. You would not get it up on that. You would not get it up on a range of other things.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Mordialloc, 'you' is reflecting on the Chair. I ask you not to reflect on the Chair.

Tim RICHARDSON: Thank you, Speaker. I would not reflect on the Chair; the reflections are very much nestled with the Liberal and Nationals opposition. What we see is an extraordinary performance at the moment, where you have, literally, the Liberal opposition tearing itself apart. One could not put forward a more extraordinary TV series than by saying, 'Look, we're going to have a leadership battle that plays out in the court, plays out in the media, plays out in party rooms and plays out on backgrounding rather than focusing on the needs of Victorians each and every day.' That is what is fundamental to the role of members of Parliament left, right and centre. Instead we see time and time again the Liberals focus on themselves rather than the interests of Victorians.

I grieve for Victorians if they are subjected to some of the damaging views and attitudes that those opposite have been playing out for many months now that demonise and impact people from the LGBTIQ+ communities, our treaty, people from our First Nations communities and a range of Victorians who rely on Labor governments to support working people. Do not take it from us. All you have to do is see some of the comments that have been put forward recently. They just show the damage and division. Just recently, two weeks ago – we do not know who backgrounded it – in the *Herald Sun* of 20 September we had:

"The party has no choice, it just cannot continue, it's hugely upsetting, but that's the truth," said another senior Liberal MP who has ... been regarded as a strong supporter of –

the member for Hawthorn –

... "All options are being considered."

One has to sit there today and go, ‘Who was the person who was the once trusted person?’ It would not be the member for Nepean, would it? It would not be the member for Brighton. If the member for Brighton is a nightmare, I wonder what the dream is? You could not get a person with more tickets on themselves or more sure of themselves. The member for Brighton comes in here, comes forward using very interesting language about ‘nasty’ and ‘mean’ – he never said that to former Premier Andrews – and talks about that kind of language and that impact. Then you see some of the backgrounding that goes on. When you are more focused on yourselves, Victorians can never trust you to front up to the issues that they need addressed in their community. It goes back – you can see the comments in the first speech of the member for Hawthorn:

The motto I often recite in my mind, as a reminder, is this: politics is not about me, it is about you ...

not you, Speaker, but ‘you’ in the quote, you as Victorians. The Leader of the Opposition has spent weeks down the road in Queen Street. He has not been anywhere near the Hawthorn electorate. He has not been anywhere near the community. For weeks and weeks, when Victorians rely on an opposition to be functional, to be asking the important questions, they have been missing in action. You just have to listen to the despair of the Leader of the Opposition in Canberra, who told them 12 months ago to get their house in order before they come forward for a federal election – to get their house in order and front up on behalf of Victorians because there is an election to focus on.

But we see this time and time again, and we see some of the interjections from those opposite going through polls and about where polls are at. Let me remind them of where the member for Malvern was. He was up and about, sailing through in 2021 – he only had a popularity vote of about 11 per cent at that time, but we will put that to one side – and then bang, in comes the former member for Kew Tim Smith, who had some very interesting character reflections on the boys club and the old guard of the Liberal Party that once again blinds them to institutional reform and blinds them to acting on behalf of Victorians. What did former Premier Andrews say that rings true to this moment today? They are Liberals first and Victorians second. Each and every part of their policy development and engagement puts that forward.

This is the state of play at the moment in Victoria. We have really critical issues around service delivery, investing in health, investing in education and the expansion of public transport services, yet we are confronted with some of these issues. This is what happens when you have policy on the run. We had Tom Elliott’s program this morning on 3AW. I do not know how many times they have gone back to the east–west link. Goodness me. This is the third time. When they go back to the east–west link, it is normally about three or four months before the member for Bulleen comes back to being Leader of the Opposition. I am not someone who sees things in the stars or a bit of a reader of the tea leaves, but when the east–west link gets reheated like a horrible three-day-old spag bol microwave dinner, you know that is when the former Leader of the Opposition the member for Bulleen is up and about. You just see that he shaves down, he gets a bit more involved in question time, he gets a couple of bootings and then he is up and about and there will be a charge.

Let us make no mistake whatsoever that the only reason we do not have a new Leader of the Opposition in Victoria is that the five or six or maybe 30 candidates that all think they can be heroes were not able to get together to make a decision here. No-one needs to record a partyroom meeting to know how divided they are. No-one needs a secret recording to know that they are deeply divided in about three different camps, and you know that when they go back to the old party elders – the father of this house, as he is affectionately known, the member for Rowville. The member for Rowville was sounded out obviously as a former Treasurer who has served this state – the Honourable, of course. But it is getting bad. The member for Rowville is 1993 era. He might keep serving for another 30 years, who knows? He keeps getting re-elected, but I would not say he is necessary for the next decade.

People are approaching out of desperation the member for Rowville to save the day, because of the deficiencies in leadership and strategic direction, and bring the Liberal Party together in unity – which this government has as a hallmark. We are a hungry, supportive and inclusive team, investing in health,

investing in rail and delivering projects for all Victorians. That is what this functional team has been all about. That is why we get the majorities that we have and Victorians place their trust in us to keep delivering for them. It is why we have record investments in health and why we implemented the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, while those opposite opposed a levy on mental health and wellbeing services and would cut that and scrap mental health levy funding, which they call a tax rather than an investment in Victoria's mental health and wellbeing. That is what we would see. We would see scrappings like we saw of education funding, we would see TAFE on its knees again and we would see major road and rail projects come to a grinding halt.

You see, they do not have one big, comprehensive rail or road project other than the east–west link. Dare we remind Victorians about the intersection removal policy of 2018? I and my Frankston line colleagues would have loved to have been in shadow cabinet when they said, 'We're going to start removing intersections left, right and centre across metropolitan Melbourne.' It was a \$10 billion announcement that had one doorstep, and then you never saw it again. They have never talked about it again. In Mentone in my area, Balcombe Road–Nepean Highway–Warrigal Road was meant to be one of these intersection removals, and I was like, 'What's going to go in acquisitions?' And left, right and centre –

A member interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Off-ramps, on-ramps. It was cooked up randomly and then never talked about ever again and has never seen the light of day. This is the kind of policy you get on the run. You go, 'Oh, the east–west link was okay; reheat that.' You go into a policy around treaty where you are supporting First Nations people, and then the Leader of the Opposition the member for Hawthorn does not even have the courage or the decency to contact First Nations people to detail his change in policy. At least the member for Kew showed the leadership to support First Nations people in our community and listen to them and support a vote on the Voice. We saw them once again talking out both sides of their mouth.

That is what the member for Hawthorn has done with his colleagues time and time again. Again, I am only observing public commentary by the *Guardian*; the *Age*; channels 9, 7 and 10; and the *Herald Sun*. Who is putting all that information and all those articles out there? The Liberal Party members of Parliament in this place. You do not need any better example than the Leader of the Nationals begging them just to pull out the cold shower. The Leader of the Nationals has never had so many grabs and so much gravitas than telling the Liberals to have a cold shower. I know the member for Gippsland South was put in the freezer when he said at the start of this parliamentary term, 'The coalition agreement's absolutely atrocious. We would be better just going out on our own. We've renewed our ranks.' The member for Gippsland South looked a bit sad for little bit – he was clearly put in the Nationals' freezer – but he said some truth there. They are completely and utterly dysfunctional. When you have got a coalition partner begging them to sort it out and you have got the leader of the federal opposition begging them to sort it out, you see just how dysfunctional they are.

How can Victorians ever have confidence and trust in a Liberal Party who do not even want to vote for their own leader? They do not even want to support their own leader in their community. That is what Victorians are fronting up to now. How can you have a coherent and consistent policy narrative when you cannot even trust that the things you say in shadow cabinet will not be recorded? That was an extraordinary moment. I have no idea how the Deputy Leader of the Liberals, the member for Caulfield, is still at the leadership table. Literally it was eight months between the recordings and the member for Hawthorn having a clue. That is the most egregious breach of trust of colleagues ever, and they know it. They know over there that this is such a dysfunctional place and environment after a decade of leadership changes, of challenges and of impacts. Over and over and over again we see that they are not fit even to govern the Liberal Party, let alone govern Victoria. That is what their challenge is in our state, with 107 weeks to the next campaign. If the people in the party room do not support the member for Hawthorn, then how can Victorians have trust and confidence? How can they have trust and confidence when a member for Western Victoria in the other place, when asked about 15 or

16 times whether she supports the Leader of the Opposition, just blanks it and says, 'Oh, it's a nice day today. It's a good day to be up and about in spring.' You could not get a more undermining comment on this environment.

If only the basket case that is the Victorian Liberal Party were the only issue. The problem is that it undermines democracy across our region. We have seen when parties are more focused on themselves the impact that that has had on holding governments to account. I would grieve for Victorians if they were subjected to such dysfunction. Can you imagine around a cabinet table? I do not even know how shadow cabinet functions; I would have loved to have seen the address to the Nationals –

Emma Kealy interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Neither do you, member for Lowan. You do not know how cabinet functions. I know you have got leadership ambitions. I know both of you at the table have strong leadership ambitions –

The SPEAKER: Member for Mordialloc, through the Chair. Member for Lowan, your turn will come.

Tim RICHARDSON: I know that the member for Lowan has strong leadership ambitions, but the member for Lowan cannot front up in this environment and say this is a good environment to work in at the moment. You look at your coalition partners, and they have got more backgrounding and more discussions. Maybe have some guts, Nationals. Maybe front up and say, 'No, no. We're the dominant force now.' The Nationals carry the load in this place. We see that. The part-timers in the Liberal Party front up half the time. It is absolutely astonishing just how little they do.

We suspect who the real contender is. I think we say it is the member for Berwick at the table. I know the member for Berwick will be on his phone and will not want to look up, but he has had a crack. He has had a crack before; he got within one vote. I will read that out again. There is this senior Liberal MP, member for Berwick, floating around that until now was regarded as a strong supporter of the member for Hawthorn. I know you had a struggle, falling just one vote short, but this article says that there is one up for grabs and they are senior. There cannot be too many because there are only about 30 of you and there are not too many that would be considered senior, so there is a really good chance if the member for Berwick could finally get some of the crew together. Maybe a puff piece about the member for Berwick's version of ready to serve would be an opportunity. That could be an opportunity to really showcase, because we see at the moment more people backgrounding in the media than there are supporters of the member for Hawthorn. There are more people on the record for backgrounding; there are so many sources, it is not funny. They are lining up to background. If the member for Berwick could get his house in order, with maybe that one vote sitting out there who says it is all over, then the challenge would be up. But we grieve for Victorians if they are ever confronted with the divided Liberal–National opposition that we see here today in Victoria.

Government performance

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (16:32): I grieve for any Victorian who was listening to that absolute diatribe from the member for Mordialloc. Although there is one thing that he mentioned that I would like to take up, and that is that the member for Lowan cannot say this is a good environment to work in. You know what, the member for Mordialloc is exactly right, because as it stands today there are two members of the Labor Party who sit up in creep corner, who are still members of the party but who have been booted out of the Labor party room because they are too dangerous for the women within that room. They are still members of the Labor Party. This is something that we have to work with in this environment each and every day, this is something that the attendants in this place have to work with each and every day, and there has never been full disclosure over why they have been sent up to creep corner.

When we hear any of them – today we heard during question time the Premier and the Minister for Health, and we heard the member for Mordialloc just now – start to have a crack about the good track record that Labor has about women, how about they have a look in their own backyard, because it is not a positive story at all for Labor when it comes to the treatment of women. I will never, ever forget that. I will never allow Victorians to forget that, because the hypocrisy that we hear from Labor time and time again around their stance on women can only be perceived as one thing and that is, ‘We will protect the people who put women at risk and we will hush it up and keep it quiet.’ That is an absolute disgrace.

Thank you very much for letting me take up that grievance, but I would like to grieve today for all regional Victorians who are paying the price of 10 years of a city-centric Labor government who can only ever focus on what we would say is the area inside the tram tracks. But I think that has changed recently, because like an episode in a TV series that the member for Mordialloc again tried to make a funny joke about, we have our own version of *Utopia* here in Victoria. A television series has already been made about the Labor government. Who can forget *Utopia* with that nation-building authority where no dream is off the table and no infrastructure project too big. I feel like the Labor government might have just picked up a script from the Working Dog team and thought, ‘You know what, this is too good. We should pick this up. I think we can make this work in Victoria. We can make this happen.’

Now we get this version of *Utopia* that we heard from the Premier today, that we are going to have an amazing rail service – which only runs between Cheltenham and Box Hill, mind you. This line between Cheltenham and Box Hill is going to help every single regional Victorian in some way to travel around the state quicker. In fact I think we heard today that it will save 26 minutes for someone from Traralgon to get to Box Hill. That is incredible, because there is not even a timetable available for this service. This is a fabulous version. I feel like this is another script. We have got another whole season coming of *Utopia* where they can just lift some of the cabinet documents and some of the media releases from Labor and think, ‘Holy smokes, this is gold. We really, really should bring some of these people onto our writing team.’ Not only is Labor is trying to drive this spin about the Suburban Rail Loop, this massive infrastructure project – no project is too big for the Labor government; no project was too big for *Utopia* and the nation-building authority – they are actually trying to spin us down this imaginary pathway, where somehow it is a good thing that all of the state’s infrastructure money is being funnelled into this one single project while the rest of Victoria misses out. They are missing out, and we see that time and time again when it comes to regional infrastructure and rural infrastructure.

The member for Evelyn raised so many points about the deteriorating state of our roads. Many, many parts of Victoria are currently suffering from drought. We have some of the lowest rainfall that we have ever had on record in Victoria, and yet what we hear from Labor is that the reason the roads are bad is because we have had too much rain. I would encourage everybody on the government side of the chamber to stop listening to their own rhetoric, to stop just thinking about the spin and the lines. How about we see some evidence-based decision-making over there? This is not just us saying it, the Liberals and Nationals. We are not the only ones who are saying, ‘Hey, our roads are falling apart. Hey, there’s been very, very low rainfall.’ It is not an adequate excuse. We actually do our research. We go out there. We speak to the Bureau of Meteorology. We talk to them. We access them online. You can actually see the reports and see what the comparative rate of precipitation is across the state over time. Increased rainfall is not a fact. It is not the reason that our roads are so bad. If I hear another fanciful objection, with Labor saying that the roads are actually quite good, I would encourage any Labor member to make their way out of the city and actually travel on some of our country roads, because they are in an absolutely horrific state.

I heard earlier some of the interjections from Labor backbenchers, who perceive that, ‘No, there’s a perfect world out there. Labor are amazing; they’re delivering for the regions.’ You are just letting yourself down. In fact I was saying to the member for Berwick at the table next to me, ‘I wonder if we should actually have as a topic for this grievance debate that we should grieve for the Labor

backbenchers, who are too busy swallowing the spin and sucking up to their bosses to actually get out in their communities to speak to people who are suffering with cost-of-living pressures, who can't access health care, who can't drive on a safe road, who can't access a low-cost rental and who can't save up enough of a deposit to buy a house in their communities.' These are the people that the Labor backbenchers should be talking to. If they did their own research, then they might actually realise, 'Wow, I've got to challenge my elders and say that we've got to do something about this,' because otherwise they will not be there in two years time. I grieve for those backbenchers who are too busy with their fingers in their ears rather than actually listening to the evidence that is put before them in this chamber time and time again. Speak up for the people who elected you to be here. Speak up for your community, for the issues that are impacting your community. I know that all the members of the National Party are fierce community advocates. They are amazing community champions. They are tirelessly raising issues around the escalating cost of living under Labor, where we have seen power bills increase by 25 per cent in the last year.

We see that gas bills have gone up by almost 10 per cent in the last year. We have seen the covering up and the trying to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop, a Melbourne project, with 55 new or increased taxes. Thirty target property, and we know what happens when there are increased property taxes – it pushes up the cost of buying a house and it pushes up the cost of rent. It makes it much, much harder for someone to save up a deposit for a home, because all of their money is going out paying for Labor's taxes to fill this massive black hole dug by their nation-building project, the Suburban Rail Loop, which will not benefit anyone in my electorate of Lowan, because we are so far away from Cheltenham to Box Hill in philosophy, in our business focus and in the way that we treat life and respect one another but also in our access to public transport services, because what we get in regional Victoria is next to nothing, with all of the focus by Labor on what happens in the city.

We know that Labor's decision-making is having catastrophic impacts on our local healthcare services. Are Labor going to amalgamate hospitals or are they going to merge hospitals or are we going to call it a consolidation? We have a look at the health services plan released only a couple of months ago, and secretly at the back of that we see that we are still going to have regional boards to manage hospitals as a consolidated group. To me that sounds like large-scale amalgamations across the state, and this has now been confirmed. Over the weekend we heard the Minister for Mental Health confirm that there will no longer be standalone mental health regional boards even though the royal commission specifically said that we need mental health boards to be separate to hospital boards otherwise these reforms will get lost. But no, Labor have changed their mind after just three years. All of the regional boards are going to be thrown together and Labor will go ahead with consolidation, amalgamation or merging – whatever you want to call it – of our hospitals, and we are living that experience with Grampians Health.

Last week I spoke to a staff member who I know very well and who was one of the health promotion and disease prevention team at Grampians Health. Their entire team was sacked last Thursday. They are all women. One of them is on maternity leave and actually lives in the member for Mildura's electorate, and she was sacked by the Labor government, who say they are all about women.

Juliana Addison interjected.

Emma KEALY: I would like to take up the interjection from the member for Wendouree, because this is exactly my point. This is the evidence. When you speak to the people who got sacked last week, that is what happened in the community. Health prevention was taken across from primary care partnerships when Labor cut them and scrapped them and took away their funding. They were moved to Grampians Health, who have now sacked them. There is no health promotion anymore, and what is the impact of that? We are going to have more people who are sicker, more people who put demand on our health system and more people who need an ambulance. It will just cost more money and have worse health outcomes for our local people.

This does not even touch other aspects about health care and the cuts to health care, the appalling outcomes and worsening outcomes for my people and people right across regional Victoria who cannot access care when they need it. Mental health locals – the only mental health service that we would have had as part of the mental health reform – are being scrapped. That would have been what delivered front-of-house services to the Hamilton community, to the Horsham community and to many communities right across the state. They have been scrapped by Labor. The first thing that Labor did when they saw the recommendations of the royal commission was to implement the mental health tax, and that will bring \$1 billion into the coffers of the state government this year alone. Why aren't they supporting the royal commission's recommendations after making a promise to all those Victorians who gathered in the Royal Exhibition Building, many in tears because they had shared their stories, they had shared their experiences, they had lost loved ones to mental illness and mental ill health?

The promise was that Labor would fix that. They have broken that promise, and that is disgraceful. As a result we will only see worsening mental health outcomes in all of the data that we will see in years to come. It is already getting harder to see a mental health professional. We are already seeing record numbers of Victorians taking their own lives. We are already seeing record numbers of people on the alcohol and other drug residential rehab treatment waitlists. It is simply a terrible story when it comes to Victorians who need help and support, the people who are most vulnerable in Victoria, because Labor have made big promises to them and time and time again they have let them down.

Labor are increasing cost-of-living expenses. Labor are increasing the cost of doing business and putting pressure on our small businesses, which recruit so many people in our rural and regional communities. Labor have absolutely decimated the healthcare sector and people cannot get health support when and where they need it. And because of all the additional taxes and all the additional charges, which are going to pay for a great big project to service a very, very small number of people in Melbourne, Victorians are paying the price. It is pushing up the cost of living. It means they have got less chance of being able to save up a deposit to buy their own home. There are families that are wondering how they are going to keep a roof over their heads, pay the school fees, keep food on the table and make sure that they give the opportunity to their family to have positive outcomes. I grieve for all Victorians, but I particularly grieve for regional Victorians, who are paying the ultimate price for Labor's mismanagement of the state for the past 10 years.

Energy policy

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:46): I grieve for the fact that the opposition are a vision-free zone when it comes to energy policy – absolutely zero. They have absolutely zero to offer the Victorian community. It is extremely disappointing that in this day and age they have not taken heed of where the market itself is going locally, nationally or internationally. They have not learned from the inertia of the former federal Morrison government either. That is a great pity. Let me zone in on that and validate the assertion and what is behind my grievance.

Last week the coalition quietly released a new renewable energy policy. Let us be really frank about this: it is an anti-renewables and anti-investment plan from the Liberals and Nationals, which is absolutely galling but nevertheless – what did I say from the outset – vision-free. The consequences will be – get this – blackouts, higher power prices and lost jobs and investment in Victoria, which actually flies in the face of the rhetoric that we hear from those opposite. One would actually think, according to what they have said in the chamber, that they might actually look forward, but in fact that is not the case. This is a plan to prolong unreliable coal and open the door to Peter Dutton's nuclear reactors. We know Victorians do not want this. There is no social licence, let alone any kind of data, that would substantiate this, and it is exorbitantly expensive to invest in. We have seen with the Hinkley power plant in the UK – and those costs are blowing out like there is no tomorrow – that that really is not a reasonable trajectory for Victoria.

What would this do, if we were to follow the vision-free plan of the Liberal and Nationals opposition? This would take us back to the dark old days of the previous coalition government, when wind farms were effectively banned, investment was smashed and over a quarter of all jobs in the sector were lost. Zoning in on that, looking at some of the elements of their new renewable energy policy – I am not sure what is renewable about it, because it is all about, as I was saying at the outset, prolonging fossil fuel reliance in this state – they would institute a 2-kilometre buffer zone around proposed wind towers to minimise the impact on residential properties and local communities. What does that translate to? I remember this vividly. I remember it being excruciating at the time and thinking, ‘Come on, get Labor back in!’ And thank goodness, we did. When they were last in government the 2-kilometre buffer devastated the wind industry. Victoria’s strict noise regulations already protect neighbouring properties, yet members opposite have learned absolutely nothing from the Baillieu era. Here they are wanting to reinstitute such outdated policies that are simply not in line with where the world is headed when it comes to energy efficiency and when it comes to reducing emissions and the cheapest form of electricity to invest in.

There are also a whole array of matters that in their minds will assist communities when it comes to transmission lines but that really do not translate to what they suggest they will. We know that if you are going to get energy to where it needs to go more efficiently, you need transmission lines to do that. That is just a fact of life. With some of these things it does not look like they have examined what is in place at this point in time. For instance, it says:

Advocate to the Commonwealth that any compensation received by landowners for hosting major transmission lines, or for impacts caused by such projects, is exempt from taxation.

What is the actual fact on that? The Victorian government is already doing this. Taxation is ultimately a decision for the Commonwealth. You can see they have not really taken this issue very seriously, because if they had, they would already be abreast of those aspects. They also say:

Ensure lower emission generators, high voltage transmission lines and large scale battery owners are required to comply with all relevant bushfire overlays.

Guess what, the CFA already provides guidance to renewable energy developers and transmission companies in relation to bushfire overlays. We often hear the opposition talk about the CFA, and I have no issue with that. They do an amazing job and we are very grateful for their contributions to the Victorian community, but you would think the opposition might have checked in with the CFA to see what they actually do, but they did not and they have put together policy elements which simply do not make sense or are superfluous at best.

The wind element I find galling, and I cannot believe it. I cannot grasp with all we know in this day and age that they would still be resting on that piece of archaic policy that will do nothing to serve the community. I want to validate further the point I am making here, because you might ask what it means. What would it do to our community? Let us look at what it did when they implemented such policies way back when. Following the implementation of the coalition’s planning restrictions in 2011, 14 wind farm projects were abandoned in 2012. I cannot see how that was a benefit to the Victorian community. Renewable energy jobs were slashed by, get this, 25 per cent. Retail power prices increased by, get this, 34.1 per cent. We have proven already that privatisation does not work, which is why we are bringing back the SEC and why we have embedded and enshrined it in the constitution so those opposite cannot dismantle it, or we have made it extremely difficult for them to do so.

A \$4 billion investment was lost – \$4 billion, not even ‘million’. Four billion dollars in investment was lost for our state. Now, that does not seem to be very visionary, does it? It really is mystifying that they would be continuing to peddle out the same tired old tropes about when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine, but, guess what, the world is heading in that direction, so they must give credence to this. We know it is a fact. I should say they might try to colour this policy in a way that makes it seem a little more attractive. The opposition say that this is all about balance and that they support the transition away from coal, but that is exactly the sort of language they used before the 2010

election. Once elected, guess what, they decimated the renewables sector. I have already spoken to the tragedy in terms of the billions of dollars of investment that were lost, the large number of renewable energy jobs that were simply slashed and the rapid escalation in power prices, which does not seem to make a lot of sense for the Victorian community – not one little bit. So why would we want to go back there? Who knows – it is mystifying.

If we flip this around, why on the other hand do we need new generation, storage and transmission? Victoria's ageing coal-fired generators are becoming increasingly unreliable and are retiring – that is it. Our ageing coal-fired generators – I am repeating this, because we often hear the opposite to be true. We often hear from the opposition, 'Oh, well, we've just got to keep on doing what we have always done with coal et cetera or we won't have energy security.' Well, this actually attests to the opposite of that, because the ageing coal-fired generators are becoming increasingly unreliable and retiring. By 2035 the remaining 4.8 gigawatts of coal-fired generation will be gone. We cannot just keep going with the same old, same old, or we will be in a terribly difficult spot, to say the least. At the same time – this has actually been well transacted today through the bill that we have had in the house with regard to offshore gas storage – our domestic gas supplies are rapidly depleting and global fossil fuel prices are increasing. That is why we have to build more renewable energy and transmission to keep the lights on and the bills down. We can see there is a real imperative to have a clean energy future and to do what we are doing, what we have been actively doing for a number of years, to transition our state to a cleaner energy future.

I am just going to touch on the renewable energy zones. This is really about completely changing the way that transmission is planned and developed in Victoria, for good reason. I mean, we need transition lines because that is how energy runs. I am sorry to be spelling that out, so to speak; it might seem an obvious issue, but sometimes I get that for some communities there are sensitivities about this, and they may not always see the value in that. But of course it is fundamental in order to get energy where it needs to go. The current process is actually completely backwards and creates great angst in communities that host new energy infrastructure. It also creates uncertainty for investors because, under the existing arrangements, AEMO plan any expansion of Victoria's transmission network and, once they identify the need for a new line, they conduct an economic test to assess whether the project stacks up financially. They then initiate a procurement process – I am sorry this is a little bit laborious, but I am getting to a point – to find a private company to build and operate the line. Only then do the full environmental assessments begin, and the community is fully engaged in the process. You can see that that is around the wrong way, because getting the community and key stakeholders in from the outset would seem to be a far more pragmatic but also a far more considered process when you are dealing with something as serious as this kind of major infrastructure investment.

To address this we have set up an entirely new government body, VicGrid, and have developed what is known as the Victorian transmission and investment framework. I should say that it is a complex process. I am not going to go into all the details associated with that, save for the fact that legislation passed by this Parliament earlier this year has enabled VicGrid to plan the development of our renewable energy zones. This is really important because it says that we are making a proper commitment that is transacted before the Australian people and that has passed through the Parliament of Victoria, meaning that – and this is what is important; this is the critical nexus – a body directly accountable to the Victorian government will be in charge of this critical function. Instead of being at odds or at arm's length, it will actually have a really critical and accountable nexus, which means community and their needs are being considered from the outset. They are responsible for administering the \$480 million Renewable Energy Zone Fund, which has supported 12 projects that will strengthen and modernise the state's grid. I do want to emphasise, because often we hear this line of ideology, that we have factually recorded, visible investments that are really driving our state forward – action.

I know that VicGrid is working with energy market bodies in other jurisdictions to implement three major transmission projects: Western Renewables Link, the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West project and Marinus Link. Where possible the principles of the Victorian transmission investment framework, particularly the landowner payments legislated in the act in the proposed community benefits and traditional owner funds, will apply to these projects, and quite rightly too. VicGrid has also been planning the transmission required to connect offshore wind to the grid, working with stakeholders and communities over the past 12 months to find the most appropriate corridor. You can see that when you are looking at energy policy it is obviously an extremely complex space to operate in and not simply a matter of saying we will make the distance between wind farms bigger and we will just sort of batch up a few points about tax and other things without actually having checked the policy that is already in place because we are just trying to make this new renewable energy policy seem something other than what it actually is. What I am really proud of with our state, apart from the fact that we really are delivering, including the biggest battery – that is something to be really, really proud of as well –

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, exactly right, and it is happening in Victoria. I am really proud of that. But we also have really tough and aggressive renewable energy targets, which means we will actually get to where we need to go. We are not resiling from the commitment, we are actually hurtling towards it and taking the community with us because we know this is what Victorians want. They voted for the SEC, did they not? They voted for the cleaner energy transition, and that is exactly what we are delivering for them.

Government performance

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:01): I grieve today for the people of Victoria for putting up with this incompetent government for the last decade. Victorians have had enough. Everything in this state has gone up. Power has gone up, gas has gone up and fruit and vegetables have gone up. But not everything has quite gone up. There is one thing that has come down, and that is Labor's approval rating. It is going down – down, down, down. There is a reason for that: the Victorian public are hurting. This government has managed to stuff everything up, and now Victorians are paying the price. This government cannot manage money. It cannot manage a budget, and when they run out of money they come after yours. When I first got into this Parliament, do you know how many taxes Labor had introduced? Forty-nine. It was 49 taxes when I first came into this Parliament, and it is now at 55. That is only in a two-year period.

Look at their social housing debacle, their Big Build and their Big Housing Build. We heard it today: 466 less homes in the June to December quarter. Their vacancy rate is at 93 per cent. In New South Wales and Queensland it is 98 per cent. That 93 per cent vacancy rate is 4000 homes. When Labor took over this state in 2014 there were about 10,000 applications for social housing. Now there are over 60,000 applications, and in the last quarter that increased by another 5 per cent. The Big Housing Build is the big flop. You are going backwards on the Big Housing Build.

We have so many people now struggling to get a home. In my electorate we actually renovated four units for homeless people. That to date has put through about eight people who have transitioned, waiting for the government to get their act together. I am proud of my community for doing it because at least they got their hands dirty and did something. This government cannot do anything, and this is a state in crisis. There is no denial. We have a housing crisis. We have a health crisis. We have a policing crisis and a youth crime crisis. What this government have left as a legacy is a state in crisis, and they are doing nothing to fix it.

It is all going backwards. The government is in trouble, and that is why its approval rating is falling at a rapid rate. It has gone south very quickly. The member for Mordialloc was up here today spruiking off as he always does. He was talking about polls and swings and everything else. The member for Mordialloc at the last election was one of the worst performing Labor candidates, with a 5.2 per cent

swing against him, and the way this is going I doubt the member for Mordialloc will have a job next year. He probably needs to focus on his own electorate and getting re-elected rather than focusing on the opposition. The member for Mordialloc is in a lot of trouble. I tell you what, he was talking about getting into cabinet today. He wants to get into cabinet. I think there have been 49 reshuffles and he still has not got there. The member for Mordialloc is kind of factionless. No-one knows where he sits. He is not left, he is not right; he is stuck in the middle. He cannot get in there and he gets very, very upset.

But we are a state in crisis. I mean, look at the health crisis we have at the moment. The poor Treasurer tears his hair out, you can tell. The poor Treasurer had to find another \$1.5 billion. I do not know where it came from. He does not know where it has come from. But the Treasurer is saying to his ministers, 'Tighten up. We can't afford it.' The Treasurer knows how bad it is. He knows that our AA rating is going to go south because Labor will not let go of the Suburban Rail Loop. Everyone is saying it is a really bad idea, but they think it is a great idea. The reality is nobody – no credit rating agency and not the Australian infrastructure agency – likes this project. The problem is our forecast debt. That is what is putting projects at risk. Look at the budget: 100 projects shelved. The poor member for Bass is on a very, very tight margin, and Wonthaggi got shelved. She could be gone at the next election. The poor member for Bass is a hardworking member, but because of the Suburban Rail Loop and because the government has tunnel vision – and that is all it is, tunnel vision – they have cost that member her seat. And there will be a lot more; do not worry about that. That is why there were tears in the caucus room at the last budget. They have all gone, 'I'm gone. I'm not going to be here.' The polls are going south, and they are in trouble.

Labor, to their credit, only made two commitments in my electorate: the West Gippsland Hospital and Drouin Secondary College. That was it. Guess which ones they shelved? The West Gippsland Hospital and Drouin Secondary College. They could have kept one – they could have kept Drouin Secondary College at least – but no, they did not do that. You know what is really funny about the site for the West Gippsland Hospital? Rather than an excavator being there, what do you think is on that site today? Cows. They have put the cows back on the site. I do not know, I have not seen a cow wear a surgical mask, and I am pretty sure they cannot perform an operation. I tell you what, you do not need cows on the site; you need an excavator. You need an excavator to start building the hospital. I had the Minister for Health say to me, 'You don't understand the difference between planning and construction.' I know the difference. I was a builder for 30 years, and I am damn sure I have built more hospitals than the health minister. I have built more hospitals than everyone in this chamber right now. You need an excavator to build a hospital. It is really that simple. They have had a decade to plan for the hospital. It is paralysis by analysis. Nothing is happening. They are out of money, and that is why it is not happening. That is why six hospitals are being shelved – six. Unbelievable. And this next budget is not going to be much better.

Let us reference our roads. Oh my goodness, aren't they in a good state. The member for Gippsland South yesterday in question time flipped commitment after commitment after commitment – six press releases, it was, about roads. 'Oh, we've done this, we've done that and we've done that.' No, you have not. You have not done anything. Our roads are rubbish. In my electorate there is an intersection in Bunyip, the Hope Street intersection, where it is accident after accident after accident. You would think this would be a priority for the government, because one day there will be a fatality. I have spoken to the minister for roads about it, and I have spoken to local council about it. It needs a realignment. It needs a roundabout. It needs something done, but nothing – absolutely nothing – has been done. Why do you think we get nothing? Because we have got no money.

Gumbuya World now is a very big tourist attraction in my area, and there have been six fatalities at that intersection – six deaths. No investment, none – that is pathetic. That is why I grieve for the state of Victoria, and that is why I grieve for people in my electorate. I have got the Thorpdale slip halfway up the hill to Thorpdale; they still have not fixed it between Trafalgar and Thorpdale. Seventy per cent

of Australia's brushed potatoes come off that hill, and this road keeps falling down the hill. What have they done? Nothing. Why have they done nothing? Because there is no money.

There is a forecast debt of \$188 billion, with an interest bill of \$15 million today, going up to \$20-something million in 2026, and that is if we keep the current credit rating. But the credit agencies are saying we will not keep that while we continue down the path of the Suburban Rail Loop. They have been very clear about it. I do not know why the government has blinkers on and is blind to advice given to it by people who know. Why do they say it is going to be downgraded? Because of the ability to repay the debt, and the government are proving they do not have that ability. They do not know how to manage money. When the interest bill is outstripping the revenue by the taxes you have introduced, you create more debt. It cannot manage money. This government is absolutely hopeless.

I will call it the autocratic Allan Labor government. We are taking away choice after choice from people. Planning choices have gone. People do not have a say in planning anymore. The government come in and say, 'We're going to do this. Bad luck, you don't get a say.' Communities now do not get a say in what is going to happen in their electorate. Box Hill is going to have 70-storey high towers. No community gets a say. In my electorate, in Warragul – and I am going to bring this up again in the adjournment tonight – when the community did try to consult, they got totally ignored by the minister, and this is happening across Victoria. It is not just planning. You are taking away people's right to use gas. Tomorrow a bill comes into Parliament, and you will take away people's right to use gas. That is the next thing for this autocratic Allan Labor government, and that is what it is now: a dictatorship by a different leader. You keep taking away people's rights, and that is why the people of Victoria are grieving today. I will talk about that other bill tomorrow, but that is another instance where we see rights stripped away from everyday Victorians.

When the government starts to figure out that you cannot live in a tunnel, you cannot treat outpatients in a tunnel and you cannot educate people in a tunnel, this state will be better off. It is that simple. You are pouring all the money into one project, and everything else is suffering. We have police shortages. We have teacher shortages. We have ambulance ramping day after day at hospital after hospital. Acting Speaker Edbrooke will know how important this is. In my electorate, with a population of the size that I have between two towns, between Warragul and Drouin – it is about 43,000 people; it is a lot of people – how long do you think we have a MICA paramedic for? You would assume for 40-something thousand people you would have 24-hour MICA care. No – 12 hours. People in my electorate, I will say this to you: do not have a heart attack after 10 pm, because there is no MICA paramedic. They have got to come from Traralgon or they have got to come from somewhere else. That is pretty pathetic for one of the fastest growing areas in Australia over the last decade. That is a lack of investment. I asked the Minister for Emergency Services for another ambulance for the Drouin ambulance station.

Steve McGhie interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: I cannot believe the member for Melton is defending the government on this. You used to be the head of the ambulance union or the secretary – whatever you were. What a goose. I cannot believe you are mouthing off to this. The Drouin ambulance station needs another ambulance. They have got the staff, but they do not have the equipment. When that ambulance goes, there will be no ambulance there. That is not an unreasonable request, surely. Surely, we can have an ambulance. Oh, no, we cannot, that is right, because they are ramped at the hospitals. We cannot get them off there.

This is the problem with this government, and this is the reason why Victorians have had enough. This is the reason why the Premier's approval rating is now at 30 per cent. It went south. This is why their approval rating is at 49–51, two-party preferred. This is why our leader's approval rating is going north. This is why the coalition's approval rating is going north, because this government has totally managed to stuff this state in the last decade. The roads are a disgrace. Every basic service in this state is under pressure because this government cannot manage money. It just has tunnel vision on the Suburban Rail Loop. It is an absolutely pathetic excuse of a government, and it is no wonder the poor

Treasurer has a hairline like mine, because no-one listens to him. He is saying to tighten up, but that side of the house does not tighten up. Just remember, Victoria, when they run out of money, they come after yours.

Housing

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (17:17): Talk about 'Keep your hair on'. I am grieving today for the people of Victoria, who really deserve a Parliament that is focused on their needs during a housing crisis, yet we have a situation where only one side of this house is focused on an incredibly important issue like housing. To use a fine Malcolm Tucker expression, the omnishambles that are the Liberal Party are paralysed by their internal politics, and while they are focusing on themselves they are ignoring the most important issue for people in Victoria, which is the housing issue, be it housing affordability or social housing. We have seen the farce played out when they could not even get up a leadership challenge, because a third of the party room wanted the gig for themselves. It is like some really bad rugby match with 15 players on the field and six substitutes just desperate to get on, but the real tragedy is that in the lower house they do not even have the numbers to form a rugby team.

While they were arguing about whether it is okay to be at an anti-trans rally with neo-Nazis in court, the Allan government was getting on with addressing the real concerns of our community. They were in court for four weeks. What was our Minister for Planning doing in those four weeks? I will tell you what she was doing. She was approving 915 new homes in Docklands, 538 new homes for young people in North Melbourne and 365 new homes in Hawthorn. I will get to this later, but I do believe that the interim opposition leader objected to those when they first came along.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would encourage the member on her feet to use members' correct titles.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): I uphold the point of order. I ask the member to use correct titles.

Michaela SETTLE: As I say, while they were in court trying to decide whether they should be walking with neo-Nazis and campaigning against trans people, our wonderful planning minister was out there getting approvals done and making sure there were more homes for Victorians. We are tackling housing affordability with a suite of innovative ideas, and they are just playing groundhog day, an awful merry-go-round of leaders and Lib spills. If I was a betting woman, I would bet that 'Lib-spill' is bound to make it into the Oxford dictionary soon as a frequently used word.

But the evidence is in that the Allan Labor government is effecting real change to help provide homes for families. So while they squabble, we get on and do it. The ABS data published last week confirms that Victoria is building thousands more homes than any other state. In the last 12 months Victoria has built more than 60,000 homes. That is nearly 15,000 more than New South Wales and 27,000 more than Queensland. When it comes to home approvals, Victoria continues to set the national benchmark, approving 10,000 more homes than New South Wales and 18,000 more than Queensland. These results – they did not just come from nowhere, they came from our extraordinary Minister for Planning at the table and all of the work that she has done to contribute to the housing statement. This is no mistake. This government has set its view to addressing housing affordability, and we have done just that. The Minister for Planning has used her powers to intervene or fast-track homes to approve 10,700 homes in the past 12 months, a more than 100 per cent increase on previous years. We are getting on and doing the job.

Yet the only contribution that I have heard from the other side on this important issue has been from the current Leader of the Opposition, which is a threat to repeal the short-stay levy. He is happy to protect his rich investor mates but cares nothing for people living in regional Victoria, because it is we that bear the brunt of the impacts that the short-stay accommodation has on rental properties. Fifty per cent of Airbnbs are in the regions, and that is taking away vital housing.

Vicki Ward: Housing for workers.

Michaela SETTLE: Absolutely. We know that the Leader of the Opposition takes advice and money from Jeff Kennett, and I suspect that he also shares Mr Kennett's charming view that regional Victoria is the toenails of the state, because this is the sort of thing that he will do to regional Victoria. His threat to repeal the short-stay levy is nothing but a slap in the face. He is happy to leave regional towns with no healthcare workers and no teachers, because they cannot find a house. I was really delighted to speak on the short-stay levy bill just last sitting week, because it matters to me a lot. My parents live in Anglesea, and I have seen what has happened in that town. In Anglesea there are about 300 Airbnbs, and that represents about 10 per cent of the entire stock. That is 10 per cent of houses that could be filled with families and could be filled with skilled workers. To be honest, I was there recently and I walked along the street and they were empty houses, because they are investors from Melbourne who want to make a quick buck during the holiday season. It leaves the town without the ability to house their skilled workers and families.

While the Liberals would leave skilled workers homeless so their mates can reap the rewards, this government has taken real action. I was absolutely honoured on Monday to represent our wonderful Minister for Regional Development in the other place, and I was there to announce one of the projects in the first round of the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund in Beaufort. I really want to give a shout-out to my gorgeous and hardworking colleague the member for Ripon. I know that this is a project that she advocated so, so strongly for, because she does listen to her community. She knows that her community needs housing so they can get skilled workers into the electorate.

Vicki Ward interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: Unlike the previous member, indeed. I was delighted to be there to announce 15 units that will be built by the Pyrenees Shire Council to house skilled workers. That is just one of the many projects that are going to roll out across the state under the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund.

While we are building worker accommodation, the opposition would rather preserve their holiday homes. They are so out of touch that they have suggested that the Airbnb tax is a tax on the family holiday. Can I remind them that the average Airbnb is \$300 a night. I do not know what happens in Hawthorn, but I can assure you that people who live in the regions are not booking family holidays and people in the regions cannot afford \$300 a night to take their family away. They are much more likely to be taking advantage of that great announcement last week by our Premier that camping in our parks is free.

One of the many young pretenders to a fairly tarnished crown is Sam Groth, the Shadow Minister for Tourism, Sport and Events. He said of the short-stay levy:

This tax will impact regional Victoria and the tourism economy. Every dollar on Labor's tax is one less that can go into businesses ...

I would really suggest that he gets out of the party room and into the regions, because if you talk to businesses in the regions they will say we have critical worker shortages – somewhere like Anglesea. My son worked at a restaurant in Anglesea, commuting from Melbourne, because they could not get workers. He could stay at his granny's, but they could not get workers in, and that is how difficult it is. I think perhaps if he got out of the party room and spoke to businesses he might understand. I point out that in his very own electorate we have seen a drastic fall in available rentals. Ten years ago, before we had short-term stays, it had a healthy market balance of about 3 per cent and now it is at a staggering low. It is 0.7 per cent because those houses have been taken up by Airbnb. You know what, they are the numbers that he should be counting. They are the numbers that are important. But rather we had to listen to him pontificate in the *Herald Sun* about his tilt for leadership, saying:

I don't sit here in this place wanting to be the next Jeff Kennett, or the next Robert Menzies or the next John Howard. I want to be the first Sam Groth and do things my way.

That is a great little speech, and we are looking forward to him doing it his way. But, as I say, I wish that his focus was on the numbers in his own electorate of the people that cannot rent a house. They are so concerned with themselves that they are not interested in what is happening in their electorates. Let me tell you, if the member for Rowville feels double-crossed, imagine how regional communities feel to hear that the current Leader of the Opposition would repeal important legislation that not only frees up rentals but also sees 25 per cent of that money raised being put into social and affordable housing.

The housing statement introduced draft housing targets for councils to support them. I had another fantastic gig on Monday representing Minister Tierney in the other place, and that was to announce an extraordinary collaborative project with Yarriambiack, Loddon, Buloke, Hindmarsh and Swan Hill shire councils and it was about getting municipal building surveyors into the region. It is a really innovative idea to try and support councils in the regional areas.

But above all else we know that the Liberals do not support social housing. The Leader of the Opposition does not believe in social housing. Some of those approvals that we passed in the last four weeks while he was sitting in court – he spent time in 2021 on the back of a ute in Hawthorn opposing that public housing building. I do not know why they hate social housing. Well, I have got an idea, and I am saving it until last. But it is such an important approval to get through to have public housing. As our wonderful Minister for Planning says, we want to put that housing where people have access to schools, work, public transport. We do not think that they should be shoved out into some dim dark place like people on the other side.

The Liberal Party have consistently shown their opposition to new homes, and amongst the young pretenders let us just have a look. In 2017 the member for Brighton opposed a development in Hampton of 207 new apartments. In 2018 he supported the former member for Brighton's opposition to a new public housing development delivering 300 new homes. Another young contender: in 2021 the member for Sandringham opposed a proposal to build 1048 apartments in Highett. There is a pattern in Highett. In 2018 he opposed another development, which was the former gas and fuel site in Highett. And our very own Richard Nixon, the member for Caulfield, opposed the development of 46 new social housing dwellings in Balaclava, but of course we got on, and we got them built. Let us all remember that the last time Pesutto's Liberals were in government every single budget –

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): I remind the member to use proper titles when referring to members.

Michael O'Brien: You anticipated my point of order, Acting Speaker, thank you.

Michaela SETTLE: I apologise, Acting Speaker. The last time the Liberals were in government, every single budget that they delivered had significant cuts to housing assistance, social housing and support for disadvantaged Victorians to access the rental market. Every single budget that they delivered cut out –

A member interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: I can go through them if you would like. \$348 million from social housing; \$1.8 million, housing assistance; \$13.1 million, housing assistance; and 210 dwellings cut. You certainly did it. But let us never forget in this place what I think encapsulates and really drives the Liberals, the reason they will not get behind our social housing and the reason that I grieve for Victoria if they ever get in, what we heard from the former Liberal housing minister in the other place, who believed low-income families had no place in Brighton. Let us remember those words:

There is no point putting a very low income, probably welfare-dependent family in the best street in Brighton where the children cannot mix with others ...

Government performance

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:32): What a contribution to follow. I am really glad to hear the member for Eureka say that the Liberal–National Party live rent-free in her head. I have never heard so many comments from our members on this side of the house and from your side of the house, so thank you so much for that. Today as part of the grievance debate, starting here, I grieve that this government is driving up the cost of living across Victoria. Victorians may have noticed that there is a cost-of-living crisis going on right now. Everything is costing more, whether it is petrol, whether it is groceries or whether it is eating out, the stats are showing that Victorians are spending less on discretionary items because things are costing us more. Victorians are cutting back on extras like eating out, going out and having fun because the cost-of-living increases mean that you are spending more but getting less.

The travesty of it all is that it is about to get a whole lot worse because of what the Allan Labor government has just done. Last week it was revealed that the government-run Melbourne wholesale fruit and vegetable market in Epping will be slapping fresh food vendors with crippling rent increases of over 100 per cent over the next decade. Soon vendors will be paying more than \$220,000 for space to sell their fruit and veggies, which is nearly double what they were paying. It is costing fruit and veggie sellers \$1100 per square metre to sell their fruit and vegetables, which is more than what prime office real estate on Collins Street costs. But how does that impact everyday Victorians? This market supplies 35 per cent of all fruit in Victoria, from farmers to your plate. It supplies independent supermarkets, greengrocers, local cafes and restaurants.

This is the matter at hand: Fresh State CEO Jason Cooper said that this will drive fresh food businesses out of the market and that it is going to directly increase grocery prices. So the next time you go to the grocery store to buy your supermarket staples and your fresh fruit and vegetables and you are wondering why it is increasing and increasing and increasing, this is why. This is a tax on fresh fruit and veg that is going to be passed directly on to Victorians' grocery bills. When you next go to buy fresh fruit for your kids' lunches, when you grab that smashed avo at your local cafe and when you next buy flowers for your missus, remember that you will be forking out extra, because this government are drowning in debt and desperate to tax you wherever and however they can to dig themselves out of it.

I grieve that the Victorian government is bulldozing ahead with reckless redevelopment whilst denying locals their right to have a say in the future of their own suburbs. The government have already announced that there are 10 big activity centres, including one near my electorate of Warrandyte, in Ringwood, just next door. And what are these? They are 10 areas to be reshaped and remade as new CBDs in the suburbs. I know that is sending shivers down the spines of people in my community, because CBDs in the suburbs is not what they signed up for when they opted to live in Warrandyte. These are high-rise buildings, up to 20 storeys high, in the centre of these areas. And if that is not high enough, there are draft planning controls that have been seen by the *Age* that suggest that developers could be given the green light to exceed these 20-storey height limits and go even higher if they do such things as include some social housing in the project.

Let it be known here today in this chamber that I am not against social housing and that the Liberal–National parties are not against social housing. But what we are vehemently against is robbing locals of having a say in what their neighbourhood looks like. That is as plain as day; that is simple. Victorians might think, 'Gee, that's a lot of change to our area. Surely residents will get a say on this residential development, right – surely.' Well, that is a big N-O. The Allan Labor government want to strip residents' rights to third-party appeals for many new developments. Under the government's planned changes to ResCode, the main planning code that defines how our suburbs are allowed to be developed, residents will be stripped of their rights to review in many situations. And it is not just the coalition who are calling out this injustice, but local councils have objected to these changes, including councils in my area. The government have underhandedly announced these changes while all the councils are in caretaker mode for the council elections. How is that? For now there are 10 additional

major activity centres with these 20-storey buildings that residents cannot oppose. But where next? Who knows – coming to a suburb near you. Community consultation according to the Allan Labor government is now to shut up and put up with whatever the government wants to build in your backyard.

I grieve for the people of Victoria because every action that the Allan Labor government takes only digs our state deeper into debt, with major project cost blowouts one after the other. There is not a major project that this government has been able to deliver on time or on budget. Have a think about this, Victoria: if you are working a job and you blow the budget and you do not get it in on time, you have failed at your job, no? Surely, no? But not for this failure of the Andrews and the now Allan Labor government, friends. When both Premier Jacinta Allan and Premier Dan Andrews were questioned on why there have been such extreme cost blowouts, they both answered, ‘Things cost what they cost.’ Well, Victoria, this is what they cost. We have got the West Gate Tunnel – four years late and over budget by \$4 billion. We have got the Metro Tunnel – nearly \$5 billion in cost blowouts. It was meant to cost \$10.6 billion. It is now up to \$15.6 billion, and this is including the latest blowout of \$900 million last month, which the government revealed in the sneakiest way possible – when Victorians were not paying attention because it was the eve of the grand final and we were focused on that.

And then, to boot, there is also the North East Link, which has now blown out by \$10 billion. Originally it was due to cost \$10 billion. In 2019 that figure went up to \$15 billion, and then over Christmas time last year – merry Christmas to Victoria – it escalated to a total cost of \$26 billion. Absurd. Then there is the ever-delayed airport rail link, with this arbitrary timeline as to when it will ever be built, yet that is already going to be a few billion dollars over budget. That is not to mention Suburban Rail Loop East, with a price tag of \$35 billion for the first stage of the government’s \$219 billion pet project, with no business case, which Infrastructure Australia is still waiting on, which is already facing a \$22 billion shortfall. It has, I might add, had cost overruns of \$6.9 billion. The two Labor Premiers might be fine telling the Victorian public that things cost what they cost, but you know what is not adding up – how the Andrews and Allan Labor government can face the Victorian people after they have bankrupted and indebted our state.

I grieve for young Victorians who cannot afford to buy a house because of the financial mismanagement of the Allan Labor government. Many young Victorians are wondering why it is so hard to buy a house. I am proud to be one of the youngest MPs in this Parliament. I am proud to be the youngest woman in fact in the lower house, in this chamber. But I grieve with young Victorians and young people who cannot achieve the dream of buying their first home. What Victorians might not realise is that in Victoria 44 per cent of a new house and land package in greenfield development areas in Melbourne is made up of government taxes, fees and charges, according to the Urban Development Institute of Australia – 44 per cent. Talking about a new house for a young Victorian, nearly 50 per cent, nearly half, of that house cost is government taxes, fees and charges. That is ludicrous. For example, for a \$600,000 house-and-land package in a new area, that is over \$250,000 that is gone to taxes, fees and charges. That is wild.

The great Australian dream has now become the Labor government’s great tax grab. It was just over two years ago that former Premier Dan Andrews said on housing, to quote him specifically, that ‘ownership is not such a big thing’ to young people. He certainly does not speak for this young person and certainly does not speak for the hundreds of young people that I speak to in my community and across Victoria who say that this is the number one issue for them, to be able to afford a new home and to be able to achieve this great Australian dream. How out of touch is that, and how very typical of Labor. As I said, I speak to young Victorians every single week who are struggling to achieve their dream of buying their first home. I speak to young Victorians every single week who can barely get into a new rental property for their growing family, and I know because I have heard from members of my community who line up week after week, weekend after weekend, with lines that run 30,

40 people deep, waiting to simply inspect a rental property, because it is that hard in this environment to get a new rental, let alone to buy a new home.

This government's policies and taxes are making it harder and harder to own a home. It is famous that Daniel Andrews on the eve of the 2014 election promised Victorians on statewide television that under his government there would be no increased or new taxes. Well, 55 new or increased taxes later, here we are, Victoria. How is that for the truth? Of these 55 new or increased taxes, guess how many are on property and household: 29. Over half of those 55 new or increased taxes are around property and housing, and we wonder why it is so hard for young Victorians to buy their first home. Recent reports show that 70 per cent of young people think that they will never be able to own a home. Victoria, we need a government who actually cares about home ownership. We need a government whose first reaction to everything is not to introduce yet another tax. We need a government that recognises that home ownership is a big deal to young people and will be willing to fight for it.

I grieve that the Allan Labor government has let Victorian roads decay into disrepair, neglecting our suburbs and regions in favour of their city's pet projects. According to the government's own condition assessments, 91 per cent of Victorian roads have been rated poor or very poor, road resurfacing works have plunged by over 65 per cent on regional roads and over 25 per cent in metro Melbourne over the past three years, and this week the government announced a road upgrade spending blitz, congratulating themselves. But the budget for road maintenance is still 16 per cent lower than in 2020. They are celebrating themselves for doing the bare minimum like it is a big deal. Pat on the back for the roads minister for doing the most basic of her jobs. You certainly do not hear them in council celebrating every week that they take in our rubbish and take it to the depot. We have local roads that are in disrepair. We have potholes that locals are hosting two-year birthday celebrations for. We have intersections that locals are begging to be fixed, including Five Ways, which I have now raised by mentioning it 11 times in this place – and it is still not fixed – and including Tortice Drive and Ringwood-Warrandyte Road, which I have raised in this place time and again. The government are so busy patting themselves on the back you think they would be in danger of having a shoulder injury, all for doing the bare minimum that taxpayers are paying them to do.

Finally, it is my pleasure to celebrate my first year in Parliament as one of the newest members here. Around the time that I began this first year that I have spent in Parliament was also the day in which we had a new Premier sworn in, so here we are celebrating one year of Labor failures under Premier Jacinta Allan. This must be one of the saddest anniversary celebrations ever, because we are celebrating higher taxes, skyrocketing debt, crumbling roads, a health system in crisis, energy insecurity, major events leaving the state, a housing crisis and of course CFMEU corruption on the government's watch. How exciting!

Let us start with financial mismanagement. When it comes to borrowing, everyone else in Australia has a AAA credit rating whilst we are the only state to be lacking and left behind with lesser than. We have got a decreased credit rating, which will increase the cost of paying back the state's crippling debt. Speaking of debt – we have spoken about it before – it will surge to reach \$187.8 billion by 2027–28. That means that we will be paying in interest every single hour \$1 million. Just tick that away as we go on and speak – \$1 million of interest in debt that we are paying every single hour because of the financial mismanagement of the Allan Labor government.

We are also celebrating – not really – a surge in youth crime. This is something that has impacted my electorate so deeply. The number of home invasions has gone from one every three days in 2015 to 3.4 per day this year, which is nearly a 1000 per cent increase since Labor came to government in the last 10 years. In addition, the answer to that is for Premier Allan to weaken bail laws as of March this year. That was great! We are looking at a state that is in record debt, with our health system crumbling, our roads full of potholes, a housing crisis, a youth crime crisis – happy birthday.

Opposition performance

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:47): I have been getting into my Russian literature lately, especially Leo Tolstoy. I think probably one of the most famous opening lines in history is his line:

All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

It made me think of those opposite and the myriad ways that they are unhappy. Since we are a government that backs families and supports families, I thought perhaps one of our family-friendly initiatives might help that unhappy family across the aisle. So I thought I would go through what we have got an offer and see how it might help them.

Firstly, the Get Active Kids voucher – what a fantastic initiative: \$200 for kids to get involved in sport. We have had over 150,000 vouchers already provided to families to make sure that children have the opportunity to be involved in a team sport. I think team skills are something those opposite would really benefit from, learning to get along with each other and learning to coordinate and cooperate. I encourage those opposite to have a look at Get Active Kids, especially with all of that time sitting down over the last three weeks. Some of them have been benched. Some have been at the bench – definitely not on the field, helping families in their electorates, like this happy family has been doing. I encourage them to look into that.

Another family initiative which I am really proud of is the Glasses for Kids program. This one is personal for me. I had no idea my daughter had a vision problem until the school phoned me to say, ‘Your daughter can’t see below the second line.’ I had no idea; her teacher had no idea. We had heard from the teacher earlier that my daughter’s reading was stalling: ‘We’re not sure why – let’s put some extra effort in.’ It turned out she could not see and we did not know. When school started this term we packed her glasses into her bag as well for her to wear at school. The Glasses for Kids program, which checks vision for kids in prep to year 3, is so important. It also provides glasses for families that need them. This is about overcoming disadvantage. It is not just about helping with health but also countering disadvantage in education, and it also helps busy families who cannot necessarily do the running around to all the different appointments that we have to do. I thought the unhappy family opposite might benefit from our glasses program, because I do not think they have a vision for Victoria. If we could just get their vision tested, we might be able to help them with that. Their only vision is that they want power. They are power hungry and obsessed with power. Maybe they need to get some new glasses and take a look in the mirror, because people are not happy with how they are looking.

Another one of our family initiatives that would benefit the unhappy family opposite would be free kinder. My daughter is graduating from four-year-old kinder this year. We are so excited. A very big thank you to Kylie, her fantastic kindy teacher. Both of my daughters have had Kylie, and we have been so, so lucky. A big focus of what teachers like Kylie are doing at the moment is writing the transition plans for all the kids to go from kinder to school. It is about being ready and willing to learn, but those opposite just do not seem willing to learn. That is their problem. They went through the member for Bulleen as a leader twice. That shows us they do not know how to learn. I think that their leadership obsession would be better replaced with a learning obsession.

Speaking of learning, you cannot do your best learning on an empty stomach, which is why I am so glad – and it is great to see the minister here – that our breakfast club program has been expanded. We committed a further \$21.1 million in the Victorian budget to expand the school breakfast club program to include all government schools that opt in across Victoria, building on \$141.2 million already invested and having delivered more than 40 million healthy and nutritious meals to students in participating schools across the state, like Whittlesea Secondary College and other great schools in my area. It is really important not to be hangry. It is important to have something to eat so that you can focus, and we know that those opposite are very unfocused. We know that they are unfocused because they have got no policies that they are focusing on. All they are focused on is grabbing power for themselves, so they should break bread together, shouldn’t they? They should get together, break bread and maybe that would help them with some of their issues.

We have also got another great program for them, the Smile Squad. The Smile Squad provides dental check-ups and treatments, including teeth cleaning, fluoride application, fissure sealants, fillings and root canals, at schools to ensure that our children have healthy teeth. Again, this is a great one for busy families. It saves you the running around and it also saves the money for the appointments. We have had more than 100,000 government school students receive free dental care as of July, we heard from the minister. It is absolutely fantastic. The Smile Squad had an extended stay at one of the schools in my electorate. They got there and found that there was so much need among the children, so they stayed longer. They stayed for weeks and looked after all the kids at that school that were able to participate. I am absolutely proud of that. To be honest, though, I am not so sure about this family initiative for the unhappy family across the aisle. I think they have already got enough smiling assassins over there, but, do not be fooled, they are too busy fighting to worry about fighting to look after Victorian kids' teeth. All they are smiling at are the donations they are receiving for their legal fees. So that one is maybe not for them.

But there is another one that could be for them. This is a new one. Some of these initiatives we have been rolling out for a decade. They have had a great time to build and support so many different families, but this is a new one. It is the school saving bonus, which is very exciting. Thank you, Minister. As a mum I have received the Compass notification to say how things are happening, and I do remind all parents that 18 October is the deadline to update your contact details with your school to make sure that the money that is coming for next year can come through. The school saving bonus provides a one-off \$400 to help Victorian families cover the costs of their kids' school uniforms, textbooks, excursions and activities. It is really important to get that certainty now, because families are planning and thinking about Christmas expenses and then thinking, 'Okay, after Christmas we're going to need to get new uniforms and books. When are we doing it?' I have got a daughter starting school next year and I am thinking about her school shoes and that sort of thing. Families can choose how they spend the bonus. It can go towards camps, trips, excursions, swimming and sporting programs, outdoor ed, graduations, school uniforms and textbooks. The school saving bonus is fantastic. I think those opposite are more interested in saving their backsides unfortunately. The only excursion they have been on is to the Federal Court.

A member interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: That was not expensive. This program supports camps. I think they have got multiple camps over there: some of them are solo campers and someone has been to tennis camp. If only they could all be in the same camp. I think that the school saving bonus would be fantastic for those opposite to help them really rally together and be their best selves – be the best that they can be, please, for the benefit of all Victorians.

Speaking of camps, I am really excited to see that camping is free for Victorian families this Christmas. We had actually already booked our camping holiday to Cape Conran. We were there last year, and we wanted to go back. Last year there was a dead whale on the beach, which for some people is great. The best thing the kids liked about the holiday was going and looking at the dead whale. That was free too, so thank you to Minister Dimopoulos for providing that whale for my family, and apologies to the whale. That is at Cape Conran. I encourage everyone to go. Free camping is about supporting families to enjoy time together at low or no cost, so we can get back to nature. The feeling when you are in nature, the way that you can relax, takes so much stress off. Families being together away from devices – all of these things are so important. Camping will be free at all 131 of Parks Victoria's paid campgrounds from 1 December 2024 until 30 June 2025. If like me, you have already booked your camping holiday for that period, you will be refunded. Just letting you know: we have got you covered in any way.

This builds on the \$25.7 million we have already saved campers since 2019, and that is why there are so many happy campers in Victoria. More than 50 million people visit Victoria's iconic state forests and national parks a year. There is camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, four-wheel driving, trail bike riding, horse riding, birdwatching – hopefully not all at the same time, because that would be very

dangerous. One by one is great. We have got 31 new and 60 upgraded campgrounds delivered by this government and 155 upgraded four-wheel drive tracks. My family loves four-wheel driving, so that will be great. The reason I thought this one might be good for the unhappy family opposite is because they really just need to take a chill pill. They need to take some time out. They really need to see what –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: A bit of time around the fire, a bit of Kumbaya. I do not know if any of them can play guitar, but that is what they definitely need. And about the member for Croydon, ‘There is nothing to lose’ in going on a nice camping trip together. I wish them very well with that.

Something else that those opposite might benefit from, with support for families, is around free IVF. This government is giving the chance to more people to become parents, to start a family in the first place. Public fertility care is now available, and it is actually available right across the state, so it is at the Royal Women’s, Monash and the Mercy, as well as the Northern, but also out at Mildura, Bendigo, Warrnambool, Geelong, Shepparton, Ballarat and Sunshine. This is about making it fairer and more affordable for Victorians who want to start a family, and there is a special focus on low-income earners; Victorians living in rural and regional areas; people who need donor services; altruistic surrogacy support, such as LGBTIQ+ and single people; people needing fertility preservation due to medical treatments, such as those with cancer or undergoing gender reassignment treatment; and people who need genetic testing because they are known carriers of medical conditions that may pose a threat to the life of their child. This is a fantastic thing, an over \$120 million program helping families save up to \$10,000, and we welcomed the first baby last November, little baby Felix. We have seen the interesting rebirth in the last weeks of the member for Rowville. That was a great rebirth, and there are many people looking for a chance to be leaders. They say that success has many parents and failure has none, but I do not know: I reckon mum Bev and dad Brad are pretty happy with how things are going.

In summary, this happy family on this side wishes nothing more than happiness for those opposite. I have run through all the ways that our programs can support them. We know so many Victorian families are already on board and benefiting from the programs, because we have been busy focusing on Victorian families, not on ourselves. This list that I have gone through is the evidence of that, and the outcomes are there to see in our Victorian families, who will always be better off under a Labor government.

Question agreed to.

Bills

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (18:02): This contribution will be a lot calmer than my last one. I am happy to rise on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. It is a bill that this side of the house do not disagree with. We support this bill because it is actually common sense and we do need to shore up our gas reserves because of the fact that we are running out of gas.

It has been an interesting debate today. The purpose of this bill is essentially to create an offshore storage facility off Gippsland South, down that way, in the member for Gippsland South’s area, and it is actually smart, because we do need that storage. We know Victoria uses the most gas of anywhere in Australia because it is the coldest mainland state. That has been quoted numerous times today, but it is factual. Historically in Victoria, especially through the 1960s and 70s, when Victoria really started to develop, a lot of houses were connected to gas. That is an important point about this, and this is where I fear over the last decade – and I know the government was warned about a decade ago about

gas, gas storage and gas requirements in Victoria – those requirements were largely ignored. That is why we find ourselves in a position today where we are talking about serious shortages of gas and why this facility has to be built, and I think the government has been a little bit ignorant in delaying the inevitable.

We know there is a push towards renewables. We know there is a push on wind and we know there is a push on solar, although the wind turbines are starting to become a little bit dangerous, I believe, because there is stuff falling off them when they are spinning at rapid rates. I heard today someone told a farmer he has got to wear a hard hat on his farm because he has got wind turbines. Needless to say, that farmer is not too impressed about that. The problem we have today and the reason this facility has to be built is that there has been no meaningful exploration for gas in the last decade, there really has not. I was doing a bit of research on what gas is actually available in Victoria at the moment, and apparently, according to the research, there is 1.6 trillion cubic feet of gas just in the Gippsland Basin alone. That equates to about 50 years supply. Regarding the extraction method, obviously we do not frack anymore. That is something that a Liberal government stopped after the Labor government issued 13 fracking licences. It was a Liberal government that put a stop to fracking. But what we do need is conventional onshore gas exploration to get our stocks up.

I went back through the 2022 election commitments and one of those election commitments was to ramp up conventional onshore gas exploration, but the sidebar to that was any gas found in those reserves was going to be 100 per cent reserved for Victorians. It was not to be sold; it was going to be used for Victorians. We have heard time and time again and my opinion on this is – and it is only my opinion – that you should always reserve your own domestic supply first before you export anywhere. To be perfectly honest, this should be a policy at a federal level across all states – it really should. It is the same with timber. Every natural resource we have in this country should be reserved for us. If you have excess, by all means go to market – happy for that. But for us to export gas, then buy it back at an international rate is stupid. It is totally stupid. This is why we have to invest in exploration. It is a given – providing it is conventional, providing it is not fracking. There is nothing wrong with exploration, providing it is done in the right way.

We have a situation now in our transition where gas has to be part of our energy mix – it has to be. There are so many homes in this state that you cannot afford not to do it. I can tell you that in my building career I reckon 98.5 per cent of the homes I have built are on gas, every one of them. Unfortunately with current government policy and the bill that is going to be introduced tomorrow – most of the bill is all right except for section 38, and I will talk about that tomorrow – with this transition, the government has I think prematurely said you cannot have gas. The only thing they did wind back was regarding hotplates; they did say you can have a gas hotplate and you can renew your hotplate. That is not great. I do not know if anyone in this chamber has fully converted their house from gas to electricity yet, but I can tell you it is not a cheap exercise. It will not be cheap, and a lot of Victorians will not be able to afford to do this. An average cost will be about \$27,000, but it will cost more depending on your house, depending on whether you have got the roof space for an electric central heating unit. If you do not have that roof space, you then have to go to split systems, and you will need multiple split systems. That is just the reality of where we are at the moment.

But we have had industry telling the government for quite awhile now that gas has to be part of the mix. We had Paul Guerra, chief executive of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry – and Paul is a pretty switched-on bloke – say that:

Our current trajectory is putting Victoria's prosperity at risk, as energy security and price cannot be guaranteed.

This is a failure by government when we have got the chief executive of VCCI coming out very, very concerned about Victoria's prosperity. This is the point: it is industry leader after industry leader. He goes on to say:

New clean energy industries will create enormous economic and environmental benefits, but the transition must ensure an affordable and available supply to power Victoria into this next stage of prosperity.

What he is saying there, and it is really quite simple, is we need gas until the transition is done. We need it in the mix. If we do not have it in the mix, people will suffer. It is as simple as that. Businesses will close.

I have got one of the biggest tomato farms in Victoria in my electorate; they supply Woolworths and everyone else. If they cannot get gas, they are gone. They will move interstate and 300 jobs will go. It is really simple: if the gas supply runs out, 300 jobs will go. We have already seen businesses up and leave this state because of the government's gas policy. As I said, we do not oppose this bill. We support this bill purely because we on this side of the chamber know the need: the government has to have storage. It is a pity – it is actually a sad fact – but Victoria used to be an exporter of energy. We used to export; now we import. That is purely because of a lack of foresight from the government to realise that exploration had to happen.

There is plenty of gas in Victoria, and I get sick and tired of the minister saying geology over ideology and all the rest. Time and time again she says that. If you do the research, the geology will tell you that we do have gas reserves. They are there, but we need to get to them, and we need to get to them in an environmentally friendly manner. That is very important, because we do not want to go back to the dark ages of the Labor government and fracking for gas. They issued 13 fracking licences – talk about an environmental nightmare. Now they come out and pretend to be the big environmental saviours. This government issued 13 fracking licences. Jeez, they like to jump on a bandwagon quick, but they forget very quickly where it all happened. They also forget who privatised the SEC half the time too – 'Oh, it was Jeff Kennett.' It was always Joan Kirner who passed that into legislation. It is actually sitting here; you can go to the library and look it up.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Through the Chair.

Wayne FARNHAM: My apologies, Acting Speaker, sorry for leaving you out. The coalition supports this bill because it is the right thing to do. We need it to happen, but you have got to start looking for more gas.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:12): As always, Acting Speaker, it is really terrific to see you in the chair.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Gary MAAS: Well, it is good for some of us, member for Narracan. It certainly is. He always does a top job, the member for Greenvale.

I too rise to make a contribution to the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. In doing so I would just like to cast the chamber's mind back some 10 years. If you think back to 10 years ago – I think it might have been around about the time of the dying days of the Nap Time, or Naphthine, government – at that time an incoming Labor government would only inherit some 10 per cent of renewable electricity that was generated in this state. We know that that number 10 years later is five times higher and that this government is well on the way to its target of 95 per cent renewables by 2035 and net zero by 2045.

Spearheading all of the boundless energy that is spurring on this government has been a minister that has covered various portfolios through climate action, energy and resources and now the SEC as well to ensure that this government is leading Victoria and taking the state with us on this path. It is a path that we all know has to be done. To that end, it is not often I give a shout-out to ministers in an individual capacity, but the Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources and

Minister for the State Electricity Commission's boundless energy has really taken us to this point where we are at the moment. It is really incredible.

This bill is just part of the suite of many bills that have been brought to this place that have been in the energy, climate action and now SEC portfolios and indeed the environment portfolio as well. The bill will amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 to clarify that offshore underground gas storage is permitted in Victoria. The bill is designed to ensure energy security while the Victorian government decarbonises the gas sector through electrification, energy efficiency and the transition to renewable energies. It will help secure gas supply while we get on and build cheaper and more reliable renewable energy for the future. The legislation ensures offshore gas storage is done safely and effectively – just as we have been doing for many years, but onshore. It ensures the critical role that deep gas storage will play in Victoria through the renewable energy transition, ensuring projects like the Golden Beach energy project can go ahead. The Golden Beach energy project will see empty reservoirs on the ocean floor used as a storage facility that could supply the market in peak periods through natural gas production. It is expected to deliver natural gas production of up to 30 petajoules a year from winter 2027 – about a quarter of Victoria's annual household and small business consumption. The field will then be transitioned into an underground storage facility providing around 12.5 petajoules of storage, increasing Victoria's gas storage capacity by almost 50 per cent.

As I have said, we know that gas is a part of our state's energy transition, but we are running out of it and Victoria needs new sources to mitigate the depletion. This bill paves the way for the development of offshore gas storage projects. You only need to look at the Victorian energy upgrades program, which has seen some 506,000 homes and 24,000 businesses receive upgrades through the program in 2023. Since 2009 more than 2.4 million households and businesses have been taking on the advantages of this program. You can see that we are getting on with the practical action of electrification while we are also ensuring we can support Victorian families and businesses who are able to get off gas and that they can do it in a way that will also lower their bills in the process. We are ensuring that that happens across the whole state. One of the ways that we are doing that is through the Victorian default offer, ensuring Victorians are paying the lowest wholesale price for their energy. Around 340,000 residential and 58,000 small business customers are currently on the VDO, ensuring Victorians have a simple and trustworthy way to ensure their energy supply.

The Labor government's reinstatement of the SEC is ensuring continued investment in wind, solar and storage while providing households with a one-stop shop to help them electrify, and the SEC is also ensuring we have got the workforce to support Victoria's renewable energy transition by creating more than 59,000 jobs, including 6000 traineeships and apprenticeships. I was delighted to see that the City of Casey in my electorate of Narre Warren South was one of three local government areas selected as a part of the new SEC pilot program. The program will help electrify homes and put power back in the hands of my constituents and give them the tools that they need to consider the transition from gas to electric appliances.

As outlined in the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, pathways and actions to decarbonise the gas sector will continue well into the long term. This has not been able to happen at the required speed and scale without addressing the imminent risk of gas shortfalls. We all know the transition to renewables is important. This is something the Allan Labor government is taking meaningful action on, and as I said before, we are well on our way to 95 per cent renewables by 2035 and net zero by 2045. In this shift we are aware that we need to get the transition right to ensure Victorians can keep the lights on and keep warm on the coldest days. In conclusion, we are ensuring Victoria's energy security remains intact now and for the future. For all of those reasons, I am supportive of this bill and wish it a speedy passage.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:19): I too rise to talk on the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024. Like everyone on both sides of the chamber, I think this policy is okay. What we are trying to do here with the policy is actually store gas out in the basin

so at a later date, when we do need to access it, we can bring it back onshore to use in our supply, which does go around the state of Victoria. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 to clarify the holder of the petroleum production licence in Victorian waters within 3 miles of the coast is authorised to carry out underground petroleum – which is our natural gas – storage operations. This involves the transfer of existing natural gas to an offshore reservoir in Victorian waters to be stored for later access. On the face of it the bill is good. We are securing our energy source as we move out of fossil fuels and move into a renewable restructure of our electricity system.

The government position on gas since I have been in here has been one of probably gas being the enemy, and it has been talked down at a lot of stages when I have been sitting in the chamber listening. But the rhetoric has changed over the journey in the last 12 months, and the word ‘gas’ has not been brandished as a dirty word. It is something that is now coming to the fore and that is going to be a key component in our energy supply for a long time into the future as we do get our energy mix right. We need to make sure that we do have the amount of gas that is needed to supply Victoria, not only for our households – back in the day when it was set up the reticulated gas line went to most houses in Victoria, and we need to make sure that supply is there – but also for our manufacturing arms. There are a lot of businesses right around the state, and I have a lot in the Latrobe Valley, that rely heavily on the use of gas, because that is the only supply that can actually generate enough heat to manufacture the parts that are needed to supply different chains and manufacturing arms right around the state and that are also shipped offshore internationally.

The gas supply that we do have we need to make sure stays steady. I noticed the member for Narracan brought up the fact that that there are roughly five decades of gas supply in and around Victoria that one day, maybe, could be accessed responsibly to be used for Victorians. It seems with our gas that we do have here that it goes everywhere around the world apart from here in Victoria, and if it was only coming here, our gas supply and our gas prices would be a lot cheaper. So the government have changed their rhetoric over my journey sitting here in the chamber about what gas is going to do. Even Minister D’Ambrosio, when she gets up to speak, now realises that gas needs to be our friend and needs to be part of our mix as we move forward, which is good to hear. As we transition out we need to make sure that gas supply is there.

Taking gas out of our energy system at the start I felt was really only to keep the Greens happy as we move into green energy. But I think we only have to look back a few decades to when the Longford gas plant blew up, and I think most people can remember when that happened. It showed how vulnerable Victoria was back then and probably still would be today if we did not have that mix of gas in our supply. Recently we had some big storms, which we all talk about. We remember the ones that were up around Mirboo North that not only tipped over a lot of trees and wrecked houses but also pushed over transmission lines, and it was only the gas-fired generators that kicked in that actually kept power on virtually to the eastern seaboard of Australia. So we need to make sure that we are backing our natural resources that we do have and that we keep those supplies there if we can.

As I said before, gas supply for our manufacturing is critical. There are not a lot of places that use these large volumes of gas that can rely on an electricity supply coming into their business that is going to create enough energy, or burn hot enough, to make what they are manufacturing. I did speak a few weeks ago – just thinking of it now – about the crematoriums that are around the place. The crematoriums use gas-fired facilities to dispose of our loved ones when we cremate them. We need to make sure that they are kept on and going until we can come up with another way of making sure these units can work without being on gas.

The member for Gippsland East was also a little bit concerned. He wanted to make sure that we secured the fishing practices of our wonderful fishermen up in Lakes Entrance on the trawlers, who go out to bring our produce to market – all the fish and seafood that we eat. What are the boundaries that are going to be changing for them? We need to make sure that we are not having an unintentional impact on where they can take their boats out to, to trawl around and get the seafood that is part of the

make-up of what we eat. It is very difficult. I am sure that it is very worrying for the people that are on those trawlers up around East Gippsland and that rely on these designated areas where the fish are that they are trying to capture that we do not disturb that with the infrastructure that needs to go out to this basin. We need to know: is the pipework going to be laid on top of the sea floor? Is it going to go underneath partially on the way out? They are questions that we need answers for because we do not want to tick off on an area where we are doing a good thing in securing our gas supply and storing it but have the unintentional consequence that we are impacting other people that also rely on this area for their living. We also need to make sure that we do have that wonderful fresh fish and seafood supply for Victoria.

The bill has been developed at the request of industry and is intended to give certainty to the industry for it to invest in Victorian waters. It will, for example, enable the Golden Beach energy storage project to be developed by GB Energy Pty Ltd for it to proceed with establishing the essential storage infrastructure that can transfer onshore gas to be injected into the reservoir in the offshore gas field and made available at a later date. As we said, we are supporting what is going on here. It is a good idea because we do need to make sure that these supplies are adequate, not only for us here in the chamber but for everybody in Victoria.

I think big business, small business and the general public rely heavily on our gas supplies. I know from my role as a plumber working on gas appliances in houses that at the moment gas is a very highly sought after way for elderly people to heat their homes. They have that heater on – the old heater that used to sit on the wall. That is what a lot of them use. A lot of the old houses, dating back into the 1950s and 60s – their only supply was a gas supply. These people rely on it for their cooking and their heating and also to use for their hot water, so we need to make sure this supply is adequate and it is there while we do the transition out. I think that this amendment in the bill, to be able to create space to hold those gas supplies is great, but I do think we need to involve local people, especially our fishing fraternity, to make sure that they have stable work going forward.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:29): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (18:30): I am so incredibly proud to be speaking to this legislation, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024, which will give the express legal authority for both mobile and fixed-site pill-testing services to operate here in Victoria. Why am I so proud to speak to this legislation? It is easy. It is because pill testing saves lives and reduces harm to our community.

Various professional organisations – alcohol and drug services and the health, community justice, social and youth service sectors – have publicly championed pill testing for a number of years. However, I want to pay special tribute to one organisation in particular, the mighty Health and Community Services Union, otherwise known as HACSU, today for their strong advocacy and for constantly going above and beyond. HACSU represents the thousands of workers in our alcohol and drug and public mental health workforce. These are the workers who work with drug overdoses and who save lives. In December last year HACSU wrote to the Victorian government urging the Premier

and the minister to take up the offer of a free trial of pill testing during summer music festivals. They again continued that. I am very proud that it is this Labor government, the Allan Labor government, that is taking acting and demonstrably going to save the lives of those that we love. Pill testing saves lives, and I commend the bill.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (18:31): I am very pleased to make a contribution on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. From the outset I would like to speak about the importance of prevention and harm minimisation. Pill testing is something I have advocated for, and I am enormously proud to be part of a government that is delivering this reform. I represent one of the youngest electorates in Victoria in this place. My electorate is also home to lots of fantastic festivals – for many years we hosted the Laneway Festival – and my electorate is opposite the Flemington Racecourse and the showgrounds. This last summer at the showgrounds we experienced as a community shocking scenes when a number of young people were admitted to intensive care units after ingesting drugs that made them profoundly and dangerously unwell.

After this terrible summer I approached the Premier and I told her about my experience as a local MP being worried about people in my community – and young people in my community. I was so pleased she listened and she shared with me her concern for young people in Victoria. It was a very troubling summer, and I think as a community we have to act when we know that there are measures we can take to reduce drug and alcohol harm, and pill testing is just one measure. In my community of Footscray, where we have recently been experiencing an increase in drug-related harm, we have acted. We have funded Cohealth and the outreach service to go out and support people and to provide referral services. Of course drugs are changing, and one of the really alarming things is the toxicity of drugs that are now circulating. We are all very worried about the synthetic drug epidemic in America and what we have seen evolve there.

I have a personal experience I want to share, and that is of supporting someone who was experiencing an overdose at a music festival. Music festivals are a joy to me. I love attending music festivals. I am passionate about the live music industry. About 10 years ago at a music festival on a very hot summer night in Victoria I remember walking up to my tent with some girlfriends and literally stumbling over someone who was under a tree. This young man was so unwell he could not speak. We kept trying to ask him where his friends were, what he had taken, and we sat with him when St John ambulance came to help him. As wonderful as they were, they were not paramedics, so they organised for an ambulance to come into the festival site. I hope that that young man ended up okay. We waited with him until the ambulance came and it was a very distressing thing to experience. I know as a parent now – I was not then – that it is your absolute worst nightmare. It is your worst nightmare that your child might make a decision. Let us be honest, people take recreational drugs to enhance experiences and to have fun. It is your worst nightmare that a young person that you love will take a recreational drug and it will end up sending them to an intensive care unit or worse. There are people in this chamber, including the member for Melton, who I know have provided first responder care to people in that situation.

This bill makes important changes to the existing legislation to ensure that we have the necessary legal framework to conduct pill testing. Under the current legislation it is a criminal offence to possess or supply drugs of dependence in Victoria – this does not change that – meaning it would be currently illegal to operate a pill-testing service. Whilst other jurisdictions in Australia have commenced pill-testing trials under existing legislation, Victoria will be the first jurisdiction to explicitly make the provision of pill-testing services legal. Legislation means staff and clients can have confidence that no-one is breaking the law by using, operating or hosting this service. For a service like this to work, people need to have confidence that they will not be in trouble for making a decision about their health. The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill will give express legal authority to establish both fixed and mobile pill-testing services in Victoria. Those mobile services are essential because as the music industry is changing festival sites are changing. We saw last summer a very extreme weather event. It was late in the summer, over Easter, when festivals were cancelled and

others cropped up. We need these mobile services in place. The bill will establish a licensing framework to authorise, appoint and regulate both fixed and mobile pill-testing services and it will enable the supply of naloxone through secure automated vending machines. I have naloxone in my office. I think naloxone is such an important tool for people to have. It is easy to use to help people who are experiencing an overdose.

The bill does not change the government's position that illicit drug use carries inherent dangers and can never be considered safe. This is one of the other valuable things about this reform. I want people who are thinking about taking drugs to get advice and to be told about the risks. I want them to know when they walk into that tent or that pill-testing facility that they will be told what might happen. Nothing is safe. But if they make the decision, and many of them do, they will know what is in it. The music community as well – the festival-going community – I know will share that information, and that is vital. It will not require everyone to turn up and get a pill tested, but that information will spread quickly, and that is going to be a really valuable resource to the community as well. We do not condone risk-taking behaviour or illicit activities, but it does mean the action we are taking will help prevent risk to young people. Manufacturing, possessing, using, distributing and selling illicit drugs remain illegal, and those laws will continue to be enforced. We have worked closely with Victoria Police. We know that this can work because around the world there are 31 programs already operating, and of course the ACT and Queensland also have trials in place.

I am really proud that we have made a decision to protect the health of young people in Victoria. As someone who has witnessed an overdose at a festival and sat there nervously waiting for an ambulance to arrive, I am so pleased that we are making this change. This change will not save everyone. It is not going to stop or prevent people from being unwell, but if it saves one life it is the right thing to do. I commend this bill to the house because, as someone who represents a very young community, a community that hosts a lot of live music festivals, it is something that we have been calling for for decades. Finally it is coming, and I am very proud of this government for delivering it.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (18:41): I rise today to contribute to the discussions on the amendments regarding pill testing in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill-Testing) Bill 2024. Before I go on, I just want to commend the contributions by all of the members, but I do want to single one out, and that is the one by the member for Frankston yesterday, who was so passionate during his contribution, but all the contributions have been fantastic. The fundamental issue of this bill, as the member for Footscray just said, is about saving lives, and young lives at that, mainly young lives, because that is the majority of people that are popping these pills, and generally at festivals.

People know my background in paramedicine. I do not know if anyone in this chamber has ever – and I know the member for Footscray has witnessed a drug overdose – tried to resuscitate someone that has had a drug overdose, so I will describe it to people, and you can just picture it. You have a person, whether they be young or older, that might have popped a pill or a mixture of pills. That is just someone having a good time and acting normally until they pop the pill, and then within a few minutes or within half an hour you see that they have changed. Their demeanour has changed. Some of them will become unconscious and most of these pills depress respiration, so the first sign of seriousness in these issues is this person is on the ground, generally unconscious, non-breathing. If you stop breathing, it is a pretty serious issue, a pretty serious issue to your brain cells, let me tell you, for the length of time depending on how long you are not breathing for. Hopefully someone there will try and assist that person in trying to, let us say, resuscitate them.

What would happen is if you stop breathing and you stop breathing for a considerable period of time, then your heart will stop and you will go into full cardiac arrest. Sometimes people do not notice that someone is on the ground in cardiac arrest. They think they are asleep. Sometimes they will become cyanosed, so they will become blue in colour. Again, they are not breathing, so of course you try and resuscitate that person, and if we are fortunate enough to get defibrillation to them, proper resuscitation, whether an ambulance arrives, you can be quite fortunate in resuscitating those people.

If there is naloxone available, it is an amazing drug. I do not know if anyone has ever seen the efforts of naloxone when it is administered. If it is done by intramuscular injection or IV, as ambos would do it, people instantly will sit up. They will come straight out of their unconsciousness and sit up. Some of them would be quite aggressive. If it is intranasal, it might take a little bit longer. That does not mean that they do not need ongoing medical treatment – they do, and they need observation. Some of them will get up and wander off. They will take off in their aggressive tone, because they have had an overdose and you have upset that process for them. They have got this anti-overdose drug, naloxone, and they are quite angry about it – not quite normal of course, but quite angry about it.

The unfortunate thing is that we do not save everyone in these overdoses. I do not know if anyone has ever had an experience of telling a family member ‘I’m sorry, we couldn’t resuscitate your child’ or ‘couldn’t resuscitate your relative’. It is pretty damn hard to go and tell a family member, friend or a bystander that might have been at the festival with the young person, ‘Your friend is no longer going to be with you.’ They are the experiences of someone overdosing. They are the experiences of people who will try and assist in providing support to those people that have overdosed and even save their lives. That is fundamentally what this issue is about. We do not want them to get into that situation of overdosing, right. What we are doing here with pill testing is trying to prevent that and to prevent the tragic outcome with some of them – that is, not surviving.

It would be remiss of us in this place to assume we have the power to stop drug use – of course we do not – across this state. Let me say, while we talk about pill testing, we seem to focus on the younger generation. The younger generation are not the only ones that have trouble with drugs. The general community have trouble with drugs, and we are talking about prescribed medications. There are more overdoses through prescribed medications out of the older community members than what there are with the younger community members. Let us not focus on young kids. We have a problem with drugs right across our community, and some of them are illicit and some of them are prescribed. It is not just focusing on kids.

Where we can make it safer for those who do choose to consume illicit substances and save lives in this process, we must make the necessary changes, and that is what this bill is about. Pill testing is one way that the Allan Labor government is committed to saving lives across the state and helping people make better and more informed decisions surrounding illicit drug consumption. That is the whole idea through this pill-testing process. It is not just about testing the drug, but it is about assisting them, educating them, informing them about the risk and also trying to provide other additional supports. That is what this pill-testing bill is about, and that is what the process is about: engaging with these people that are taking and trialling these drugs. Of course with the synthetic drugs that are around today we do not know what is contained in these drugs. Again, the pill-testing regime will sort that out for us, we hope.

I want to extend my thanks to the Minister for Mental Health Minister Stitt in the other place and of course the Premier for the fantastic work on this bill and bringing this bill forward. I also want to extend my gratitude to all of the health unions that are supportive of this bill: the Health and Community Services Union, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the Victorian Ambulance Union and the AMA. They have all supported this pill-testing bill because they know, and of course their professions are all about helping and saving people. That is what they do. That is their job. They see the difference every day in their working careers around the fine line between life and death. If we can prevent younger people, generally speaking, who are pill popping from dying, then this bill will be very successful.

As I said earlier, it is also about providing other information to these people that are engaging in this practice, information that can inform them, and they can then make a value judgement on whether they continue the practice or not. We know that drug taking is a high-risk action. In 2023 alone we saw 547 Victorians die from drug overdoses. That is the second-highest annual figure that we have seen. We are trying to stamp out drug taking alone. We are not going to stop that, but we can assist in other ways through this bill. If you compare the 547 deaths in 2023, that is a lot higher than the road

toll deaths in the same year. We have accepted that our road toll deaths are too high, and time and time again we have tried to implement measures that encourage our road users to drive a lot safer. We have put a lot of time, effort and money into road safety to prevent death, and this is an avenue for our government to prevent death through people trialling the drug or the pills that they are taking but also the dangerous synthetic drugs that have been created now. Contributions were put up yesterday in regard to fentanyl and nitazenes and things like that that are on the market now and coming into this country – really highly potent drugs – and as I said, they can change a person's life within a matter of seconds.

It is only by sheer luck that some of those people will survive the taking of those drugs, because others will assist in resuscitating them and bringing them back to life. It is a fine line. It is not a great experience resuscitating someone, especially a young person you know has caused harm to themselves. You never forget it, and I know the member for Footscray raised the experience she had when she stumbled across a young man under a tree. Thank God she did stumble across him, because I can tell you what, from my experience he is probably alive today because of that stumble, and that is what is important. We all need to have a go at supporting these kids and trying to stop them taking the drugs, but if they are taking them, this pill-testing bill will assist them in the future.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (18:51): I rise in support of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024. I would like to start with a quote about this work and about the work that we are doing through this bill. That quote is: 'They obviously want to save lives.' That is a quote from the member for Narracan. I thank him for recognising the great work that we are doing through this bill, because we have a fundamentally different approach to those opposite but our goal is to save lives. Seatbelts do not mean that we condone speeding, life jackets do not mean we accept drowning and Quitline does not mean we promote smoking, just as pill testing does not mean that we condone drug use, but these are things that exist to keep people alive, because we know that people do not always make the best choices. The 'just say no', high-horse approach of those opposite does not work. We need a health-led approach. The war on drugs –

Bridget Vallence: Acting Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Lauren KATHAGE: Well, I am so glad I packed up my speech, but here we go. As I was saying, seatbelts, life jackets, Quitline – all of these things just mean that we want to stop people from dying. It is not about judgement. It is not about saying that we are going to climb up on our high horse above people and tell people how they should lead their lives and watch on from a lofty height as they die. That is not what this government is about. This government is about a health-led approach. We know what happens when the hardline approach is taken. If you think, for example, about sniffer dogs at music festivals, we had the terrible, terrible case in Western Australia of the young girl Gemma, a beautiful, happy 17-year-old, who died. She had gone to Big Day Out, one of the biggest music festivals. It was a hot day. Noticing that the sniffer dogs were there and worrying about being caught, she took all of the tablets she had at once, and that was a fatal quantity of ecstasy. By the time she was taken to hospital her temperature was 43 degrees, and there was nothing that doctors could do to save her. Think about that approach to young people's drug use at festivals and the outcome that caused, compared to a health-led approach which recognises that people will use drugs and instead seeks to keep them alive and provide them with information that will help them and not harm them.

My best mate from high school is still alive, but in many ways I lost her when we were still teenagers. She took up with a guy from a different group that we did not know too well. They headed to a bush doof, which was the type of music that she liked, and she took a pill that was contaminated with something. The impact on her life continues; 25 years later she is still impacted by that choice. These are impacts that can be stopped through pill testing. She is one of the lucky ones. Think of all the deaths each year from overdose, all the people that do not get to have that continued friendship or that continued relationship with the people they love and care about, and I think here of the young girl

whose story I was explaining before. It is worth noting that her mother, when recounting the story 10 years on, said the pain has not reduced a single bit, 10 years after losing her beautiful teenage daughter.

This health-led response is the right thing to do. It has support from experts, and the list of experts who support the health-led approach is lengthy. It includes the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Public Health Association of Australia, the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association and the Pennington Institute. But it is not just experts that support this approach, it is also parents. Parents want their children to come home after being out. Parents are not going to write their child off for a bad choice. They just want their kids home safe and well, and that is what this legislation seeks to do.

Those opposite are not in support of pill testing, and they have really performed some incredible mental gymnastics to justify and explain why they do not support pill testing. We heard complaints yesterday from the member for Brighton. His complaint was that the pill testing as proposed does not provide enough information to people having their pills tested. He said that if more information could be provided to people having pills tested, it would save lives. But at the same time they are saying that they oppose pill testing, so people would have no information at all. Therefore the risk to life would be increased. That is some incredible mental gymnastics from the member for Brighton. To me that seems –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required by sessional orders to interrupt business.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Miss Lacey Cafe and Wine Bar

David HODGETT (Croydon) (19:00): (861) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to reinstate permanent fencing in the outdoor dining area of Miss Lacey Cafe and Wine Bar that was removed during the Coolstore Road level crossing removal project. Ms Tennille Douglas, the owner of Miss Lacey Cafe and Wine Bar, has always had an outdoor dining area available for her patrons, a vital part of her business that has been part of the cafe for 17 years, dating back to the previous owner. Prior to the level crossing works and the change to the traffic the outdoor area was a quiet corner of Croydon with very little traffic passing through. The cafe also had fixed fencing along the edge of the kerb which provided a safety barrier to the diners utilising the area. When the level crossing team removed the fixed fencing from the area Ms Douglas was assured that it would be replaced like for like. However, as the project is nearing completion, Ms Douglas has been told that temporary cafe panels will be the replacement option offered. Replacing permanent fencing with temporary fence panels is hardly like for like. Just recently when we had high winds we witnessed businesses having those temporary panels just blow over. If there were to be an accident on this corner, the temporary panels would do nothing to protect diners.

As a result of the Coolstore Road level crossing removal project in Croydon the traffic flow and main thoroughfare have changed, and as a result of this Lacey Street now joins with Kent Avenue, making this the main thoroughfare through Croydon. The increased traffic flow means there is now a larger volume of vehicles turning onto Main Street at the intersection of Lacey Street. Miss Lacey Cafe and Wine Bar, located on the corner of Lacey Street, is now in the heart of a major intersection, with cars passing by this business frequently and often at speed. Given the close proximity of her business to the intersection, the slope of the road and the lack of kerb at the corner, without the permanent fencing this poses a significant safety concern for the diners within the outdoor dining area. The patrons are

sitting ducks at risk of an accident happening or someone being seriously injured or killed. Ms Douglas has already seen a decline in customers utilising the area, as they feel unsafe. Having already been significantly impacted by the level crossing removal works, it is unfair that Ms Douglas continues to be impacted by this latest decision where the fixed fencing will not be replaced as promised. Minister, I implore you to reinstate permanent fencing at the outdoor dining area of Miss Lacey Cafe and Wine Bar, which was removed during the Coolstore Road level crossing removal project, to ensure the safety of patrons and prevent a tragedy from occurring.

Alphington neighbourhood battery

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (19:03): (862) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I ask that she arrange a briefing for me on the progress of the Alphington neighbourhood battery. This is a project proudly funded by the Allan Labor government through the neighbourhood battery initiative, and it has been delivered by a fantastic volunteer-run community organisation, Village Power. When it comes online, the 300-kilowatt-hour battery will support around a hundred households, helping to address rising energy costs by enabling families to store and use renewable energy when it is most needed. At a time when families are feeling the burden of cost-of-living pressures this project offers real relief. It will work by storing excess energy generated by solar panels in a shared battery, and participating homes can draw that energy out when they need it. At peak times the village power bank may sell some excess energy to the electricity grid to reduce the price of power for the network. One of the great things about this model is that it is inclusive of people without solar panels. If you join up, you can buy solar power generated by your neighbours, making it available to many more renters and apartment dwellers and spreading the benefits of cleaner energy to more households in our community.

I want to commend the team at Village Power, headed up by outstanding Alphington local Graeme Martin, for their wonderful vision and the enormous amount of work and advocacy they have put in to get to this point. I have been really proud to support them through their journey, from facilitating their early discussions with Solar Victoria to backing their successful application for feasibility funds and later for implementation funds. They are also master collaborators, drawing support from Jemena, Darebin council, the Commonwealth and lots of industry experts. I think they might have the whole of Alphington cheering them on for their project. We are excited for this battery; we want to see it succeed. It is part of our Labor government's bold ambition and commitment to reach 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035. It is part of our story – to get more homes onto solar, to help more households with their power bills, to support a clean energy workforce and to work towards a more sustainable future for our kids. I am looking forward to the minister arranging a briefing so I can update the Alphington community on this vital renewable energy project.

Cave Hill Road–Melba Avenue, Lilydale

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:05): (863) Lilydale is a wonderful and growing community. However, traffic congestion has significantly increased in the heart of Lilydale as a result of the state government's changes to the road network, causing frustration and serious concerns about safety in times of emergency. The matter I raise is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is to conduct and publish a risk assessment investigation into the impact of the road closure of Melba Avenue at Cave Hill Road after the recent trapping of residents and emergency vehicles with the July 2024 flooding of the Olinda Creek in Lilydale. Our community hopes that such an investigation would offer recommendations on how to rectify the damage caused by the government's closure of Melba Avenue at Cave Hill Road. There is significant community concern about traffic flow through Lilydale since the government's removal of the level crossings at Lilydale on Main Street and Melba Avenue at Cave Hill Road, with residents experiencing a massive increase in traffic congestion and being trapped after the recent significant storms and flooding event in Lilydale as a result of these road and traffic changes that I just mentioned.

Despite the Labor government promising the level crossing removal at Main Street, Lilydale, would slash congestion and travel times, it has done the complete opposite. Congestion is far worse now, and the poor road network planning has created congestion pinch points and dangerous safety hazards by (a) reducing two lanes down to one lane inside the intersection under the new station and rail bridge on Main Street and (b) removing the second access road in and out of Lilydale at Melba Avenue at Cave Hill Road. The government's decision to close Melba Avenue at Cave Hill Road means that Hutchinson Street onto Main Street, Lilydale, is now the only access road for Lilydale High School, Box Hill Institute's Lilydale campus, the Marketplace shopping centre, a childcare centre, the public library, Melba Support Services, Cire college, industrial businesses and residents in that part of Lilydale.

Let us be clear, this was not the removal of a level crossing, just a cheap and nasty blocking off of the road without community consultation. It is dangerous, and it happened despite the objections from local emergency services warning that this would restrict emergency services vehicles and would trap residents in times of emergency. We know that that is exactly what happened when the banks of the Olinda Creek broke and Lilydale was flooded in July, preventing the movement of emergency vehicles and of thousands of people on the wrong side of John Street, Lilydale. It is a disgrace that the state Labor government's actions could directly put at risk so many Victorians. Had the government extended the sky rail across the road and kept Melba Avenue as a thoroughfare road underneath, this would have mitigated the safety hazard. Now our community is overwhelmingly concerned about the negative impact to public safety and the impaired access for emergency services on these roads. I would like to thank Sharyn Manning, the Lilydale Township Action Group, the Lilydale CFA, SES and Yarra Ranges police for their advocacy.

Northern Bay College

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:08): (864) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action that I seek from the minister is that he join me and visit Northern Bay College's Hendy campus. Members of the house may have heard the terrible news last week of a fire at the Hendy campus of Northern Bay. There was significant damage to the prep to grade 2 classrooms, reception and other facilities. Students and staff could not return to the campus last week, and arrangements were made for the students to attend the nearby Peacock campus for classes. I am really pleased that grades prep to 6 were back at school as of yesterday, with grades 7 and 8 still at the Peacock campus. Understandably, this has left staff, students and the wider community reeling, but with everything going on it has been extraordinary to see how the school community have come together to offer their support for everyone. Having the minister visit Northern Bay College will be great for the school community in this challenging time, and I look forward to hosting him.

Country Fire Authority Foster and Mirboo North stations

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:09): (865) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide funding at long last for both the Foster and Mirboo North fire station rebuilds. The minister will be aware that I have been asking for this one for some time, but there is now added impetus in that I believe the minister or at least the government has just in the last day or two signed off on a lease arrangement for Foster CFA to be able to have a new site, which is on Crown land on former railway land in Foster. We have a site now ready to go. It will be leased from the Crown by the CFA. Dave Jones and his volunteers at the Foster CFA have been waiting for this for well over 10 years now. Certainly the entire time I have been there we have been waiting for funding for a new fire station at Foster. Mirboo North is in the same boat. I know captain Trent Venten and the team there also have had promises made – in fact we celebrated before the last election as the CFA gave advice that they were providing capital funding for both of these stations, along with Yarram, which is finally now being done, but that money evaporated. It seems that it was taken back by the government, and we are now still waiting to see funding for the rebuild of these stations.

Apart from bringing them up to modern standards, both of these brigades have trouble literally getting the trucks that they have into the stations. You can go to either side of the folding doors and see the chips on the brickwork, because the trucks simply do not fit. Indeed both brigades are limited in the trucks that they can get because some of the newer trucks simply will not fit in their outdated and very old stations. We need to support our CFA volunteers. There has not been enough support for them, particularly in these locations. Foster and Mirboo North, I understand, were one and two on the capital requirements list of district 9 for a long time and still are, and we are waiting to see that support. Now that we have the site sorted for Foster, we certainly need funding to get a new station built. Secondly, at Mirboo North, as the minister herself and the Premier as well saw when the storm hit Mirboo North earlier in the year, there is a completely inadequate facility at the moment. We do need funding for both of these stations, and I ask the minister to provide it as quickly as possible.

Wheatsheaf Road–Plumpton Avenue, Glenroy

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:12): (866) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to the intersection of Wheatsheaf Road and Plumpton Avenue in Glenroy. One of the proudest achievements from my time on council was the commencement of the \$30 million Glenroy Community Hub. This magnificent space includes child care, kindergarten, maternal and child health, community health, the Glenroy Neighbourhood House, community meeting rooms and a wonderful new library set in the beautiful grounds of the Bridget Shortell Reserve, with a very well used park and playground. It attracts hundreds of residents a day, including many young children and people with mobility issues, and it is currently very difficult to cross the intersection of Wheatsheaf Road and Plumpton Avenue to access the site safely. There have been a number of accidents at the intersection, and I thank local resident Stephanie Leong for taking the time to write to me and document some of the most recent incidents. I understand the intersection is a joint responsibility with council, and I have requested that council undertake an urgent review of the parking conditions at the site with a view to increasing visibility. I have also nominated the intersection for consideration through the federal black spot funding program. I would appreciate the minister seeing the intersection in person and discussing the ways the different levels of government can work together to improve safety at the intersection.

Housing

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (19:13): (867) My adjournment is for the Minister for Housing. The action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the Labor government's plans to fix Victoria's housing and homelessness crisis. Victorians are struggling to secure stable housing. They are facing ballooning public housing waitlists, stagnating social housing, more taxes, higher rents and insufficient new housing supply, with the dream of home ownership becoming harder, especially for young people. Particularly with higher land tax, mum-and-dad investors and others are getting out of the rental market. That means less rentals and higher rents. Not only are people struggling to buy homes but they often cannot get into rental homes or afford rents. For example, a local mum I know lost her accommodation as her landlord had to sell, and she could not find anywhere to go. Now she and her three kids have been placed in emergency housing 1 hour away from their schools. Another couple with five kids who run a business locally and set up festivals have been struggling financially due to a WorkCover incident. They could no longer afford rent and faced eviction. They could not find any alternative affordable rent after applying for so many properties. At the last minute they found an affordable Airbnb, but they are now in limbo, going from Airbnb to Airbnb to avoid homelessness. Even with Airbnbs, families like this will soon face more costs with the Labor government's new short-term accommodation tax passed through to them.

These are some things I saw growing up in Horsham, but it is much worse now. On housing supply the Labor government had announced building 80,000 new homes a year over a decade, but the most homes Victoria has built in 12 months is under 70,000 homes in 2017. Home approvals in 12 months to July this year were only about 52,000. There is a long way to go to get to 800,000 builds. Meanwhile Victorian rents have gone up more than 10 per cent in 2024 alone. The public housing waitlist has

ballooned to over 61,000. Homelessness has increased by thousands, with the Mornington Peninsula having the fourth-highest level of homelessness in the state. A leaked report shows the number of public homes managed by Homes Victoria fell by 446 in the last half of 2023. We have reports that the Labor government is stockpiling rental properties in a move experts warn will force rents up, and since Labor's Big Build we have seen a net loss of 3500 public housing bedrooms. These are not empty figures; these are mums, dads, friends, grandparents and young people, all struggling to survive.

Housing is not merely a roof over one's head; it is everything. Lack of stable housing is linked to increased inequality, depression, anxiety, unemployment, obesity, lack of productivity and much more. Housing gives people a better quality of life and cohesive communities. We need to do much more on this issue.

Dandenong Ranges telecommunications infrastructure

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (19:16): (868) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and it relates to the critical issue of telecommunications across the Dandenong Ranges in my electorate of Monbulk. Last week I met with senior representatives from Optus and Telstra to continue advocating for better mobile phone resilience across our region. This is an issue which has impacted our community for far too long, with many areas experiencing poor or no mobile coverage when we experience prolonged power outages. As I have said many times before, not being able to make a call is inconvenient at best and it is life-threatening at worst. I have also been in discussion with federal colleagues, pressing for real solutions to these telecommunications black spots and blackouts. I know our minister has been working hard on this issue as well, and I want to take a moment to acknowledge the impact that these efforts are having. Recently the federal Minister for Communications the Honourable Michelle Rowland MP, who is wholly responsible for telecommunication regulation and policy, announced the outcomes of round 2 of the federal mobile black spot program, and this included funding awarded to mobile solutions for Emerald and Lilydale, which will provide much-needed new or upgraded mobile infrastructure and will help improve mobile coverage in our area.

I would also like to take a moment to recognise the work of the late Senator Linda White, who was a fierce advocate for the Emerald community. In her submission she made it clear that mobile black spots in and around Emerald Secondary College were a critical issue, particularly given the area's vulnerability to bushfires, flash flooding and storm events. The school has a category 2 fire classification, and Senator White emphasised how crucial it is for students, staff and families to be able to reliably reach emergency services when needed. Given this progress, I ask the minister to provide an update on what further action the Victorian government is taking to advocate for additional federal support to ensure telecommunications infrastructure continues to improve and can withstand prolonged power outages.

Thorpdale slip

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:18): (869) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is the immediate investigation and rectification of the Thorpdale slip. It is a section of road halfway between Trafalgar and Thorpdale, and the locals obviously call it Thorpdale slip, but this road now has been like this for 20-plus years. I know my predecessor Gary Blackwood brought this up with the government many times, but the problem is there is a very, very large volume of truck movements down this hill, and this road continually slips into a valley. Regional Roads Victoria are there quite often putting more crushed rock in and everything else, but it is getting dangerous, and when you have got an area like Thorpdale, which is a very, very high-producing area of fruit and vegetables – 70 per cent of Australia's brushed potatoes come off this hill – and when you have got B-doubles going down this hill it will be only a matter of time before a serious accident happens. So I would really like the minister for roads to start investigating the rectification of this. I think over 20 years is way too long in anyone's mind. It needs to be fixed, and it needs to be fixed urgently before something more serious happens.

The Orange Door

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (19:19): (870) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is that the minister come to visit Cranbourne to open the sparkling new Orange Door, which is coming very soon. This government has made unprecedented investments in the prevention of family violence, but there is more to be done in considering how we can respond to this scourge. Not only have we made unprecedented investments, but we are leaders nationally and we are unparalleled globally for the approach that has been taken. The member for Narre Warren North and I recently visited the people who are responding to family violence in Cranbourne at a location where the family violence service is being temporarily housed. I must say how grateful I am, and I want to take the opportunity to thank the workers at the local Cranbourne Orange Door for what they are doing. I know they are very much looking forward to moving into the new centre. I look forward to the minister's response and welcoming her to Cranbourne, and I look forward to continuing this really incredibly important work.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:21): The member for Croydon raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. If I understood the description of the issue that he raised, he was seeking the reinstatement of permanent fencing at Miss Lacey Cafe and Wine Bar, particularly around the outdoor dining area, which I think he said had been impacted by works for the Level Crossing Removal Project. That matter will be passed on. The member for Northcote, a hardworking local member of Parliament in the Northcote area, has raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources. She was seeking a briefing on the Alphington neighbourhood battery initiative, obviously a really important initiative there in that local community. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services seeking funding for the Foster and Mirboo North fire station upgrades. I will make sure that matter gets passed on.

The member for Lara, the hardworking member in the electorate of Lara, raised a matter for the Minister for Education, in that he come down and visit the Northern Bay College Hendy campus, which I think she said had been impacted by fire, so a quite important visit there that she is seeking the minister to take. The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, seeking the minister to conduct and publish a risk assessment. I think it was Melba Avenue and Cave Hill Road or Main Street, Lilydale, that was the cause of the issue.

Bridget Vallence: It was the closure of Melba Avenue at Cave Hill Road.

Colin BROOKS: The closure of Melba Avenue. I will make sure that *Hansard* is checked and that matter is passed on. The member for Broadmeadows, who is an extremely hardworking member of Parliament, raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. She was seeking the minister to join her at a visit to the intersection of Wheatsheaf Road and Plumpton Avenue in Glenroy, and I am sure that the minister will be keen to join the member at that location.

The member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Housing seeking that the minister update the member on the government's plan to fix housing. I am sure that the Minister for Housing will be very keen to do that. It is a serious issue, and maybe the minister will outline the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, which is delivering thousands of new homes for Victorians who need social housing. I note that the social housing waitlist – with a long way to go – has come down several thousand applications over the last year. On top of that is the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund. All of the initiatives are outlined in the housing statement, resulting in Victoria building and approving more homes than any other state in the country. I am sure the minister will be keen to pick up on those points, notwithstanding the serious issues that the member has raised in relation to some constituents in his electorate – and maybe even outline that the federal Liberals went missing when the Housing Australia Future Fund was being considered in the federal Parliament. There was no support. I remember in this Parliament when issues were raised on housing at the time there was silence on that

side of the house. No-one would pick up the phone and ring their federal counterparts and say, 'You should pass the HAFF.' No-one rang Michael Sukkar and said, 'Listen, you should pass that funding for this important housing' –

David Hodgett: We did, but he didn't answer.

Colin BROOKS: He was not taking your calls then and he probably is not taking your calls now, I would say. I would also make the point that the Leader of the Opposition has been quite notable in opposing social housing projects in his electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! We are straying from the task at hand.

Colin BROOKS: I will move on to the member for Monbulk, who raised a matter for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. She is seeking an update on the advocacy in relation to telecommunications organisations in her electorate, in particular in relation to mobile coverage, particularly around emergency situations. Such a hardworking member of Parliament is the member for Monbulk. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety – an important issue no doubt – of road safety at the Thorpdale slip, seeking that that be investigated and rectified. In relation to that particular issue the member is obviously being hardworking in making sure that matter has been raised. The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence – a serious issue there that the hardworking member has raised – in that the minister visit the new Orange Door in Cranbourne. It does incredible work, the Orange Door service, and I am sure that the minister will be keen to engage with the workers at that particular centre.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hardworking house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:25 pm.