

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 5 March 2025

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Wednesday 5 March 2025

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend and change the title of the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 to expand the coverage of that act to emergency services and volunteers, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:34): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (09:34): The Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025 amends the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012 to replace the existing fire services property levy with an expanded emergency services and volunteers funding levy from 1 July 2025.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:35): General business, notice of motion 33 and orders of the day 5 and 6, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) presented a petition bearing 334 signatures:

This Petition of residents from across Victoria draws to the attention of the House their concerns regarding the appalling state of our roads.

The petitioners therefore request that the Labor Government provide more funding and maintenance to fix our roads.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Managing Disruptions Affecting Victoria's Public Transport Network – Ordered to be published

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978:

Order under s 17B granting a licence over Lake Boort Wildlife Reserve

Order under s 17D granting a lease over Albert Park
Fire Rescue Victoria – Report 2023–24
Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 2.

Motions

Motions by leave

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Shadow Attorney-General to publicly retract his comments, apologise and commit to a meaningful dialogue with Victoria's Muslim community to better understand how Islamophobia and vilification are impacting them.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Tropical Cyclone Alfred

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:37): I want to begin by just making some remarks to our friends in south-east Queensland who are facing a category 1, 2 or maybe 3 cyclone. We send our best wishes to all of those in Brisbane who may be impacted by storm surge or flooding and recognise the outstanding leadership of Premier David Crisafulli, whose government is preparing with the Brisbane City Council and other councils for what could be quite a significant event for our third largest metropolis. It is a shame the Premier played politics with what could be a serious natural disaster affecting our third largest city, but we should not be surprised at this from a petty and juvenile Premier whose taxpayer-funded dirt unit has got nothing else to do except find dirt on opposition MPs' birthdays.

Crime

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:38): While we are talking about the Premier of the day, why don't we talk about crime, because I want to talk about crime. The bashing of a security guard in Bendigo shows that crime is out of control right across the state and particularly in the Premier's electorate of Bendigo. She does not care about crime. This side of the house has tried multiple times to toughen our bail laws, to get sentencing under control and to make the government focus on making Victoria safe again, and all we have got is excuses from a hopeless and weak and petty government – a juvenile government, a government that does not accept that we need to get tough on crime. And if nothing else, we have got to change the government to fix this problem.

Loreto College Ballarat

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (09:38): Loreto College has celebrated their 150th anniversary, recognising the arrival of Mother Gonzaga Barry and the nine sisters in Ballarat in 1875. These trailblazing Irish nuns laid the foundations for what would become an enduring legacy of education, community and leadership through the Loreto tradition in Australia and South-East Asia. As a past student and current parent, I was honoured to be one of 1200 guests to celebrate mass with Father Justin Driscoll in the school's historic gardens on Friday. It was a very special welcome to country from Wadawurrung traditional owner and class of 2019 alumni Macaylah Johnson after she led the Dhurrung students in the opening procession.

The breadth of the school community was well represented throughout the mass, with contributions from Loreto sisters, current and former staff, students and school captains from across the decades. It was a joyous occasion reflecting Mother Gonzaga Barry's advocacy and commitment for education and the importance of the Loreto values of verity, felicity, freedom, justice and sincerity. Well done to principal Michelle Brodrick; deputy principal Christine Shaw; assistant principal, faith and identity, Felicity Knobel; liturgy coordinator Jarrod Ryan; and everybody who contributed to making Loreto's 150th celebration a success. Congratulations, Loreto, on 150 years.

Community event traffic management

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:40): The Allan government has unleashed another ridiculously expensive bureaucratic nightmare on regional community events, forcing them to cancel because of prohibitive costs. One of the first victims is the Bridge to Bridge event in Cohuna, which had to be cancelled last Sunday because their traffic management charges went from \$2000 last year to \$22,000 this year – yes, \$22,000 for a small community event. Instead of raising money for the local hospital as they have for years, they were just raising money to pay GAME traffic management for the Allan government’s stupidity. I say ‘stupidity’ because the Allan government has blindly implemented the updated Austroads *Guide to Temporary Traffic Management*, which is a national standard for major projects and road closures, not traffic management for small community events that raise money for their local community. Last year GAME had two traffic controllers for the Bridge to Bridge. This year under the new rules they said they had to have 13 traffic controllers. The locals have rightly asked, ‘Why do you need a traffic controller on a dirt track that no-one uses?’ It is just plain stupid – another example of how red, green and black tape is strangling regional Victoria. When will it stop? Will the local netball and football clubs have to have traffic controllers when they go for a training run? Will they have an expensive stop-and-go attendant in hi-vis colours on every corner of their training runs? I say to the Premier: get control of the bureaucrats in this state before more events like the Bridge to Bridge have to be cancelled.

His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:41): I was honoured to join with the terrific community in Cranbourne and across Victoria to welcome the spiritual leader of BAPS, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj. I have been particularly blessed to have participated in these festivities three times, including the most extraordinary event when His Holiness was first introduced to devotees. Together with the member for Narre Warren North and of course the member for Greenvale, who did a terrific job representing the Premier beautifully, we were also joined by Mr Tarlamis and Ms Shing in the other place at this most extraordinary event. I attended a separate event with the Deputy Premier and again the member for Narre Warren North where His Holiness sanctified soil and blessed the event, and so many of the devotees are excited about their aspirations for the future. Finally, I was fortunate to attend, with the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action, the federal member for Holt and the member for Yan Yean and her brand new baby Raf, the women’s conference. This has been an extraordinary undertaking, and I am so proud of my community for welcoming thousands of volunteers to Cranbourne as part of this peace symposium.

Julie Ogbole

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (09:42): I am deeply saddened to report the sad passing of Sister Julie Ogbole from the wonderful St Thomas community. I was honoured to go to her requiem mass on Monday, which was celebrated by Bishop Greg Bennett, Father Denis O’Byrne and Father Antony Rebolo and concelebrated by the priests of the Sale diocese. I particularly send my condolences to her family in Nigeria, her mother Martha in particular.

Cameron Marshall

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:43): Cameron Marshall is 22, and he is a great triathlete. His most recent success at the world qualifier event in Batemans Bay is particularly remarkable as Cameron competes with an intellectual impairment. Competing in the 20 to 24 age group, this was the first time an athlete with an intellectual impairment has ever crossed the line first overall in a mainstream Australian triathlon event. Every decision he makes is 16 per cent impaired compared to the average male of the same age. There are many decisions a triathlete has to make in competition, from racetrack tactics to setting the pace and changeover. Cameron is currently sitting on top of the Australian men’s 20 to 24 age points table for selection in the Australian team for the world triathlon championships in Wollongong later this year. Arguably he is the world’s leading intellectually impaired athlete in triathlon and cycling. However, there is no Olympic pathway for athletes with an intellectual

impairment in triathlon and cycling. This needs to change and more sports need to get on board to promote inclusion of athletes with an intellectual impairment to be able to compete in the Paralympics. Currently athletics, swimming and table tennis are the only sports offering an Olympic pathway, which is hugely unfair to athletes like Cameron, and there are plenty of other athletes like that in Victoria. Cam's proud parents Dayle and Ashley are not great triathletes, but they are great golfers and wonderful supporters of Cam and his endeavours, and they fund extensively his sport. *(Time expired)*

Geelong QHub

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:44): Now more than ever the LGBTQI+ community needs our support. Last week I was joined by the Victorian commissioner for LGBTIQ+ communities Joe Ball and his team Danni and Kristy on a visit to the Geelong QHub. A large group of young people and their parents shared their experiences with us and highlighted the importance of the QHub and the valuable work that they do for them. It was such a powerful conversation. It was such a strong message to me about just how life changing and how life saving the work of the QHub is to the LGBTQI+ community and their families. A huge thankyou to Jack and the team at QHub.

Pako Festa

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:45): Recently the member for Lara joined me at the Geelong Pako Festa, which is proudly supported by the Allan government. It is always an honour to officially open the Pako Festa. I acknowledge and thank all the multicultural communities who participated in the street parade led by Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative. With all the food stalls, the dancing and singing and the cultural costumes, this really was a sharing of culture like no other. I also acknowledge and thank the organisers of Pako Festa for the past 43 years, Cultura CEO Joy Leggo, Cultura board members and the event coordinator Lou LaFornara and her team. Pako Festa is a reminder of the importance of multiculturalism. Geelong is a great multicultural community. However, given the behaviour of some, we must continue to work hard to ensure inclusion, diversity, harmony and – *(Time expired)*

Bayside kindergarten forum

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:46): Last week I had the privilege of meeting with kindergartens from across the Sandringham electorate and the broader Bayside community at the Bayside kindergarten forum. This forum provides an invaluable opportunity to discuss the challenges facing bayside kindergartens, particularly the shortfalls of Labor's free kinder, which every service understands actually costs them more. I extend my sincere thanks to Miles Harris for his initiative and his support in coordinating this important event, and I thank Hurlingham Preschool, Paisley Park Early Learning Centre, Black Rock Pre-school, Hampton Community Kindergarten, Holy Trinity Kindergarten in Hampton and Beaumaris playhouse for their participation. Every local family deserves world-class early childhood education services, and I will keep fighting to ensure they get just that.

Lent

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:47): Today also marks the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, a time for reflection and renewal for Christians around the world and across our great state. For many the period of Lent is about giving something up, but some choose to do something more to help their community, to help their family or to help their friends or neighbours. To those who are remembering Lent from this Ash Wednesday period through to Easter, I wish those Christians a very happy Lent.

Community safety

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:47): Finally, in relation to the crime incident in my community in the last 24 hours in Black Rock, I urge the Allan Labor government to do more and to do it now to keep my community safe.

Transport infrastructure

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:47): Look out, folks! To say I am excited is an understatement when it comes to Labor announcing we are getting on with building Melbourne Airport rail. As a proud westie I know this is huge, and on my side of the bridge we cannot wait to get started. The next step in this hallmark project for Labor is transforming Sunshine station into a superhub. Sunshine station is one of the most critical rail junctions in Victoria, and we need to untangle it to deal with demand on the rail corridor in Melbourne's west. These works at Sunshine will also mean we can get on and rebuild Albion station. Locals in this patch have a love-hate relationship with Albion station. They love having a train station close to home, but they absolutely hate the derelict state of it. So it was fabulous to have the Premier of Victoria Jacinta Allan pop down to the station to take a walk on the platform alongside the member for St Albans and me to see just how much this station needs attention. We are not talking about a lick of paint, we are talking about an \$80 million rebuild of the station from the ground up. My message to commuters and locals is clear: Labor is going to build you your station, which you not only need but deserve, one you can finally feel proud of. My message to westies is this: unlike those opposite, who are blocking and cutting every chance they get, only Labor will deliver the essential infrastructure Melbourne's west needs now and into the future.

Euroa electorate student leaders

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:49): I had the privilege of meeting the next generation of leaders across our region while visiting local schools recently, and I can confidently say our future is in good hands. A huge thankyou to Euroa Secondary College, Seymour College, St Patrick's Primary, Broadford Primary, St Joseph's and Nagambie Primary School for welcoming me into your leadership ceremonies and classrooms. It was an honour to speak with students about the many forms leadership can take and the incredible impact young leaders can have on their schools and communities. To this year's school leaders: congratulations. By stepping up to guide your peers, you are shaping not just your school but the future of our region.

Dylan Townsend

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:49): I also want to give a special mention to Dylan Townsend, who I had the pleasure of meeting during drop-in sessions at my Benalla office. Despite his young age, Dylan's amazing understanding of Parliament and its history and the challenges facing our region is so inspiring. His political skills are so good, Dylan and I are hosting a civics class at EdSpace in Benalla.

Benalla community services

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:50): Unfortunately not all young people in our community have access to the support they need. The closure of the Benalla community services hub has left a devastating gap, cutting off vital health, housing and family violence support services. In response I hosted a round table with local organisations and community leaders to find a new home for these services, because no-one in our town should be left without the help they need.

Country Fire Authority Euroa electorate brigades

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:50): Finally, I want to say thank you to our incredible firefighters and volunteers, who work tirelessly to control fires across the Strathbogie and Boho areas. We are so grateful for everything you do.

Middle Park Primary School

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:50): I do want to say I had the delight of attending the Middle Park Primary School fete recently. It was absolutely fantastic. I want to congratulate principal Tim, the whole executive, the school council and all the parents and volunteers. They did an absolutely amazing job. They go all out to make sure everyone has a wonderful day. We had students singing and performing live on stage. We had parents performing live on stage as well. There was an enormous

ride that they managed to get into the schoolyard. There was a cinema at night. It was hot, I have to say – it was pretty intense – but in spite of that people still turned up and gave everything they could for the benefit of all the students, because that is what it is all about. I should say I was very happy to be able to support the cake stall. We know this is a stellar component, but there were many, many stalls at the fete, and these are all important funds that go towards the school. But it is not only about that, it is also about connection. It is actually providing an opportunity for different families to get to know each other in a really nice relaxed space. It is like a whole-of-community event. I really want to commend the school for going all out.

Port Melbourne Secondary College

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (09:52): I did also recently catch up with new principal Tim Nolan of Port Melbourne Secondary College. He is going to do a fabulous job. I wish him all the best.

Warragul Community Aged Care

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:52): I rise today to talk about a new facility, the Warragul Community Aged Care facility, which I opened on Monday. It is a really big investment into my local area. It was a \$40 million investment that has created 144 beds, and it employs 200 staff. When you walk into this facility it is like walking into a 5-star hotel. It is absolutely amazing. Congratulations to Martin and the team. I really wish this goes well for them. It is a fantastic investment into my local area, and I look forward to going back there and meeting all the new residents, along with Joan, who I met the other day, who was the first resident to come in.

Yarragon Primary School

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:53): On another matter, it was a pleasure to attend Yarragon Primary School again this year to welcome their new school captains. The school captains are Lily and Billie; the vice-captains are Buckley, Harrison and Bridget; the house captains are Lachlan and Mary, Jackson and Hadley, Angus and Arie, and Cameron and Jake. It is always fun going to Yarragon. Again they asked me this year why I am so bald. That is two years in a row they have had a fascination with my head. I just had to explain to them that they only put hair on ugly heads.

Team Teal

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:53): Last week I had the pleasure of representing Minister Spence and Minister for Racing Minister Carbines at Team Teal's Night at the Trots for the seventh year at Melton Entertainment Park. Since 2011 Team Teal has raised over \$3 million to support vital research and awareness of gynaecological cancers. Ovarian cancer remains the deadliest cancer affecting women, with symptoms often misdiagnosed, delaying critical treatment. Additionally, more than half of gynaecological cancers are rare and less common, leaving many women with limited or no treatment options. Team Teal's partnership with Harness Racing Victoria plays a crucial role in funding research, raising awareness and encouraging women to seek medical help. Without ongoing investment in research and education this health crisis will continue to grow, affecting more women and families. Events like this play a vital role in raising awareness.

WomenCan leads gynaecological cancer research, but education is equally vital. Recognising symptoms early can mean the difference between timely intervention and it being too late. Michelle Gonzalez from Bacchus Marsh was first diagnosed with ovarian cancer at 24 and is now in remission. Eleven years later she is a survivor and a teaching student, using her lived experience to educate medical professionals and students. Duncan McPherson, who lost his wife to ovarian cancer, serves as Team Teal's patron and works tirelessly alongside Team Teal, WomenCan and the Australia New Zealand Gynaecological Oncology Group to raise awareness and support. Integrating survivors into medical education is crucial for improving awareness and understanding of these cancers. I congratulate everyone involved in Harness Racing Victoria for this wonderful event the other week.

Chin National Day

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:55): I rise today to acknowledge the recent celebration of the 77th Chin National Day, which took place on 20 February. This day marks a significant moment in Burmese history: the inception of democratic government for the Chin people. It is a day of pride, reflection and remembrance for the Chin community, one of a number of proud Burmese communities in the eastern suburbs. I was delighted to join the celebrations and extend my thanks to Piang Lilian and the Chin community for their warm invitation. The event was a vibrant showcase of Chin culture, featuring traditional dancers and beautifully crafted attire. It was fantastic to see the traditions and history of the Chin people on display, highlighting the strength and spirit of their community.

Lunar New Year

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:55): Recently I had the pleasure of attending the 2025 Melbourne Children's Spring Festival Gala, a fantastic celebration of the Lunar New Year. The event was full of incredible performances by so many talented kids, and it was inspiring to see the next generation of Chinese Victorians honouring their cultural heritage.

Dance Innovation Team

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (09:56): Finally, I want to congratulate the Dance Innovation Team on the opening of their new state-of-the-art studio in Nunawading. In just over a year DIT have expanded into this fantastic facility, a remarkable achievement and testament to their hard work and dedication. Under the leadership of Yin and his passionate staff, DIT has already achieved great success. With over 30 talented students supported by their dedicated parents, this studio is shaping the next generation of dancers, right in the heart of my community.

Alepat Taylor

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:56): Last week I joined the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs to visit the Alepat Taylor factory on Albert Street in East Preston, just opposite the well-known Olympic Hotel. I would like to thank founder Carlo Travaglini, business manager John Lanza and the team for all the work they do on that site. The business began as a wine and spirits distributor many years ago, and it has grown into a very large, vertically integrated beverage operation. They employ 150 or so people in our part of the world, for which of course we are very grateful. Most importantly, they manufacture and distribute a wide range of high-quality mixers, spirits, wines, kombuchas and other beverages. We will follow up on some matters they raised with us relating to carbon dioxide supply and some other matters, and we look forward to continuing to support them as part of Victoria's long and proud tradition of food and beverage processing.

Clean Up Australia Day

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:57): Sunday was Clean Up Australia Day. I want to thank Kate Jost and the Friends of Edwardes Lake volunteers for all the work they did in cleaning up rubbish not only around the lake but also along Edgars Creek and over the road at JE Moore reserve. For those of us who got out, it was a bit of a wet morning, so well done to the volunteers for pulling on their wet-weather jackets and cleaning up 9926 pieces of litter.

JS Grey Kindergarten

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:57): Finally, I would just like to very briefly touch on the issue of potentially expanding JS Grey Kindergarten in Preston, an issue we look forward to working with Darebin council on in the future.

Community safety

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:58): My members statement today involves crime and unruly behaviour on the streets of Morwell. I did touch on it yesterday. I have been walking among shop owners who are considering shutting their stores in Morwell and leaving because of this antisocial

behaviour, which is out of control. The reason these people are on the streets is because of the lack of powers that the police have due to the Allan Labor government continually not wanting to make hard and tough decisions on bail. We have issues on the streets of Morwell with people publicly drinking on the streets. The police do not have the powers to move people on or arrest them nowadays.

People are scared. We have had George from Cellarbrations in Morwell talk about how, two to three weeks ago, two staff members were confronted by people wielding machetes in their car park out the back. Then last week we had an offender walk across the street at Commercial Road with a baseball bat with a knife attached to the end of it, and there was a stabbing on the street. We need tougher laws. We need something to happen in Morwell. We need to give our police the powers that they need to move them on. Out the front of the minister in the other place – it all happened out the front of her MP – *(Time expired)*

Hallam Primary School

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:59): I had the pleasure of visiting the construction site of the new Hallam early learning and childcare centre. This facility is set to provide a range of services, including day care and three- and four-year-old kinder programs, which is going to be a game changer in Hallam. It will have the capacity to accommodate up to a hundred local children each day, offering much-needed care and early learning opportunities for families in my amazing community. The centre is designed with a focus on practicality and accessibility and features an array of excellent amenities. Some key highlights include a beautifully designed outdoor play area that will encourage exploration and physical activities and a maternal and child health consulting room providing essential services for all parents. These thoughtful additions will make a highly convenient and accessible option for parents and carers. It will create an education hub from maternal and child health all the way through to secondary school in Hallam. A big thankyou to Chris the project manager and Chris the site manager for taking the time to give us a really detailed tour. It was excellent to see the construction progress, and I am really looking forward to seeing the finished facility at the end of the year.

Festival of Colours

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:00): I had the pleasure of attending the Casey Festival of Colours, the vibrant Holi celebration that attracts over 3000 people each year. The throwing of coloured powders symbolises the joy, energy and vibrance of life, spreading love and happiness amongst friends, family and strangers alike. The Holi festival is a deeply embedded tradition in the Hindu community. It celebrates love, unity, connection and diversity in communities.

Waste and recycling management

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:01): I have previously spoken in the house regarding the deeply concerning proposal by Prospect Hill International for a waste-to-energy facility in Lara. This facility plans to process an alarming 400,000 tonnes of residual municipal solid waste alongside commercial and industrial waste every single year. Its proposed location is 350 metres away from the nearest home and just over a kilometre away from the Lara town centre. The sheer number of objections, thousands submitted by community members, emphasise the widespread public concern surrounding this project. I want to be clear: I hear the community's concerns, and I stand with them in opposition to the big incinerator. Local businesses and organisations have also strongly voiced their objections. It is worth noting that the Committee for Geelong and the Geelong Chamber of Commerce do not endorse this project. The City of Greater Geelong has voiced its opposition to the proposal and confirmed that it will not engage this facility for waste management. These objections are not simply a case of 'not in my backyard'; they reflect a significant understanding from right across the community that this proposal is utterly unsuited for its proposed location. The proponents have consistently failed to provide adequate information to address concerns raised about the impact of a big incinerator on the local environment, the health of nearby residents and safety issues. The community are actively and

tirelessly working to make their voices heard, and I will continue to stand alongside them in opposition to the big incinerator. Once again I thank local residents, who are leading this fight.

AgriFutures Rural Women's Award

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:02): As we near International Women's Day I would like to acknowledge a group of women who I admire so much, and they are the women of rural Victoria. Last night I was honoured to present the AgriFutures Rural Women's Award. These awards have been recognising amazing women in rural Victoria for 26 years. The award recognises women who are making a real difference in rural communities, whether it be providing remote access to first-aid advice for parents and carers, like last year's wonderful winner Grace Larson, or the wonderful Nikki Davey from Bacchus Marsh, who two years ago won for her innovative online flower-selling interface. I am delighted to acknowledge this year's winner Dr Mary Cole, whose work on soil microbiology is helping farmers reduce input costs, improve their soil and futureproof their farm businesses. I also want to acknowledge the two finalists Sherri Symons and Den Lim for their innovation and passion.

Rural Women's Leadership Program

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (10:03): In the audience last night there was another amazing group of women, our future leaders. The Rural Women's Leadership Program had their graduation ceremony earlier in the day. This program fosters women in leadership, and I had the pleasure of meeting with this group last year in Macedon. What an outstanding group of women they are. This is a great program facilitated through Agriculture Victoria. Both of these events create a strong network of women across rural Victoria.

Sofia Mastoris

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:04): Sofia Mastoris was born 2 February 1939 and, sadly, passed away on 28 January 2025. I had known Sofia since I was first elected the member for Thomastown, maybe even earlier. Sofia was an extremely well known identity in the area, a long-time Australian Labor Party member and friend to many. Sofia was such a strong woman, full of the love of life and so energetic. She would bring people together and never stop contributing, even when she received the diagnosis of yet another cancer. Sofia was president of the Hellenic Women's Federation, organising many social lunches and events but particularly known for the women's day lunch that was enjoyed by many with food and lots of Greek dancing and music. Sofia was diagnosed with breast cancer many years ago and survived it. She was also an active member of the 'Anemones' Greek Women of the Northern Suburbs group and worked closely with Nola Radiotis, its president. The 'Anemones' group was formed by women who were survivors of breast cancer coming together to provide peer support and also good fun with Greek dancing lessons every Tuesday. I was a member for a while, and I learned many traditional dances with the group. They also danced for many of the celebrations and events that were held by the Victorian Greek community.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I would like to give my condolences to her son Nonda and grandchildren Ari, Adam and Dean and also my respect to Areti, her daughter, who also passed away from cancer.

International Women's Day

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (10:05): I rise to update the house on the incredible work Victorians are doing to mark International Women's Day this week, including many events that I have been lucky enough to attend so far. At the weekend I joined hundreds of empowered women from our multicultural communities celebrating their International Women's Day awards with the Australia Today group, and I was lucky to join the Australian Information Industry Association for their breakfast this morning celebrating IWD and celebrating the trailblazing women across the tech sector, who are absolutely integral to my ministry portfolios of

government services and of course women. Tomorrow I look forward to celebrating women first responders with parliamentary colleagues in this place and with the Speaker, and in my electorate on Friday I am looking forward to celebrating the day with the Melton council and then joining Her Place Women's Museum and the Australian Museum of Democracy for their celebration of women activists across this state. I will then be lucky to join the Australian Workers' Union's trailblazing fighters for gender equality in the workplace before joining the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority to celebrate their work supporting women next week, because women's rights are human rights, and I cannot wait to march forward with every Victorian.

Werribee Open Range Zoo

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:07): Point Cook has something to trumpet about, because the elephants have arrived at the Werribee zoo. I look forward to meeting with the Minister for Environment and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, because we will see 200,000 extra tourists in our community.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, under standing order 118 I ask that you review the performative stunt masquerading as a members statement by the member for Bulleen, and I ask that you review it regarding the outrageous and personal reflections he made on the Premier.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I was not in the chair at the time. Imputations obviously are disorderly. I can refer it to the Speaker, who was in the chair, but there is no point of order further than that.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:09): I am really pleased to rise today to speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply. This report is a comprehensive and necessary examination of food supply and food security right across Victoria, which the chair in her foreword describes as 'an existential issue for our state now and into the future'. As the committee heard throughout this inquiry, access to affordable, nutritious food is a fundamental necessity and a key determinant of health, wellbeing and social stability. The importance of this inquiry at this point in time cannot be understated. It brought together key stakeholders, experts and community organisations to explore the pressures impacting our food supply, from rising cost to supply chain vulnerabilities and the challenges of population growth and urban sprawl, which I will touch on in my contribution later.

I sincerely thank the chair of the committee the member for Wendouree, committee members and the secretariat for their hard work and dedication to this important issue. I deeply appreciate the efforts that went into researching, consulting and drafting this report, and I commend the spirit of collaboration that was evident throughout this process.

I want to speak on this committee inquiry because I think it is of particular importance for the Lara electorate for two reasons: firstly, in terms of food security and ensuring our Victorian food supply, and secondly, in terms of some of the issues that this report discusses with regard to population growth and urban sprawl. This report is particularly relevant to the community in the Lara electorate and the wider Geelong community because we have seen a sharp rise in food insecurity. In the past year alone food relief services in Geelong have reported a 33 per cent increase in demand, reflecting the broader cost-of-living crisis that is hitting Victorian families. We know that there are several key factors contributing to the cost-of-living crisis – increases in gas and electricity prices, housing stress and mortgage pressures – and of course food prices continue to rise, making the essentials more expensive than ever.

We have fantastic local organisations like the Geelong Food Relief Centre which do extraordinary work in meeting these growing demands. The centre in Geelong has two social supermarkets, ensuring

that families have access to affordable food, but we know we cannot have affordable food without a food supply. The rise in food insecurity has also seen a huge surge in community support, and over the past two years I am really pleased to say that the number of volunteers at the Geelong Food Relief Centre has nearly tripled, growing from 65 to 185 people.

The second reason that I want to speak on this report is with regard to population growth and urban sprawl, which was a key theme of this report and something that the committee examined very closely. The location of the Lara electorate means that we are at the forefront of dealing with matters of population growth and urban sprawl, particularly for once rural townships like Lara, Little River, Avalon and Balliang. We are consistently seeing large blocks of acreage up on realestate.com.au being pitched to the market with the prospect of ‘This could be future residential housing’, ‘This could be rezoned for residential land’. What we are seeing is prices massively jacked up across the area of what was once agricultural land and the potential loss of agricultural land, which we know is so important for our food security here in Victoria and a key theme of the committee’s report.

I am really pleased to see in here across the, I understand, 33 recommendations considered by the committee and made to the Victorian government that there are a number of recommendations that directly address population growth and urban sprawl, protecting our agricultural land and ensuring that agricultural land is here now and into the future for future Victorians, and there are some agricultural covenants as well, which limit the way land can be used and developed. I think these are incredibly important recommendations that will really help secure the future of prime agricultural land in and around the Lara electorate. I know the member for Point Cook is very passionate about this land too, with his electorate encompassing some spectacular growers from the Werribee South region who have provided all kinds of amazing vegetables for Victorians to enjoy over many years and, I hope, for many years to come.

This is an incredibly important committee report at a very important point in time for Victoria as we look at food security and securing our food supply system. I was really pleased to speak on this.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:14): I am going to make some comments today on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2024–25 budget estimates, which was tabled in October 2024. Chapter 5 in particular covers off on the Department of Justice and Community Safety, and the initiatives in this include the support of emergency services, on page 71. First of all, with the emergency services and the SES, I do want to note that this is 50 years this month of the SES, and I think that is a fabulous achievement. It was established in 1975, but prior to that it operated as civil defence and it rolled into the SES – but congratulations to the SES on that milestone.

The report refers to the role of the SES in disaster relief and recovery and covers off on flood events, which had an enormous impact in my electorate, particularly in October 2022. Within that enormous event the Alexandra SES played a very significant role, taking control and having to deal with the emergency that it was. At the helm was Peter Weeks OAM, who has since received in the Australia Day honours the Emergency Services Medal, along with a couple of other SES members, for his work over a significant period of time. Peter himself was in the civil defence in Alexandra before the SES. He started in 1972, three years before the SES was convened. Alexandra in fact was the second unit in Victoria to be part of the SES, so that is a feather in their cap.

The Alexandra SES, as with the Mansfield SES and the Marysville SES, have to deal with something really quite different. The terrain means the nature of the work they do and the gear they need are very unique and specific, because we have mountains, lakes and rivers. There is Lake Mountain and there is Mount Buller. We have got Lake Eildon in the centre, which covers many communities, and many rivers, but the Goulburn River is particularly large and can be quite treacherous. Alexandra have a boat, which is something that most SES units do not have, and they certainly need it, but they do not

have an inflatable rescue boat. They are very keen to have an inflatable rescue boat. I think the government has said that it is something that is certainly on the cards, and I would like to see that that gets delivered to the Alexandra SES.

The Mansfield SES do have an inflatable rescue boat and a regular boat, but they actually need a lot more. They need a new station. The crew at the Mansfield SES have been waiting for years for a new station and they want to know what the go is and where they are at at the moment. They have many questions for the government. Will there be funding for their new unit in the current budget? Are they still one of the top five priorities in the SES for a rebuild? Will the government work with them to help establish not just their unit but also the emergency services precinct that the Mansfield council have planned in the area where the SES is currently located? As I have mentioned, the SES in Mansfield have different gear than others do, with the boat and the inflatable plus the regular trucks. They are out all the time fundraising, but the premises that they have are not fit for purpose. They need to be upgraded, and the government know this. I have raised this in this chamber since 2015. That is a decade. I was told many years ago that they were on the priority list, towards the top, but nothing has happened. The community and Mansfield are right behind the SES. They value them highly, they know the work that they do and they support the need for an emergency services precinct, which would have not just the SES located there but also the ambulance service and in future probably the CFA as well. It is near the police station, so we would have that entire precinct. The council have worked hard and put the land aside, and they have done the preliminary works that they need to do. We really need that emergency services precinct. The SES absolutely need their unit to be rebuilt. It has currently got stairs and their offices are upstairs. It is not disability inclusive, and it needs to be rebuilt now.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:19): As chair of the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee, I am again pleased to rise to speak on the *Securing the Victorian Food Supply* inquiry report that was tabled in this place in the last sitting week of 2024. The reason we did this inquiry was for the next generation. As I look up into the public gallery and see those young, happy faces, I think, ‘What does the future look like for them? What is their food supply going to be? What’s food security going to mean for the next generation to come through?’ With Victoria’s population expected to rise above 10 million by the 2050s, our inquiry report on securing the Victorian food supply made recommendations that address what is needed to ensure the long-term supply of healthy, locally grown food in this state so that every Victorian can get locally grown food.

The report’s 33 recommendations and 29 findings are focused primarily on the state’s food supply, population growth and urban sprawl. I know that the member for Lara is very concerned about this, and I thank the member for Lara for her thoughtful contribution, which addressed food insecurity in her electorate as well as across Geelong. We know that securing Victoria’s food supply is vital for the future of our communities – their quality of life, health and wellbeing, and jobs – and our state’s economy. And as we all know, it is also a cost of living issue. Victoria needs to consider ways to overcome the present and future challenges so we can guarantee the longevity of our state’s food supply, which is why we closely looked at farming and manufacturing of food in peri-urban areas; the impact of urban sprawl and population growth at the fringe of the state’s major cities and regional towns, including Ballarat in my electorate; as well as the future of farming across our state.

Agricultural and farming industries crucially provide the fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy, and countless other foods all of us rely on every day. The decisions that we make today – that everybody in this Parliament makes – will have a massive impact on land use, the future of farming in our state, access to Victorian produce and ultimately our state’s food security. Securing our food for Victoria needs to be a priority of not just the government but all members of this Parliament regardless of the geography of their electorates. This is a task that we must approach not only enthusiastically but seriously with a sense of urgency, and that was certainly the approach and the attitude of the members of the

Environment and Planning Committee and secretariat. I once again want to recognise the outstanding collaboration of the committee members – including deputy chair the member for Morwell, the member for Bass, the member for Croydon, the member for Monbulk, the member for Ripon and the member for Warrandyte – and the great work of committee manager Igor Dosen, research officer Samantha Leahy and administrative officer Helen Ross-Soden.

We were sorry to see the departure of the member for Warrandyte from our committee at the end of last year, and we thank her for the contribution she made to the committee. And whilst the member for Warrandyte is irreplaceable, we have been pleased to welcome the member for Narracan onto the committee for our new inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria. We have just undertaken our first regional visit to Colac and south-west Victoria, which was very informative.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member has started to talk about the current inquiry, which is out of order during statements on committee reports.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member for Wendouree to come back to the committee report.

Juliana ADDISON: Yes. I was just about to say that I will talk about that report in due course.

The securing of Victoria's food supply inquiry recognised that there are significant challenges facing farmers and that these are multifaceted. These challenges merit a whole-of-government, whole-of-food-system response which recognises that farmers are at the heart of our food system and healthy food is at the foundation of the wellbeing of all Victorians. The ongoing loss of farmland around our urban centres, where most Victorians live, also has implications for the resilience of our food supply – once again, the member for Lara addressed this issue in her region of Geelong. Significantly, the supply of food grown on farms adjacent to our cities is more vulnerable to disruption – and I am sure the member for Point Cook is well aware of that – than those produced further afield.

In closing, I want to say this was a really, really great report. Our inquiry's findings and recommendations call for a cohesive policy approach. I recommend the report.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:24): My contribution on committee reports today is on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's 2024–25 inquiry, and I refer to page 65 of that budget estimates report and the government's commitment to law enforcement and crime prevention. For the point that I want to make in relation to law enforcement and crime prevention, I want to make some commentary on that around the fisheries officers and the reduction in the number of fisheries officers that is causing considerable concern in my electorate. One might think that recreational anglers would perhaps welcome less scrutiny over their fishing activities, but the weight of emails and calls into my office over the last week indicates that they are very angry and they want their fishery protected.

One of the challenges we have in both Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota is that each will now only have two fisheries officers, and this is where a level of concern lies, because to undertake surveillance or enforcement work fisheries officers rightly must be two up. There must be two of them there. It is over 2 hours between Lakes Entrance and Mallacoota, and when there is a need for urgent work, if one of those fisheries officers at either of those locations is on annual leave, sick leave, parental leave, long service leave or whatever leave they are on, they do not have 2 hours to travel between locations so that they can undertake that surveillance or enforcement work, so they cannot do their jobs properly. We also had a regional manager in place who could provide some flexibility to this arrangement, but that job is also gone.

Fisheries have told us not to worry because the special investigations group will be provided and it will have additional resources to ensure that poaching and major crime will be tackled head on. The

only problem is we have no guarantees that they will have a presence in East Gippsland. They are probably going to operate out of Melbourne. They will not be on the ground as the fisheries officers are, and they will certainly not be able to respond in the quick amount of time that local fisheries officers on the ground are able to.

We are also told as part of this announcement that the majority of anglers do the right thing, and that is true, but the reason for that is because of the presence of fisheries officers. That is why they do the right thing. The bottom line is this is going to have less on-water hours for those people who are protecting our fisheries. If you want to boost your input into the top-end crime element, do that, but do not reduce the fisheries officers.

We are also told on the Victorian Fisheries Authority website that fisheries officers also enforce laws pertaining to littering, boating safety, wildlife protections, appropriate campfire use – they do a whole lot of things. But there is silence on who is going to take up the slack here, because we have had a reduction in our parks office in East Gippsland as well. This is largely a money-saving exercise trying to be dressed up as something good, and I would urge the minister and fisheries to have a look at this, because there are unique geographical circumstances that apply in East Gippsland where we need workers having the flexibility to be able to operate two up at very short notice.

We accept that there are changes coming, but we need reconsideration of some of these elements. The fisheries officers cannot be restricted in the work that they do, having to wait for someone to drive 2, 2½ hours in the hope that they are available to be able to work two up on what is basically their bread-and-butter roles in the community.

We are having these cutbacks to fisheries officers while we are handing out free fishing rods to schoolchildren. That is good; that is important. But these positions in our local communities are a far more important priority, and we should not be handing out free fishing rods to every student while we are cutting back on fisheries officers. So I urge both the minister and fisheries Victoria to revisit this structure to allow our officers the flexibility they need to do their job properly, and that is probably going to be three fisheries officers in each of those two locations. Please consider the unique geographical challenges that a location like East Gippsland presents and allow these people to do their job properly in our community.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:29): I follow on from the member for Lara and the member for Wendouree to talk about our agricultural sector. That is a really terrific thing. Of course I am continuing to speak on the *Securing the Victorian Food Supply* inquiry report, which was delivered in November 2024.

I just want to start off a little bit beyond where I left off in talking about one of the wonderful farmers in the community that I represent, John Saad and his team down there at Fresh Select. We saw Fresh Select before the election, and we were able to deliver a \$500,000 grant. That was by the minister at that time, the Minister for the Environment and Climate Action, Lily D'Ambrosio. One of the wonderful things is that those farmers are not just great farmers in the area of Werribee South but they are also innovative farmers, and as such, Fresh Select, John and the team were awarded by the *Weekly Times*, in the Farmer of the Year Awards, Innovative Farmer of the Year. I just want to give a big shout-out for his efforts and his team's efforts. What they are producing is Nutri V. Some of you might have seen this at Coles. It is one of the natural supplements. It comes from broccoli and other vegetables that would otherwise have gone to waste. This is what our wonderful innovative farmers are doing. They are taking a product that otherwise would have been tilled back into the soil and making an economic benefit for the organisation but also avoiding food waste. We have \$2.4 million tonnes of food waste in Victoria every year, and we know that sometimes it is tilled into the soil.

For those of you who do not know, the sweetest part of broccoli is the stem. Those of you who have young children know they eat the stem first because that is the sweetest part. And for those of you who are not engaged with young children: shave back the hard parts of the stem, cut it up with a little bit of chilli and a little bit of lemon and flash-fry it. I know the member for Melton is all about this. I look forward to sharing a meal with him soon. They are doing really great stuff in Werribee South, and Fresh Select is just one of those farms that are doing it. But they do have challenges, which this report outlines. The report goes to the fundamentals. We need farming in our peri-urban areas. It is essential. As I said last time, 10 per cent of Victoria's vegetables come from the community of Werribee South, and that is something we need to protect and preserve.

Recommendation 8, which is a really important recommendation in this report, is:

That the Department of Transport and Planning develop a Planning Practice Note to guide the development of tourism in conjunction with agriculture.

Just a few moments ago I was talking about some of the wonderful tourism in the community that I represent in Werribee with the introduction of the elephants at Werribee zoo. But we know that that increased tourism, with the extra 200,000 people every year arriving in a great farming community like Werribee South, puts some challenges there. This report goes to those fundamental challenges of tourism. The beautiful beaches of Werribee South, the beautiful farmland and Wyndham Harbour – all those places – bring challenges with tourism. At Werribee mansion, whose roof is being repaired at the moment, the Sikh community pull out silverbeet – not by the kilo; they do not count it in kilos, they count it in tonnes – and prepare meals for charity.

There is a real challenge with how we make sure that these peri-urban communities in our great and productive farmland 30 kilometres from Melbourne – amazingly, some of the closest real productive farmland to Melbourne – can continue the great effort and do the work they are already doing. I really want to commend the farmers in the community that I represent and thank them for their efforts. I also want to thank the committee for their efforts in bringing together this report. It is a report that was not opposed. There was not an additional report alongside it; it was a single report.

I have invited the member for Narracan to the community of Werribee South. He has not yet taken up invite. I do look forward to the member for Narracan being able to join me in a great farming community. I would really like to see him there to experience that wonderful farmland close to Melbourne. The Labor government is committed to protecting and preserving that land. We have made a green wedge. We will continue to protect it for the wonderful farmers in our community and the food security of this state.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:34): Today I rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's inquiry into the 2024–25 budget estimates.

A member: Is that a teal jacket?

Jess WILSON: That's insulting.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Minister!

Jess WILSON: I want to home in on chapter 4.4.1, which covers the Department of Education's school saving bonus. During the 2024–25 budget estimates held in May last year the committee did hear evidence from the Secretary of the Department of Education that the department was:

... still finalising several parameters for the bonus' implementation.

I think we all know – and the minister probably knows this as well – that the school saving bonus was a bit of news to the Department of Education; it might have been news to the secretary on budget day that this was going to be a program that the Department of Education needed to roll out. The secretary at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee spoke about the parameters that needed to be put in place. Again I quote:

- how the bonus will be credited
- whether the department, schools or parents will decide how the funds are spent
- whether parents can donate the bonus
- whether unspent funds will be repurposed
- what acquittal processes the department will have in place.

Given the number and scope of the parameters that were yet to be determined at the time the policy was announced, one could be forgiven for wondering exactly how much thought could have been put into this program ahead of the announcement in the budget. Of course it was the government's signature policy in a horror budget, in a budget that only saw Victorians hit with higher taxes. This was a measure put in place at the last minute to take away from those other hits to Victorians. But it seems as though the policy was very poorly thought through and very little consideration had been given to these critical factors, not just around the logistics of the payment but whether or not the bonus would actually be able to be spent by parents themselves.

It comes as no surprise then to see that the implementation of this policy has caused headaches right across the state, whether that be for parents trying to navigate the system to get voucher codes to use at uniform shops or on the issue of not being able to use the school saving bonus when it comes to purchasing IT equipment. This is very expensive for parents and families, yet it has been specifically carved out of the school saving bonus.

In terms of what the school administrators are trying to figure out when it comes to parents trying to use the school saving bonus, parents are trying to navigate this very difficult system, but sadly the biggest headaches seem to have been created for the suppliers of products that can be claimed under the bonus, particularly uniform shops. No-one can dispute that uniform shops provide a very valuable service to our school communities, but they are also small businesses largely, and we know it is a very tough time for small businesses in this state. In fact a report from the National Australia Bank just last month revealed that Victorian SMEs have the poorest conditions and confidence of any state in the nation.

The Department of Education is not helping these small businesses and is not helping with these poor conditions by failing to pay its invoices under the school saving bonus program on time. At least two businesses supplying schools under the program were last week owed \$55,000 by the Department of Education under the school saving bonus. Despite multiple attempts by these businesses to follow up the overdue payments with the department, they remain outstanding. It got to the point where these businesses were facing a cash flow crisis. In fact they had federal taxes due and they could not meet their deadlines, they could not make their payroll, and they were waiting on tens of thousands of dollars from the Department of Education. It took an intervention from the Premier herself to make sure that these small businesses were actually paid under the government's ill-designed school saving bonus.

Bills

Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:40):
In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of

compatibility in relation to the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility in relation to the **Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment Bill 2025** (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 Bill makes various amendments to the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* (the **WIRC Act**), *Accident Compensation Act 1985* (**AC Act**) and *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (the **OHS Act**) to:

- introduce lived experience membership criterion for the WorkSafe Board Advisory Committees being the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (**OHSAC**) and the WorkCover Advisory Committee (**WAC**)
- improve return to work (RTW) outcomes by requiring employers to provide RTW co-ordinators with the assistance and facilities reasonably necessary for the performance of their functions under the WIRC Act and to ensure they receive appropriate training
- introduce new compensation entitlements and improve supports for family members after a work-related death by:
 - allowing family members of a deceased worker to receive provisional payments after a death by suicide
 - increasing weekly pensions payable to dependent children of deceased workers
 - extending the duration of provisional pension payments for dependent partners to 26 weeks
 - creating an entitlement to lump sum payments for economic loss for dependants who are not the partner or child of a deceased worker
 - creating an entitlement to lump sum payments for non-economic loss for close family members of deceased workers
 - providing access to a broader range of therapy and other support services
 - introducing a new entitlement to compensation for forensic cleaning where a worker dies at home or at the home of a family member
- improve operations of the Workplace Injury Commission (**WIC**) by allowing WIC to:
 - certify a consent agreement made between the parties to resolve a dispute which has been referred to arbitration
 - document an enforceable agreement for a worker's arbitration costs where the parties resolve the dispute at arbitration or further conciliation following arbitration
 - share information with an injured worker once conciliation or arbitration has concluded
- streamline administrative arrangements for the members of WorkSafe's Board, the Chief Executive Officer and hearing loss assessors
- correct minor drafting errors from the *Workplace Safety and Other Matters Amendment Act 2022* and the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (WorkCover Scheme Modernisation) Act 2024*.

Human Rights Issues

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- the right to equality before the law (section 8)
- the right to participate in public life (section 18)
- the protection of families and children (section 17)
- the right to privacy (section 13)
- the right to freedom of expression (section 15)
- the right to presumption of innocence (section 25(1)).

For the reasons detailed below, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any of the abovementioned rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified having regard to the factors within section 7(2) of the Charter.

Right to Equality before the law – section 8

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The purpose of the right in section 8(3) is to ensure that all 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)* and refers to discrimination based on an attribute in section 6 of that Act, which includes age, race, sex, disability and parental status amongst many others. Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an

attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. Indirect discrimination occurs where a person imposes a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute, but only where that requirement, condition or practice is not reasonable.

Training of RTW co-ordinators

Clause 7 of the Bill inserts new ss 106A and 106C into the WIRC Act to require employers to provide RTW co-ordinators with training, facilities and assistance as reasonably required to fulfil their functions. Failure to comply with these obligations without reasonable excuse, will constitute an offence attracting a penalty of 120 penalty units for a natural person, and 600 penalty units for a body corporate under clauses 8 and 9 of the Bill.

RTW co-ordinators have a crucial role in ensuring the removal of barriers and provision of adequate support for injured workers returning to work. The amendments inserted by clauses 7 to 9 of the Bill will ensure that RTW co-ordinators have the necessary skills and resources to adequately support injured workers and to reduce discrimination and other barriers they may face when returning to work. Therefore, the Bill promotes the right to equality by ensuring that injured workers returning to work are supported, treated equally and not discriminated against based on their disability or injury.

Allowing family members of a deceased worker to receive provisional payments in the case of death by suicide

Clause 22 of the Bill amends the WIRC Act to remove the section that currently prevents WorkSafe or a self-insurer from making provisional payments to family members who are likely to be entitled to compensation in circumstances where a worker dies by suicide.

Provisional payments are important to ensuring that death and dependency claims are managed sensitively and without delay by providing immediate financial support to family members of workers whose death is likely to have been work-related. Excluding all deaths caused by suicide from the entitlement to provisional payments may constitute indirect discrimination against the protected attribute of ‘disability’, which includes a mental or psychological disease or disorder. By amending the WIRC Act to provide that family members of a worker who has died by suicide are not excluded from receiving provisional payments, clause 22 promotes the right to equality by ensuring that the WIRC Act does not treat deaths by suicide differently from other work-related deaths.

Right to Participate in Public Life – section 18(1)

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through chosen representatives.

This includes being able to share opinions and be involved in decision making relating to aspects of public administration, including the formulation and implications of policy.

Introducing lived experience membership in OHSAC and WAC

Clause 11 and 55 of the Bill amends the WIRC Act and the OHS Act respectively to require the membership of the WAC and OHSAC to include people with lived experience of being affected, directly or indirectly, by incidents that occur at a workplace involving death, serious injury or serious illness.

The purpose of the OHSAC and WAC is to advise the WorkSafe Board on matters of policy relating to promoting healthy and safe working environments, workers’ entitlement to compensation and the operation and administration of the OHS and WIRC Acts and associated regulations.

The amendments in clause 11 and 55 of the Bill promote the right to participate in public life, providing the opportunity for people with lived experience to be a voice for injured workers, or the dependants of workers

who died at work in policy-making decisions concerning occupational health and safety, workers compensation and rehabilitation.

Right to Protection of Families and Children – section 17(2)

Section 17(1) of the Charter recognises that families are the fundamental group unit of society and entitles families to protection by the society and the State. The right is principally concerned with unity of family, which in this context encompasses the diversity of families living within Victoria, not only those recognised by formal marriage or cohabitation. The right in section 17(1) is related to the right to privacy in section 13(a) of the Charter, which relevantly provides that every person has the right to not be subject to unlawful or arbitrary interferences with their family.

Section 17(2) of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child's best interests and as is needed by them by reason of being a child. This right recognises the special vulnerability of children, and requires the State to adopt social, cultural and economic measures to protect children and to promote their development and education. The scope of the right is informed by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration.

Extending the duration of provisional pension payments to 26 weeks

Clause 11 of the Bill inserts new s243(1)(ab) into the WIRC Act to extend the maximum duration of provisional payments of the weekly pension for the dependent partner of a deceased worker from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. In so doing, clause 11 promotes the protection of families and children under s17 of the Charter, by reducing the risk of financial hardship, following the work-related death of a family member.

Provisional pension payments are currently only available for a 12-week period following the death of a worker. However, for around one in four claims it can take longer than 12 weeks for claim acceptance. This can result in a period where no financial support is available which can cause financial hardship for the dependent partners and children of deceased workers.

The Bill will ensure financial support to the dependent partner of a deceased worker continues in circumstances where their claim determination is delayed beyond the existing 12-week payment period. This will provide certainty and stability and ensure that financial support is provided at a crucial time for dependent partners.

Increasing weekly pension payable to dependent children of deceased workers

Clause 21 of the Bill amends the WIRC Act to increase the rate of weekly pension to dependent children of a deceased worker to:

- 12.5 per cent of the worker's pre-injury average weekly earnings (PIAWE) if there are up to four eligible dependent children; or
- an equal share of 50 per cent of the worker's PIAWE if there are four or more eligible dependent children.

The amendments recognise the economic loss of partners and children who are dependent on the deceased workers income. Families with children are particularly vulnerable following a work-related death and the current weekly pension entitlements do not realistically reflect the costs associated with raising children and can result in financial hardship. By increasing the rate of the weekly pension for dependent children these amendments promote the right to protection of families and children as under s17 of the Charter.

A new lump sum payment for non-economic loss

Clause 19 of the Bill inserts new s237A into the WIRC Act and clause 41 inserts new s92A(8)(c) into the AC Act to create a new entitlement to compensation for non-economic loss for the 'close family members' of a worker whose death is work-related

The Victorian workers compensation scheme is almost exclusively focussed on compensating family members and dependents of workers for their economic loss experienced because of a work-related death. The WIRC Act and AC Act do not compensate for the "non-economic loss" caused by work-related deaths.

Therefore, clauses 19 and 41 of the Bill will introduce compensation for "non-economic loss" for work-related deaths. The entitlement will be available to close family members of the worker irrespective of their level of dependency on the worker's earnings.

The Bill will define a close family member as being a person who had a genuine personal relationship with the worker at the time of their death and who was:

- a partner, parent, guardian, step-parent, grandparent, sibling or step-sibling of the worker
- a person of whom the worker was a parent, step-parent or guardian.

I consider clauses 19 and 41 of the Bill promote the right to protection of families under section 17(1) of the Charter by ensuring that families are compensated and supported for their grief, pain and suffering following the traumatic circumstance of the work-related death of a close family member.

Right to Privacy – section 13(1)

Section 13(a) of the Charter states 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.

Obligation to provide all relevant documents and information

The Bill amends the WIRC Act and AC Act to introduce the following new entitlements for family members and/or dependants of a worker whose death is work-related:

- lump sum compensation of up to \$20,000 per claimant for the economic loss resulting from the compensable death of a worker experienced by a person who was dependent on the worker but was not their partner or child
- lump sum compensation of \$10,000 per claimant for the non-economic loss experienced by a close family member resulting from the compensable death of a worker
- compensation for family members for the reasonable costs of forensic cleaning incurred after a compensable death that occurs in the home of the worker or the home of a family member of the worker.

To assess claims under these new amendments, WorkSafe will, under existing information gathering powers in s552 of the WIRC Act, be required to collect relevant personal information and documents from family members to establish their relationship to and/or financial dependency on the deceased worker.

These provisions engage but do not unreasonably limit the right to privacy. Section 13 of the Charter contains internal limitations, which affect the scope of the right. Because any interference with a person's privacy or reputation occasioned by these provisions will be pursuant to law and non-arbitrary, it will not limit the rights protected by section 13 of the Charter. Relevantly, I note that this requirement is necessary to enable WorkSafe to effectively obtain relevant personal information and documents to fulfill its functions. Further, WorkSafe must comply with relevant obligations under the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*, the *Health Records Act 2001* and the WIRC Act. WorkSafe also has a Privacy Manual setting out how WorkSafe and its Authorised Agents collect, store and use personal information.

Right to freedom of expression – section 15

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek and receive information.

Amendments to improve the operation of the Workplace Injury Commission

Clauses 34 and 35 of the Bill enable the Accident Compensation Conciliation Service (the legal name of the Workplace Injury Commission) to provide documents to injured workers and their representative following the conclusion of a conciliation or arbitration, so that they no longer have to make a Freedom of Information request to access to their own file. This promotes the right to freedom of expression as it removes a procedural barrier for workers wishing to access their own conciliation and arbitration file to review the information relied upon and the decision made during the process.

Right to presumption of innocence – section 25(1)

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.

New Employer Offences

Clause 7 in the Bill inserts new ss 106A and 106C into the WIRC Act which create offences that contain a 'reasonable excuse' exception, which may place an evidential burden on the accused.

The relevant offences relate to failure of an employer to ensure that a person who is appointed to act as a RTW co-ordinator completes an approved training course within a required period, and an offence relating to the failure of an employer to provide an RTW co-ordinator with the facilities and assistance that the person reasonably requires to perform their functions. Clauses 8 and 9 of the Bill then contain the relevant penalty provisions, being 120 penalty units for a natural person, and 600 penalty units for a body corporate.

By creating a ‘reasonable excuse’ exception, these offences are relevant to the right to the presumption of innocence under s 25(1) of the Charter, because they place an evidential burden on the accused, in that they require the accused to raise evidence of a reasonable excuse. However, in doing so, this offence does not transfer the legal burden of proof. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of 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. I do not consider that an evidential onus of this kind limits the right to be presumed innocent, and clause 7 of the Bill is therefore compatible with this right.

The Hon. Ben Carroll
MP Deputy Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC

Second reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:40):
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:

The Bill makes several amendments to the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*, *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* and *Accident Compensation Act 1985* to improve the experience of injured workers and other claimants throughout their time on the WorkCover Scheme (Scheme) and to improve the support provided to families and dependants of deceased workers. These changes deliver on the Victorian Government’s commitment to implement recommendations of the Independent Review of WorkSafe Victoria’s management of complex workers’ compensation claims led by Peter Rozen KC (now Judge Rozen) and a review of the adequacy of compensation and supports for family members of workers whose death is work-related. The Bill will ensure that the Scheme, WorkSafe, its Agents and self-insurers are taking a person-centred approach to the delivery of services. The Bill also includes administrative changes that will improve the operation of the Scheme, WorkSafe and the Workplace Injury Commission (WIC).

The Rozen Review was commissioned in response to the Victorian Ombudsman’s 2019 recommendation to review WorkSafe’s agent model to determine how and by whom complex claims should be managed. The Rozen Review made 22 recommendations for reform. The Victorian Government committed to delivering on these recommendations by accepting five recommendations in full and accepting 14 in principle. Five of these recommendations (9, 14, 17, 19 and 20) required legislative change.

The Bill also includes amendments that deliver on recommendations made following a review of the adequacy of compensation and support arrangements for families impacted by a work-related death. The Family Supports Review recommended broadening the types of compensation and support available for families of deceased workers and made 10 recommendations, eight of which were accepted by the Victorian Government.

The Bill includes amendments to deliver on the Government’s commitment to implementing accepted recommendations from the Rozen Review and Family Supports Review.

I will now address the key amendments in more detail.

Improving the experience of injured workers and other claimants

The challenges faced by injured workers and claimants should not be compounded by their experiences of the Scheme. Improving these experiences by ensuring that WorkSafe, its Agents and self-insurers adopt a person-centred approach is a key focus of the Bill and will ultimately lead to better outcomes.

To achieve this, the Bill amends the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* and the *Accident Compensation Act 1985* (the Acts) to insert new objectives of both the Acts, and WorkSafe, to ensure that injured workers and other claimants and users of the Scheme are treated fairly, respectfully and with dignity, and receive high-quality services. These objectives will apply to all users of the Scheme, not just workers and their families and will ensure that all decisions made under Victoria’s workers’ compensation framework are guided by these person-centred objectives.

To assist in operationalising these new objectives, the Bill will also amend the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* to empower the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC (Minister) to publish a Code of Claimants’ Rights (the Code). When published, the Code will provide clear service

standards that injured workers and other claimants on the Scheme will be entitled to when engaging with WorkSafe, its Agents and self-insurers. It will also set out corresponding obligations on WorkSafe, its Agents and self-insurers and include a procedure for making, investigating and resolving complaints about non-adherence to the Code. WorkSafe will be responsible for investigating and resolving these complaints and may issue remedies where a complaint is substantiated including an apology, an explanation of a decision or outlining steps that will be taken to avoid future non-adherence to the Code.

The Code will be released for public comment and tabled before Parliament, providing Parliament the opportunity to scrutinise the Code to ensure it contains standards that are relevant and valuable for claimants.

These changes will ensure that claimants of the Scheme are provided with a legislative basis for setting expectations for dignified and respectful treatment. Overall, this will improve an injured worker's overall claims journey and lead to better return to work outcomes and more effective service delivery.

Training of return to work (RTW) co-ordinators

Improving return to work outcomes of injured workers is a key focus of the Victorian Government. We know that workers who are not adequately supported stay on the Scheme longer and have poorer return to work outcomes which can adversely impact their overall wellbeing.

RTW co-ordinators play a vital role in supporting RTW. It is important they have the necessary skills, training and resources to provide this support and respond appropriately to contemporary challenges in Victorian workplaces.

The Bill makes amendments to the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* to require employers to ensure that RTW co-ordinators appointed pursuant to the Act complete approved training and have assistance and facilities reasonably required to fulfil their functions in supporting injured workers returning to work.

Mandatory training courses and timeframes for completion will be determined by the Minister via a Ministerial Order. This will be published in the Government Gazette and available on the WorkSafe website. WorkSafe will also provide guidance to employers on what facilities and assistance may be appropriate for return to work co-ordinators in a compliance code.

Consistent with other provisions for appointing RTW co-ordinators under the Act, non-compliance with these provisions will be met with penalties.

The Victorian Government recognises that Victorian businesses are diverse in terms of size and nature of work. As such, training requirements may differ depending on whether the employer is a large or small business and will be delivered in such a way that is accessible and provides necessary information and skillsets. This may include a mix of both online training and face to face workshops.

Employers and Employees will be consulted on the training requirements and be provided with a reasonable time to comply after the obligations commence.

Statutory review

To ensure that the Scheme's operations, and claimants experience of this, are regularly evaluated, the Bill will require statutory reviews of the Scheme to be undertaken at least every five years, with the first such review to be completed by 31 December 2030. The report on each review will be required to be tabled in each house of Parliament within six months of the final report being provided to the Minister.

Lived experience membership in WorkSafe Advisory Committees

The Bill makes amendments to the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* and *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* to require that the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee and the WorkCover Advisory Committee consist of persons who have been affected, directly or indirectly, by incidents that occur at a workplace involving death, serious injury or serious illness. People with lived experience have valuable insight to provide and this amendment is an important step towards strengthening their voice in policymaking concerning occupational health and safety, workers' compensation and rehabilitation.

Improving supports for family members after a work-related death

The Victorian Government recognises the significant impact workplace trauma can have on the families of victims. Following on from the Labor Government's Families and Injured Workers System Reform and Implementation Package, the Bill contains several amendments which will improve support for families who have been forever impacted by serious workplace injuries and deaths to help them deal with their trauma and alleviate financial hardship.

Increasing weekly pension payable to dependent children

The Bill amends the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* and the *Accident Compensation Act 1985* to increase the weekly pension payable to dependent children of a worker whose death is work-related. For workers with up to four dependent children, each child will be entitled to a weekly pension of 12.5 per cent of pre-injury average weekly earnings (PIAWE), more than double the current rate of 5 per cent of PIAWE. For workers with five or more dependent children, each child will be entitled to a pension paid at an equal share of 50 per cent of the worker's PIAWE (double the current entitlement of 25 per cent of PIAWE). The increased pension rate will apply to all future entitlements to the dependent child pension on or after the proclamation date. The increased pension rate will also be applied retrospectively so that any person who was entitled to a dependent child pension in the five years prior to the commencement of the amendment will be entitled to have received that pension at 12.5 per cent PIAWE. Impacted child pension recipients will receive a payment to account for the difference between the pension they received and what they are now entitled to receive. This amendment ensures that the Scheme provides better financial support for children and that child pensions are more reflective of the costs associated with raising a child.

Lump sum payment for economic loss of dependants that are not partners or children

The Victorian Government recognises the diverse range of dependants that a deceased worker may have that are not children or partners. The *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* currently does not provide compensation to a person who was economically dependent on a worker's earnings at the time of their death if there is also compensation payable to partners or children. This means that if a worker was providing economic support to a partner, a child and also a parent or sibling then the parent or sibling would not be entitled to compensation.

The Bill will create a new lump sum compensation entitlement for dependants other than partners and children where a deceased worker also has a dependent partner(s) or children. Eligible dependants will be able to receive compensation of up to \$20,000 for their economic loss. This compensation will be available for work-related deaths which occur on a date that is after Royal Assent.

Lump sum payment for non-economic loss

The Bill will also create an entitlement for close family members to access a lump sum payment for non-economic loss. A close family member includes a partner, parent, step-parent, guardian, grandparent, sibling, step-sibling, child or step-child of the worker or a child to whom the worker was a guardian at the time of their death. Eligible close family members can each receive \$10,000 compensation. This compensation will be available for deaths which occur on a date that is after Royal Assent.

Extending duration of provisional pension payments

Dependant partners of workers whose death is work-related are currently entitled to receive a provisional pension for up to 12 weeks while liability for their claim is determined. However, for around 1 in 4 claims it can take longer than 12 weeks for liability to be determined. This can result in dependant partners experiencing a gap in the financial assistance they receive, which can cause financial hardship. The Bill amends the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* to extend the provisional payments period to up to 26 weeks after the death of the worker. This will apply to claims relating to a death which occurred on a day that is after Royal Assent. This amendment seeks to ensure that partners will not face a gap in payments between the end of the provisional pension and any ongoing pension they are entitled to. The Bill will also remove the current exclusion on making provisional payments in connection with a worker's death that was caused by suicide.

Therapy and other support services

The Victorian Government recognises that family members who are impacted by the death of a worker will have diverse support needs. While the Scheme already provides access to family counselling services, family members may benefit from a broader range of therapy or support services. The Bill will therefore enable the Minister to issue a Ministerial Direction identifying those therapy and other support services that families can access to support them with the grief and trauma they experience after a work-related death. It will also increase the amount of therapy and other support services which can be accessed to \$10,000 per work-related death. This amount will be indexed annually. This amendment will ensure that the Scheme can better meet the needs and preferences of families of workers who die at work or who have a with severe injury or eligible progressive disease.

Forensic cleaning

Some work-related deaths occur in a worker's own home or in the home of a family member. This can be extremely traumatising for families and, unfortunately, the Scheme is currently unable to assist families facing these traumatic circumstances. The Bill creates an entitlement to compensation for the reasonable cost of

forensic cleaning of the home in such circumstances. WorkSafe and self-insurers will be able to provide this compensation as a provisional payment.

Improving the operation of the Workplace Injury Commission

WIC provides conciliation and arbitration services to support injured workers and employers to resolve disputes regarding workers' compensation claims. The Bill streamlines the administration of WIC's powers by allowing WIC to resolve disputes by certifying consent agreements made between parties during the arbitration process. It also allows WIC to document an enforceable agreement for a worker's arbitration costs and award a worker's arbitration costs in line with the Costs Schedule.

Currently, WIC is unable to share information with injured workers when the dispute resolution process has ended. To remedy this, the Bill allows WIC to share documents and information with the worker after conciliation and/or arbitration has concluded. This will avoid circumstances in which workers are required to make a freedom of information application to request access to this information, alleviating burden, stress and unnecessary administration.

Improving administrative arrangements for WorkSafe

The Bill will also make several amendments to improve the administration of the Scheme and its operational effectiveness. The Bill amends the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013* to ensure that further impairment benefits for eligible progressive diseases and serious lung injuries are indexed annually in line with the consumer price index (CPI). This will ensure the compensation amounts are aligned with those for further hearing loss, as intended.

The Bill will also streamline the appointment of hearing loss assessors by removing the requirement for these assessors to be approved by the Minister. Instead, any registered medical practitioner who has undertaken the Ministerially approved training course will be able to be appointed as a hearing loss assessor by WorkSafe. This amendment will reduce delay in appointing assessors and will align their appointment process with those in place for other impairment assessors under the Act.

The Bill amends the administrative arrangements for the appointment and resignation of the WorkSafe CEO. The WorkSafe CEO is currently appointed by the Governor in Council. The Bill will allow the WorkSafe Board to appoint the CEO with the approval of the Minister and allow the WorkSafe CEO to resign by providing a signed letter to the Chair of the WorkSafe Board. This will reduce administrative burden and align the CEO appointment process with that of similar Victorian Government entities.

The Bill will also create a power for the WorkSafe Board to appoint an Acting CEO where the WorkSafe CEO is unable to fulfil the duties of the role or the substantive office is vacant. The Acting CEO will have all the rights and powers and must perform all the duties, of the WorkSafe CEO as set out by the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013*, the *Accident Compensation Act 1985*, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*, the *Dangerous Goods Act 1985* and the *Equipment (Public Safety) Act 1994*.

Currently, the terms and conditions of appointment of Directors of the WorkSafe Board are also set by the Governor in Council. The Bill will allow the Minister to specify the terms and conditions of these appointments. WorkSafe Board Directors will also be able resign by writing to the Minister, rather than the Governor in Council. These minor amendments are designed to streamline these administrative processes.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Bill makes several important changes to the WorkCover Scheme that are necessary to improve the experiences of injured workers and claimants throughout their claims journey, increase the support available to families and dependants of workers whose death is work-related and improve the operation of the Scheme, WorkSafe and the Workplace Injury Commission.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:40): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 19 March.

Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (10:41): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (**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

The Bill amends the **Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986** to –

- (a) provide for a 90 per cent superable salary policy for Executive officers, and other contract employees, who are members of the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme;
- (b) increase the number of times members of the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme can change their contribution rate each year;
- (c) increase the period of time in which a spouse, following the death of a member, may apply to become a member of Emergency Services and State Superannuation’s accumulation arrangement, the ESSPLAN Scheme;
- (d) reduce the size of the Emergency Services Superannuation Board from 12 to 10 members;
- (e) remove the requirement for State Superannuation Fund representatives on the Emergency Services Superannuation Board to be State Superannuation Fund members and vary their selection process such that they are nominated by unions rather than being elected by members of the State Superannuation Fund; and
- (f) abolish the position of deputy Board member for the Emergency Services Superannuation Board.

The Bill also amends the **State Superannuation Act 1988** and **Transport Superannuation Act 1988** to increase the number of times members of the New Scheme and Transport Superannuation Fund respectively can change their contribution rate each year.

Human rights issues

Overall, most of the provisions of the Bill do not engage the human rights contained in the Charter. Furthermore, in general, most of the provisions in the Bill operate beneficially in relation to natural persons.

The right which is relevant to this Bill is the right to take part in public life.

Right to take part in public life: section 18

Section 18(1) of the Charter provides that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

The Charter does not define the term “conduct of public affairs”, but it may include any exercise of political, legislative, executive, or administrative power at all levels, including by participating directly in the conduct of public affairs by, for example, taking part in popular assemblies which have the power to make decisions about the affairs of a particular community.

Reduction in size of Board from 12 to 10 and the abolishment of the position of deputy Board member

Clause 4(1)(a) of the Bill reduces the total number of Board members from 12 to 10. Clause 6 of the Bill removes the position of deputy Board member. Clause 12 of the Bill provides a new section 35, which contains transitional provisions that provide for the cessation of any existing positions which are surplus to the new membership.

Interpreted broadly, it is arguable that the right contained in section 18(1) of the Charter has been engaged on the basis that the Emergency Services Board is a representative board established to make decisions regarding the administration of the Emergency Services and State Superannuation Schemes. A person’s involvement in a board of this nature may be regarded as a right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, because the Board makes decisions about a group of members in society.

If so, there is a reasonable argument that this right has not been limited by the Bill. The reason for the reduction is that it reflects the declining number of contributors to the Emergency Services and State Superannuation Schemes. Indeed, there are currently two vacancies on the Board, and a number of deputy vacancies. As such, the reduction in Board members from 12 to 10, and the removal of deputy members, will not have a practical effect on the term of any existing Board member.

Furthermore, even if the right has been limited by the Bill, such a limitation would likely be justified having regard to the purpose of the limitation, which is to reflect the declining

number of members, improve efficiencies of the Board and assist the Board in running more effectively.

Change from election to nomination

Clause 4(1)(b) of the Bill amends the form of appointment for two of the members of the Board from election to nomination.

It is arguable that removing the ability to be involved in the election process engages the section 18(1) right to participate in the conduct of public affairs. In a similar way as outlined above, a person's ability to vote in this election process may be regarded as a limitation on this right, as they can no longer take part in a process which relates to the composition of a Board that makes decisions about a group of members in society.

If so, the limitation imposed by the Bill is justified. This is having regard to the purpose of the limitation, which is to avoid representation imbalances, and to avoid vacant positions which have the effect of disenfranchising members of the State Superannuation Schemes, due to the difficulty in securing eligible candidates from the small pool of active members. Furthermore, this amendment is also unlikely to impact many people due to the diminishing number of State Superannuation Fund members.

Conclusion

No Charter rights are impermissibly limited by the Bill. I therefore consider that the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 is compatible with the Charter.

THE HON DANNY PEARSON MP
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance)
(10:42): 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:

I move that this Bill be now read a second time. The purpose of the Bill is to ensure consistency in the application of the 90 per cent superable salary policy for members of the Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme (ESSS), assist members in managing their superannuation and personal finances by enabling more frequent contribution rate changes, better support non-member spouses of members who die to apply to become members of ESSPLAN during a time of grief, and make changes to the membership of the Emergency Services Superannuation Board for efficiency and appropriateness in light of the current membership arrangements.

The Bill:

- a. Amends the *Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986* (ESSA) to legislate the 90 per cent superable salary policy for Executive Officers, and other contract employees, who are members of the ESSS to ensure this policy is applied consistently in future;
- b. Amends the ESSA, the *State Superannuation Act 1988* (SSA) and the *Transport Superannuation Act 1988* (TSA) to increase the number of times members of the ESSS, New Scheme and Transport Superannuation Fund can change their contribution rate each year so that members are better able to manage their superannuation and personal finances;
- c. Amends the ESSA to allow spouses, following the death of a member, a period of 12 months in which to apply to become a member of ESSPLAN to better support non-member spouses during a period of grief and potentially trauma;
- d. Amends the ESSA to reduce the size of the Board from 12 to 10 members to improve the operational efficiency of the Board;

- e. Amends the ESSA to remove the requirement for State Superannuation Fund (SSF) representatives on the Board to be SSF members and vary their selection process such that they are nominated by unions that are representative of the members of the SSF. This is designed to respond to the ongoing decline in the number of active SSF members; and
- f. Amends the ESSA to abolish the position of deputy Board member as they are rarely called on and there are alternative ways modern boards can manage the absences of existing board members.

90 per cent Superable Salary rule for emergency services Executive Officers

In 2022, the Government agreed to the superable salary for new emergency services Executive Officers, and other contract employees, who are members of the ES DB Scheme being determined as 90 per cent of their remuneration subject to a minimum of the highest non-executive salary. The prevailing method of determining superable salary was grandfathered for existing emergency services Executive Officers, while providing them with the ability to opt into the new arrangements for both past and future service.

This policy was initially implemented informally, by notifying employers of the new superable salary policy. Government now proposes to formalise this policy in legislation to ensure that it applies consistently to all relevant members of the ESSS.

Allow more frequent changes to member contribution rates

Currently members of the ESSS, New Scheme and Transport Superannuation Fund can only change their contribution rate once a year. This limit was most likely imposed when these schemes were introduced as the administration required was more resource intensive and time consuming.

The Bill removes the limit on the number of times members of the ESSS, New Scheme and Transport Superannuation Fund can change their contribution rate each year.

Given the automation of most of the schemes' administration processes, removing the current limit will have a minimal impact on the schemes and will allow members to better manage their superannuation and personal finances.

Spouse membership following a member's death

Under current arrangements, following the death of a member, their spouse has up to three months to apply to become a member of ESSSuper's accumulation arrangement, the ESSPLAN Scheme.

The Bill extends the period in which a spouse can apply to become an ESSPLAN member to 12 months. This is designed to support non-member spouses during a time of grief and potentially trauma.

Reducing the size of the Board to 10 members

Currently under the ESSA, the Board is to consist of 12 members that are appointed by the Governor in Council. Six board members are nominated by the Minister and six are directly elected by members of the schemes (member-elects). Three of these member-elects are currently elected by members of the ESSS, with one member-elect for each of the emergency services organisations. The remaining three member-elects are elected by

members of the former SSF. This arrangement is consistent with Commonwealth superannuation legislation which generally requires 'equal representation' of employees and employers on superannuation trustee boards.

As the SSF is closed to new members, the number of active SSF members has declined significantly and will continue to do so. Active SSF members are now only around 11 per cent of the SSF's total membership.

As only active SSF members can vote and be elected to the Board, it is very difficult to source SSF member-elects from the declining pool of active SSF members.

The size of the current Board is also larger than is considered optimal and active SSF members are now only around 20 per cent of all active ESSSuper members (compared to around 75 per cent when the current Board composition was agreed).

To address these issues, the Bill reduces the size of the Board from 12 to 10, by reducing both the number of SSF-member elects and Government nominated members by one. This ensures that the equal representation of employee and employer members of the Board is retained.

The Bill will also subsequently amend quorum requirements for SSF and ESSS member-elects to the Board to ensure efficient and balanced decision making.

Method of selecting SSF representatives

Currently SSF member-elects are directly elected by active members of various employer groups. This ensures the Board can make decisions informed by the valuable lived experience of elected members.

However, with a diminishing number of active members, making up approximately 11 percent of all SSF members, it has become more difficult to recruit new suitable candidates resulting in vacancies that cannot be filled.

The Bill therefore includes amendments to remove the requirement for SSF representatives on the Board to be SSF members and amends how SSF representatives are selected, so they will be nominated by relevant unions who are representative of the make up of members of the SSF.

The Minister, in consultation with relevant unions, will determine the union nomination process, including the unions that may nominate candidates for the two SSF positions. Candidates nominated by the unions do not need to be members of that union and unions will be able to nominate Board candidates with relevant skills, boosting the skills and experience of the Board. This arrangement aligns Victoria the superannuation boards of the Commonwealth and other states.

Given the large active membership of emergency services members, the Bill does not change the number of ESSS member-elects nor the method of selecting or appointing them.

Abolishing of the position of deputy member

The Board currently consists of nine deputy member positions, one for each of the six member-elects and a pool of three for the Government nominated members. Deputy members act in the position of Board members when a Board member is absent, ill or suspended.

Experience over the years has demonstrated that there has been minimal need to call on deputy members as there are alternative ways that modern boards can manage the absences of existing members. Between the period from 2011 to 2023, deputy members have only attended Board meetings on three occasions.

For this reason the Bill includes amendments to abolish the position of deputy Board member.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:42): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 19 March.

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (10:43): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025:

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 Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to amend *Building Act 1993* (**Building Act**), the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995* (**Domestic Building Contracts Act**), the *Sale of Land Act 1962* (**Sale of Land Act**), the *Subdivision Act 1988* and the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* to integrate a number of building regulatory functions and improve consumer protection by enhancing building insurance requirements and bolstering compliance mechanisms available to the Victorian Building Authority (**Authority**).

The key amendments contained in the Bill are to establish a statutory domestic building insurance scheme on a monopoly basis by the Authority, enhance the Authority's enforcement powers including by empowering the Authority to issue orders for the rectification of incomplete, non-compliant or defective building work, provide for a developer bond scheme in relation to particular residential apartment buildings and confer additional regulatory functions on the Authority.

Human rights issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- right to property (s 20);
- freedom from forced or compulsory labour (s 11(2));
- the right to privacy (s 13(a));
- freedom of expression (s 15)
- the right to a fair hearing (s 24(1));
- the right to be presumed innocent (s 25(1)); and
- the right not to be tried or punished more than once (s 26).

Property rights

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers conferred by legislation which authorise the deprivation of property are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

Transfer of certain property rights to the Authority

Clause 10 of the Bill will, amongst other things, transfer certain contracts of insurance to the Authority (new s 292 of the Building Act) and empower the VMIA Minister to direct the VMIA to transfer to the Authority, property, rights and liabilities specified in an allocation statement (s 300). The effect of any transfer is that all rights and liabilities of VMIA under transferred contracts of insurance vest in the Authority (s 292). Similarly, all property, rights and liabilities in an allocation statement vest in the Authority (s 302). The transfer of these property rights remain subject to any encumbrances in effect at the time of transfer (s 293 and s 304). Further, any rights or liabilities of the VMIA under an agreement vest in the Authority (s 305) and the Authority is substituted for the VMIA in any proceedings pending or existing in any court or tribunal which relate to any transferred property, rights of liabilities (s 295 and s 307).

New s 290 defines **property** to mean ‘any legal or equitable estate or interest (whether present or future and whether vested or contingent) in real or personal property of any description’, **liabilities** to mean ‘all liabilities, duties and obligations, whether actual, contingent or prospective’, and **rights** to mean ‘all rights, powers, privileges and immunities, whether actual, contingent or prospective’.

The transfer of any of VMIA’s property, rights and liabilities to the Authority, including the transfer of a contract of insurance, is relevant to the property rights of natural persons who hold an interest in the property or liability transferred. However, the transfer will not limit the property rights of persons holding the interest as they are not being deprived of their interest, but rather, the property or liability is transferred without altering the substantive content of that property right or liability.

Insofar as a cause of action in relation to any potential liability held by the VMIA may be considered ‘property’ within the meaning of s 20 of the Charter, the Bill may engage this right. However, in my opinion, the Bill does not effect a deprivation of property as it does not extinguish any cause of action which a person may have against VMIA. Rather, liability is transferred to the Authority.

Finally, even if the Bill could be considered to deprive a person of property, any such deprivation would be ‘in accordance with law’ and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property. In particular, the new provisions of the Building Act dealing with the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from the VMIA to the Authority, as outlined above, are drafted in clear and precise terms, and are sufficiently accessible to allows persons to regulate their own conduct in relation to them.

Accordingly, I consider that the transfer of VMIA’s property, rights and liabilities to the Authority is compatible with the property rights in s 20 of the Charter.

Rescission of off-the-plan contracts

Clauses 101 and 102 expand the grounds on which the purchaser may rescind an off-the-plan contract for a lot in a residential apartment building, namely where the vendor requires or permits the purchaser to take possession where an occupancy permit has not been issued or where the developer has not executed a developer bond at all or the bond amount secured is less than required by the Building Act. Clause 102 also provides a purchaser who rescinds a contract the ability to recover any amount paid under the contract as well as penalty interest on this amount from a court.

These amendments may engage a vendor’s right to property by depriving them of their rights under a contract which may now be rescinded in new circumstances by the purchaser. However, in my view the right is not limited, as the situations in which a purchaser may rescind a contract will be under a clearly formulated,

publicly accessible law and confined to specific circumstances necessary to encourage compliance by vendors and developers with the statutory scheme. Similarly, the power of a court to award penalty interest to the purchaser clearly sets out the circumstances in which this can occur and the method of calculation of any penalty awarded.

For these reasons, I consider that clauses 101 and 102 are compatible with the property rights in s 20 of the Charter.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour

Section 11(2) of the Charter provides that a person must not be made to perform forced or compulsory labour. ‘Forced or compulsory labour’ relevantly does not include work or service that forms part of normal civil obligations. While the Charter does not define ‘normal civil obligations’, comparative case law has considered that to qualify as a normal civil obligation, the work or service required must be provided for by law, must be imposed for a legitimate purpose, must not be exceptional and must not have any punitive purpose or effect (*Faure v Australia* (Human Rights Committee Communication No 1036/2001)). This has extended to obligations to take undertake work in order to maintain compliance with regulatory standards.

Part 5 of the Bill introduces provisions empowering the Authority, in certain conditions, to issue orders requiring the person who carried out the building work or a developer to rectify incomplete, non-compliant or defective building work. The Bill also introduces an offence for contravention of a rectification order (new s 75M of the Building Act).

I am of the view that work required under a rectification order would form part of a normal civil obligation, and as such, would not constitute a limit on this right. A rectification order is provided for under law as introduced in this Bill and is confined in its impact, including that a builder or developer can only be compelled to complete or rectify building work (new s 75E(1)), as opposed to being required to commence an entirely new building project. The Bill also provides protections to persons who may be required to undertake rectification works, including that the Authority may decide not to issue a rectification order if it would be unfair or unreasonable in the circumstances (new s 75B(5)) and is subject to review by VCAT (new s 75S). These provisions together work to ensure that the rectification order scheme will not operate arbitrarily.

Further, an order is imposed for the legitimate non-punitive purpose of ensuring that builders and developers deliver buildings of an appropriate standard, ultimately protecting both the health and safety of any persons who enter the building, as well as guarding against any financial loss which may be incurred by purchasers of a defective building.

For these reasons, I do not consider that the freedom from forced or compulsory labour will be limited by this Bill.

Right to privacy

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence 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.

Transfer of certain information to the Authority

The transfer of property, rights and liabilities from the VMIA to the Authority under new Part 15 of the Building Act (as detailed above), may also involve the transfer of personal information from the VMIA to the Authority. In particular, new s 303(a) specifies that the VMIA, must provide to the Authority all records and information in the custody or control of the VMIA relating to any property, rights or liabilities that vest in or become liabilities of the Authority under the transfer.

While not all information transferred will be of a private nature or be information concerning a natural person, as opposed to information concerning a corporation to which the Charter does not apply, to the extent that these provisions effect the disclosure of personal information to the Authority, this will occur in lawful and not arbitrary circumstances. The transfer of information serves a legitimate purpose of ensuring that the insurance provider has the relevant information in order to provide the required insurance and administer the new scheme under the Building Act. This ultimately serves the purpose of providing for appropriate regulation of the building industry and enhancing consumer protection. The provisions providing for the transfer of information are drafted in clear and precise terms and will principally impact on registered builders who have voluntarily undertaken to practise in a regulated industry where special duties and responsibilities attach.

Further, the Authority is required to comply with relevant privacy laws (including the Charter) in the handling of personal information, assisting to ensure that any interference with the right to privacy will be lawful and non-arbitrary.

I therefore consider that the transfer of information to the Authority under the Bill does not limit the right to privacy.

Powers of entry

Clause 96 of the Bill introduces powers of entry in Division 5 of new Part 9B of the Building Act, which deals with developer bonds. Under new s 137ZZK, a building assessor may enter and inspect the common property or any lot in order to perform their functions under the new Part, broadly being to identify, assess and report on building defects. A builder appointed to rectify defective building work is also empowered to enter common property or any lot in order to carry out the required works. An authorised person who exercises these powers of entry may take photos, make sketches of building work or use any other means for recording information for the purposes of this new Part. Under new s 137ZZL, the owners corporation, building manager or the owner and/or occupier of a private lot may be required to provide reasonable assistance to and cannot, without reasonable excuse, obstruct, hinder or refuse access to the building assessor or builder carrying out their functions in the relevant building. New s 137ZZM further provides that a person may apply to VCAT for an order requiring the owner or occupier of a lot to give access to the building.

These powers engage a person's right in s 13(a) of the Charter not to have their privacy or home unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with by permitting access and allowing records to be taken of common and private property by building assessors and/or builders. I consider that these powers are compatible with s 13(a) because the provisions in new Division 5 of Part 9B are precise and appropriately circumscribed, as they can only be exercised following written notice to the owners corporation and to the owner and occupier (in the case of access to a private lot) explaining why the person wishes to enter and at a reasonable time agreed upon by these parties. Further, safeguards apply to the exercise of the powers including that persons are required to exercise these powers of entry in a reasonable manner and must not, without consent, stay or permit others to stay on the premises longer than is necessary to achieve the purpose of the entry. The new provisions also allow for a person to refuse access to property where there is a reasonable excuse for doing so and any disagreement over access is able to be resolved through the VCAT process. I also consider these powers are proportionate to the legitimate aim of ensuring building defects are properly identified and rectified before any of the remaining bond is returned to the developer.

Right to freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. However, s 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

New s 137ZG provides that a person, not otherwise acting on behalf of the Authority, must not use a prescribed expression, or variation therein, in connection with selling the right to participate in the statutory insurance scheme.

While the right to use prescribed expressions may impose a limitation on the freedom of expression, I consider that this is a lawful restriction which is reasonably necessary to both protect public order and the rights of others within the meaning of the internal limitation in s 15(3) of the Charter. The expression 'protection of ... public order' is a wide and flexible concept and includes measures for 'peace and good order, public safety and prevention of disorder and crime' (*Magee v Delaney* (2012) 39 VR 50) and can include laws that enable the public to engage in their personal and business affairs free from unlawful interference to their person or property. The meaning of protecting the rights of others is similarly broad and would include restrictions reasonably necessary to protect the property rights of others (*Magee v Delaney* (2012) 39 VR 50).

This restriction on the freedom of expression is confined to a very particular context, being only in connection with selling the right to participate in the statutory insurance scheme. I consider that this restriction is closely tailored to its purpose of deterring and preventing fraud or other misleading behaviour which may undermine the integrity of the statutory insurance scheme and risk consumers and builders being without the proper insurance. I consider there are no less restrictive means of achieving this purpose of preventing and deterring such conduct that leaves consumers at risk.

For these reasons, I consider s 137ZG falls within s 15(3) of the Charter as it is reasonably necessary to protect public order and the rights of others. As such, this provision imposes no limitation on the freedom of expression.

I note that any expression to be prescribed will be assessed for compatibility with the Charter through the requirement for the Minister to certify a Human Rights Certificate.

Right to a fair hearing

Suspension of builder registration and grounds for disciplinary action

Clauses 37, 38, 85 and 86 of the Bill insert new subsections into s 179 and s 180 of the Building Act adding further grounds on which a builder may be subject to disciplinary action or have their registration immediately suspended, namely where the Authority is not satisfied that the practitioner meets prescribed minimum financial requirements or where the practitioner has refused or failed to comply with a rectification order or rectification costs order without reasonable excuse. Clause 39 inserts new s 180A(2AA) into the Building Act to provide that the Authority must, with notice, immediately suspend the registration of the registered building practitioner if the Authority reasonably believes that the practitioner has ceased to meet the prescribed minimum financial standards for registered building practitioners. The expansion of the grounds for immediate suspension of registration and disciplinary action is relevant to the right to a 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. While recognising the broad scope of s 24(1), the term ‘proceeding’ and ‘party’ suggest that s 24(1) was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties. As the administrative decisions at issue here do not involve the conduct of proceedings with parties, there is a question as to whether the right to a fair hearing is engaged.

In any event, if a broad reading of s 24(1) is adopted and it is understood that the fair hearing right is engaged by this Bill, this right would nonetheless not be limited. The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision and 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. The entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited.

While the Bill expands the circumstances in which a builder’s rights may be impacted, this is appropriate to give effect to the rectification order scheme and to ensure builders meet minimum financial standards, limiting the risk that builders will become insolvent while undertaking building works, potentially exposing consumers to significant financial detriment. The Bill does not alter the existing processes under the Building Act for determining suspensions and disciplinary actions, which afford a builder procedural fairness. A decision made by the Authority to immediately suspend a builder’s registration under s180A(1) of the Building Act or to take disciplinary action and impose a penalty against a building practitioner, such as placing a condition on their registration, is made pursuant to a show cause process (s 182 of the Building Act) and is subject to internal review (Part 11, Division 4, subdivision 2 of the Building Act). The builder is provided with the opportunity to provide oral or written representations during the show cause period (s 182A(1) of the Building Act) and on internal review (s 185B(2)) of the Building Act. New s 180A(2AA) is not subject to the same show process but is also subject to the internal review process.

Finally, any of the above decisions are subject to external review by VCAT (s 186 of the Building Act). This affords builders a hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal and satisfies the requirements in s 24(1) of the Charter.

As such, I conclude that the fair hearing rights in s 24(1) of the Charter are not limited by these clauses.

Immunities

The fair hearing right is relevant where statutory immunities are provided to certain persons as this right has been held to encompass a person’s right of access to the courts to have their civil claim submitted to a judge for determination. Similarly, insofar as a cause of action may be considered ‘property’ within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, these below provisions may also engage this right.

Clause 4 of the Bill expands the immunity in s 127(1)(a) and (b) of the Building Act such that a Commissioner or any person engaged by the Authority is not liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in carrying out a function, or in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the carrying out of a function under the Domestic Building Contracts Act.

The exclusion from personal liability under amended s 127(1)(a) and (b) of the Building Act will not interfere with the right to a fair hearing, because parties seeking redress are instead able to bring a claim against the Authority (s 127(2)). The provision also serves a necessary purpose by ensuring that a person appointed by the Authority is able to exercise their functions effectively without the threat of personal repercussions and overall interference that responding to court claims has. Additionally, the person appointed by the Authority

will still remain personally liable for any conduct not performed in good faith. Accordingly, this provision does not limit the right to a fair hearing under the Charter.

The Bill also inserts new s 137ZZD of the Building Act, which establishes a professional association, or a person appointed or engaged by a professional association is not liable for anything done or omitted to be done in good faith in accrediting a person for the purposes of new Part 6 of the Building Act. As this is an absolute immunity, acting as a bar to bringing a civil claim, the fair hearing right will be limited by this new section.

However, I consider that this limitation is reasonable and justified for the following reasons. While absolute in nature, the scope of this immunity is limited, only barring claims arising from the accreditation of a person for the purposes of new Part 6. It does not act to bar claims from being brought in relation to acts or omissions done by those people in carrying out their functions under Part 6 nor for conduct not performed in good faith. This immunity is necessary to ensure that professional associations, who would be otherwise be liable, are willing to make these appointments and to undertake assessments for the purposes of assisting the Authority. Unlike the transfer of liability effected under clause 4 (outlined above), it is not appropriate to transfer liability to the Authority in this instance where the Authority will rely on the judgment of a professional association.

For these reasons, I consider that the limitation imposed on the right to a fair hearing by these immunities is justified and so compatible with the Charter.

Right to be presumed innocent (s 25(1))

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision allows for the imposition of criminal liability without the need for the prosecution to prove fault. The right is also 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.

Strict liability offences

The Bill includes a number of offences that do not require proof of fault, for example, being that the relevant party acted 'knowingly or recklessly'. The inclusion of these strict liability offences in the Bill may limit right to be presumed innocent under s 25(1) of the Charter.

These strict liability offences inserted into the Building Act are:

- New s 40A provides that specified persons must ensure that notice is given to the Authority before an application for an occupancy permit is made in respect of a residential apartment building;
- New s 137O, 137X and 137Y provide that a builder must pay the applicable insurance premium under an insurable building contract (including for a varied contract) or for speculative building work, before specified dates;
- New s 137U provides that it is an offence to represent to another person that a notice of cover has been issued by the Authority if it has not been;
- New s 137ZG provides that a person, not otherwise acting on behalf of the Authority, must not use a prescribed expression, or variation therein, in connection with selling the right to participate in the statutory insurance scheme;
- New s 137ZP provides that the developer must arrange for the issue or execution of a developer bond before the occupancy permit application date;
- New s 137ZQ provides that a developer must not make a statement or provide information in relation to the total build cost or amount secured by the developer bond to the Authority that is false or misleading;
- New s 137ZR provides that a person must not apply for an occupancy permit for a residential apartment building unless a developer bond has been issued or executed and that a person must not falsely represent that such a bond has been issued;
- New s 137ZT and 137ZX provide that a developer must nominate and appoint a building assessor, subject to specified conditions, and provide certain notices;
- New s 137ZU provides that a person nominated for appointment as a building assessor must provide notice of any association they have with the developer;
- New s 137ZZB(1) provides that a building assessor must not ask for or receive any benefit, aside for consideration for the performance of their functions;

- New s 137ZZB(2) provides that a person must not in order to influence a building assessor, offer any benefit beyond consideration for the performance of their functions or remove or threaten to remove a benefit;
- New s 137ZZC provides that the developer must give a building assessor particular information;
- New s 137ZZE provides that the developer must do certain things to arrange to a final inspection of a development;
- New s 137ZZI provides that an owners corporation must give notice to the owners in an apartment building of a building assessor's report and other prescribed matters;
- New s 137ZZL(2) provides that a person must give reasonable assistance to a building assessor or builder appointed to rectify defective building work as required;
- New s 137ZZP provides that a developer must take the necessary steps to ensure the payment or release of a bond amount in accordance with a determination made by the Authority;
- New s 137ZZQ provides that the owners corporation must only apply any bond amount received for the approved purpose and otherwise deal with these funds in particular ways.

The Bill also inserts the following strict liability offence into the Sale of Land Act:

- New s 9ADA provides that a vendor under certain off-the-plan contracts must not require or permit the purchaser to take possession where an occupancy permit has not been issued.

Strict liability offences will generally be compatible with the presumption of innocence where they are reasonable, necessary and proportionate in pursuit of a legitimate objective.

Strict liability offences are considered legitimate where directed at preventing loss in particular contexts, such as consumer protection. These offences will deter existing practices within the building industry that have exposed consumers to significant risks of financial harm. This assists to enhance compliance with regulatory requirements and ultimately to protect consumers who may find it difficult to independently verify if the builder holds the proper insurance or whether a developer has paid the required bond or to compel a builder or developer to comply with a rectification order. These consumers are vulnerable to significant financial loss where proper insurance is not held or where building faults are not properly rectified. It is reasonable that the offences do not require proof of fault given significant consequences and loss that can arise regardless of whether a builder or developer acts knowingly or recklessly.

The offences are reasonable in that they do not exclude the common law defence of honest and reasonable mistake of fact, and they do not attract penalties of imprisonment. While the more serious offences, such as failing to have proper insurance (s 137O, 137X and 137Y), attract up to 500 penalty units for a natural person, which is at the high end of the liability spectrum for what a strict liability offence would generally attract, this is reasonable and proportionate noting the very large values of contractual commitments by builders and developers and their customers under domestic building contracts, and the significant costs to the community where builders fail to hold the required insurance and where builders and developers leave buildings with major faults without recourse by the consumer to cover the costs of the required additional building work. Accordingly, this maximum penalty provides a significant deterrent in response to identified practices of non-compliance in the industry to prevent builders and developers from operating without holding the required insurance or undertaking defective, non-compliant or incomplete building work. By contrast, offences which deal with more administrative or minor matters, such as s 137ZZI requiring an owners corporation to give notice to owners of a building assessor's report, attract a far lower penalty in proportion to the consequences of failure to comply and need for deterrence.

For these reasons, the limitation to s 25(1) of the Charter imposed by the strict liability offences is reasonable and justifiable within the meaning of s 7(2) of the Charter.

Reverse onus provisions

The Bill inserts the following offences into the Building Act which contain an exception in the form of an excuse:

- New s 75M provides that a person must not contravene a rectification order without reasonable excuse
- New s 137ZZL(3) provides that a person must not, without reasonable excuse, refuse access to a building assessor or builder appointed to rectify defective building work.

These offences contain excuses (also known as exceptions) which place an evidential burden on the accused, in other words, the accused is required to present or point to evidence that suggests a reasonable possibility of the existence of facts that would establish the exception or excuse. The Supreme Court has held that evidential onus provisions on an accused to establish an exception does not transfer the legal burden of proof

and do not limit the right to the presumption of innocence. Once the accused has pointed to evidence of a reasonable excuse, the burden shifts back to the prosecution who must prove the essential elements of the offence to a legal standard. Further, the exceptions relate to matters which are peculiarly within an accused's knowledge and would be unduly onerous for a prosecution to disprove at first instance.

Should the right to the presumption of innocence in fact be limited by these provisions, I am of the view that any limitation is reasonable and demonstrably justified, in that it is a proportionate measure to the legitimate purpose of the offences, which is to protect consumers by ensuring the compliance of builders and developers with rectification orders (for s 75M) and facilitating access to buildings for the purpose of identifying, assessing or remedying building defects (for s 137ZZL(3)). Courts in other jurisdictions have held that the presumption of innocence may be subject to reasonable limits in the context of regulatory compliance, particularly where regulatory offences may cause harm to the public. Finally, the offences are not punishable by a term of imprisonment, and in the case of s 137ZZL(3), attracts only a minor penalty.

Accordingly, I am of the view that these offence provisions are compatible with the Charter.

Right not to be punished more than once

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 they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right reflects the principle of double jeopardy. However, the principle only applies in respect of criminal offences – it will not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person's conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, or vice versa.

Penalties and sanctions imposed by professional disciplinary bodies do not usually constitute a form of 'punishment' for the purposes of this right as they are protective in nature and not punitive.

The ability of the Authority to take disciplinary action against or immediately suspend the registration of a registered building practitioner (clauses 37, 38, 39, 85 and 86 of the Bill discussed above) does not engage this right. This is because the purpose of taking disciplinary action against or suspending the registration of a builder is to protect consumers from future harm, such as in circumstances where there has been a failure to meet minimal financial requirements or to comply with a rectification orders. As these sanctions are for protective rather than punitive purposes, they do not engage the right against double punishment set out in s 26 of the Charter.

Conclusion

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The Hon Nick Staikos MP
Minister for Consumer Affairs

Second reading

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government)
 (10:43): 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:

The Bill amends the *Building Act 1993*, the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995*, the *Subdivision Act 1988*, the *Sale of Land Act 1962* and the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998* to implement major reforms to the building regulatory framework.

The main purposes of the Bill are to:

- integrate domestic building regulatory functions into the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) by
 - conferring the function of administering Part 4 of the Domestic Building Contracts Act on the VBA instead of the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria, and
 - transferring the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority's (VMIA) domestic building insurance business to the VBA and provide that DBI must be obtained solely from the VBA;
- enhance financial protections for consumers through the establishment of a Statutory Insurance Scheme (SIS) to be administered by the VBA to provide domestic building insurance on a first-resort basis for domestic buildings with a rise in storeys of three or less;

- introduce new financial protections for consumers through a developer bond scheme for apartments with a rise in storeys of more than three;
- restrict the sale or occupancy of apartment buildings above three storeys with serious defects that have not been rectified or if the developer has not complied with the requirements of the developer bond scheme;
- enhance the VBA's enforcement powers including by empowering the VBA to order the rectification of building work that is incomplete, defective or non-compliant both prior to and after the issuing of an occupancy permit; and
- make miscellaneous, consequential and technical amendments.

This Bill is the first step to implement the Building Reform Program to support delivery of Victoria's Housing Statement. The Building Reform Program responds to numerous reports to government including the Cladding Taskforce Report, the Building Confidence Report and Expert Panel on Building Reform reports. The government intends that further Bills will be introduced in this term of Parliament to build on the initiatives in this Bill. When fully implemented, the Building Reform Program will transform the building regulatory system with a new legislative structure and changes to arrangements for the regulator, insurance, monitoring building work among other changes.

Many of the reforms proposed by the Bill are modelled closely on regulatory measures that are operating successfully in other states.

Integrated regulatory model

Responsibility for domestic building functions is fragmented across various agencies. Each is vested with different responsibilities, such as monitoring and enforcing compliance with the Building Act, providing dispute resolution functions and domestic building insurance. Fragmented regulatory responsibilities create confusion for consumers, who may not know which agency to turn to when a building work issue arises. Consumers are often passed around agencies before finding the right one to investigate or resolve their problem, leading to lost time and additional costs. Sometimes consumers give up and choose to incur costs to rectify building work themselves rather than pursue the builder for work that should have been done correctly the first time.

It is evident that the fragmented nature of the building regulatory system, combined with complex, costly and slow dispute resolution processes and limited enforcement powers for the regulator to order defective building work to be rectified quickly has not met community expectations and weakened confidence in the building sector.

This Bill addresses fragmentation by bringing regulatory functions under the Building Act, dispute resolution functions under the Domestic Building Contracts Act and domestic building insurance into the VBA.

By combining these domestic building regulatory functions, the Government's policy goal is to deliver a 'one-stop-shop' building regulator that will be more effective at resolving building work issues quickly. It closely links the new statutory insurance scheme for domestic building work with the VBA's enforcement and disciplinary powers together with dispute resolution services.

Linking these functions as proposed by the Bill creates a strong incentive on builders to rectify building work when ordered to do so because failure to comply with the regulator's rectification orders can lead to the immediate suspension of the builder's registration. If a builder's failure to rectify has resulted in a consumer making a successful domestic building insurance claim, the VBA will be able to recover the cost of the insurance response from the builder. The links between domestic building insurance, enforcement powers, discipline, cost recovery and dispute resolution are critical to the regulator's effectiveness and the success of the first-resort insurance scheme.

Importantly not all regulatory functions will be integrated into the VBA. The functions of the Municipal Building Surveyor (MBS) and Private Building Surveyor (PBS) will not be altered with the establishment of the integrated regulator. Both the MBS and PBS will continue to play significant roles in the domestic building sector. Similarly, the role of the Architects Registration Board of Victoria with the registration of architects, and Consumer Affairs Victoria with respect to the registration of engineers, will continue without change.

Domestic building insurance and the Statutory Insurance Scheme

The Bill makes significant reform to domestic building insurance, which will be implemented over two stages. The first stage of reform will cover 'last-resort' domestic building insurance that currently operates in Victoria. The second stage of reform will introduce more significant change with the introduction of the new SIS, which will provide domestic building insurance on a 'first-resort' basis for domestic buildings three storeys and below.

Last-resort domestic building insurance

The first stage of insurance reform will deliver the integration of the VMIA's domestic building insurance business into the VBA, provide for the VBA to undertake a domestic building insurance business and introduce enabling provisions to close the domestic building insurance market to private insurers. The Bill does this by conferring a function on the VBA to carry on an insurance business relating to domestic building work. The Building Act will be amended to replace the VMIA with VBA as a designated insurer for domestic building insurance.

The Bill provides transitional arrangements to ensure building owners with domestic building insurance policies written by VMIA will continue to receive the same coverage under those policies after the transfer to the VBA takes place. All assets, liabilities, rights and other matters associated with VMIA's domestic building insurance business will transfer to the VBA. An insurance account will be established in the Building Act into which payments for domestic building insurance purposes are to be made. Payments can be paid out of the insurance account to meet domestic building insurance liabilities. The account must be managed in accordance with prudential requirements.

The transition to these arrangements will be subject to detailed implementation work by departments and agencies. Affected insurers and builders will be consulted as part of implementation work, including if the government chooses to close the last-resort domestic building insurance market. Information will be available to industry and the public ahead of the commencement of these new requirements.

The Statutory Insurance Scheme

The Bill's second reform to domestic building insurance is the establishment of a new SIS. The introduction of the SIS is a significant initiative supporting the Bill's policy objective to improve consumer protection by delivering the rectification of incomplete, defective or non-compliant building work quickly and, in the case of the SIS, removing the consumer from any requirement to participate in dispute resolution processes. The integrated model, together with rectification orders and insurance reform, are critical to delivering this policy outcome for domestic buildings under three storeys.

The SIS will provide domestic building insurance on a 'first-resort' basis for buildings under three storeys. Domestic building owners will be able to make an insurance claim even when the builder is operating in the building industry and without needing to undertake a dispute resolution process. The existing last-resort insurance triggers allowing for claims in cases where the builder has died, disappeared or become insolvent, will continue to apply under the new arrangements.

The SIS will be administered by the VBA as a government monopoly. This is essential to ensure a close link between insurance, the regulator's enforcement powers, disciplinary powers and cost recovery powers. These links incentivise builders to rectify building work when ordered to do so and are critical to the financial viability of the SIS. This is because the SIS depends on the regulator's power to order builders to rectify building work to reduce demand for insurance payout. If insurance responds due to a failure by the builder to rectify building work, the regulator is empowered to take disciplinary action or cost recovery action against the builder.

The Bill provides important aspects of the SIS and heads of power for detailed matters to be prescribed in regulations. The SIS will cover insurable domestic building contracts where the value of the work is \$20,000 or above. Building owners will be entitled to make a claim if they have suffered loss in connection with domestic building work that is incomplete or defective or non-compliant. Developers and builders, including those engaged in speculative domestic building work, will not be entitled to claim assistance, reflecting the policy objective of strengthening consumer protections for the end user or owner occupier. The VBA will be responsible for preparing a Premium Order, which will set out premiums to be paid for insurance cover. The VBA will also be able to tender for the rectification of building work covered by the SIS if the builder has failed to comply with an order to rectify the work.

The SIS will extend insurance coverage to building owners – known as deemed cover – even if the builder has not purchased an insurance policy. This amendment protects consumers from practices exposed with the collapse of Porter Davis homes. The existence of deemed cover permits flexibility for builders to pay the applicable insurance premium after an insurable domestic building contract has been entered into. The Bill provides this flexibility by giving builders 10 business days to pay the premium after entering a contract. Deemed cover and the flexibility given to builders mean offences in the Domestic Building Contracts Act against builders demanding or receiving money without ensuring the domestic building work is covered by domestic building insurance are no longer required and will be repealed by the Bill.

Detailed terms of insurance cover will be prescribed in regulations. The regulations will include matters such as the maximum amounts of cover available to a building owner under an insurance contract, periods of

insurance cover and any exclusions, among other matters. The terms of optional additional cover will also be prescribed.

Orders for the rectification of building work

The Bill strengthens the VBA's enforcement tools by giving it the power to order the rectification of incomplete, defective and non-compliant building work. The VBA will be able to issue a rectification order to a person who carried out the building work and developers. The scope of who carried out the building work is to be broadly interpreted and can include registered domestic or commercial builders as well as builders without building practitioner registration, subcontractors and others responsible for carrying out incomplete, defective or non-compliant building work. A rectification order can be issued with respect to any building class and at any time during the construction phase of the build and up to 10 years after the issuing of an occupancy permit.

The rectification order process closes a significant gap in the VBA's enforcement powers. Prior to this Bill, the VBA was not able to order builders to rectify defective building work after the issuing of an occupancy permit and had limited power to order the rectification of defects during construction. It was not able to order builders to complete incomplete work. And it was not able to order developers to rectify building work. The rectification order process closes these gaps.

The rectification order power is designed to allow the VBA to respond quickly and order the rectification of defective building work at both pre- and post-occupancy permit stages. Those issued a rectification order must comply within specified timeframes and cannot seek a stay to the operation of the order. In the case of defective building work, it is intended that the VBA provide the relevant person a period of time, for example 14 days, to respond to the VBA's intent to issue an order and raise any issues with the VBA. The VBA will also produce guidance documents on the use of rectification orders for defective work to provide transparency for all parties. These will be required by Ministerial Direction.

Rectification Orders play a critical role with respect to various functions the Bill confers on the VBA. It will be a core feature of the SIS in that builders will be ordered to rectify or complete building work subject to a building owner's insurance claim. Failure to comply with a rectification order in this context will trigger an insurance response. Failure to comply with a rectification order for serious defects can lead to restrictions on the sale, occupancy or registration of plans of subdivision for apartments with a rise in storeys of more than three. Reflecting the VBA's greater consumer protection role under the integrated model, the rectification order can be used to order the rectification of incomplete and defective work. These powers bolster the VBA's existing role in monitoring compliance with the Building Act, Regulations and the National Construction Code.

The ability to issue rectification orders will only be available to the VBA and will not affect enforcement powers available to MBS or PBS. Rather, the rectification order power complements those powers by enabling the regulator to step in when the powers of the MBS or PBS are not suitable for resolving the building work issue.

Developer bond scheme

Another significant consumer protection measure in the Bill is the introduction of a developer bond scheme. A gap currently exists with respect to financial protections for home owners in apartment buildings with a rise in storeys of more than three because these buildings are not covered by domestic building insurance. The bond will address this gap in the interim ahead of the introduction of decennial liability insurance for these apartments in future.

The developer bond scheme is modelled on the Strata Building Bond and Inspections Scheme in NSW. A developer of an apartment with a rise in storeys of more than three will need to secure a bond of two percent against the cost of the building work for the purpose of funding defect rectification costs. The bond will be lodged before the developer applies for an occupancy permit. The VBA will be responsible for approving access to the bond. The bond itself can take the form of a bank guarantee or a bond issued by an insurer approved by the VBA, or any other form prescribed in the regulations.

An inspection regime will be introduced to support the bond. The first inspection will occur 15 to 18 months after the issuing of an occupancy permit. The second inspection if required will occur between 21 to 24 months after the issuing of the occupancy permit. If defects are identified during the first inspection and are not rectified by the second inspection, the owners corporation will be able to apply to the VBA to obtain access to the bond to rectify identified defects. Details such as the method for how the cost of building work is to be calculated; the registers of persons qualified to be appointed as building assessors; and the form and contents of an interim and final report produced by an assessor, will be prescribed in the Regulations.

Assessments will be carried out by building assessors nominated by the developer, and approved by the owners corporation or appointed by the Building and Plumbing Commission. Assessors will be required to act impartially and will be given necessary powers to enter premises to carry out inspections.

Restrictions on the issuing of occupancy permits, registration of plans of subdivision and rescission of off-the-plan contract sales

To support the developer bond scheme, the Bill introduces restrictions on the occupancy, subdivision or sale of apartments if serious defects have not been rectified.

Developers will be required to notify the VBA of their intent to apply for an occupancy permit between six and twelve months in advance. This will enable the VBA to conduct an inspection of the apartment building where the construction time is greater than 6 months; or 30 days in advance if the construction time is less than 6 months. If the VBA inspection identifies the existence of serious defects and issues a rectification order, the developer will not be able to apply for an occupancy permit, nor register a plan of subdivision, nor complete an off-the-plan sale until the rectification order has been complied. Purchasers under an off-the-plan contract will also be able to rescind the contract if an occupancy permit has not been issued or a developer bond has not been paid. These restrictions create an incentive for the developer to improve quality controls to avoid delays to the completion of building work and, if a serious defect is identified, quickly rectify the building work.

Miscellaneous amendments

The Bill makes miscellaneous amendments. The Bill includes provisions to prescribe minimum financial requirements for builders. The purpose is to support the VBA's underwriting activities connected with its insurance functions. This means minimum financial requirements will replace eligibility for domestic building insurance as a requirement to be satisfied by all registered domestic builders. Regulations will prescribe these requirements and will be subject to stakeholder consultation. The Bill makes consequential changes to various sections of the Building Act, reflecting the change from domestic building insurance eligibility to satisfaction of minimum financial requirements.

The Bill introduces new VCAT review jurisdiction with respect to decisions made in relation to the SIS, rectification orders and developer bonds.

The Bill makes various other technical and consequential amendments.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:44): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 19 March.

Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:44): I rise to speak on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. If you look at the bill on its own, just the wording of the bill, it is a very simple bill in that it is a referral bill. It refers powers to the Commonwealth to enable the Help to Buy scheme, but as we know with this Labor government, you need to look closely at what they are doing to understand the sneakiness in everything that they do. This bill is no different, because when it comes to the policy there are issues with this bill, and of course when it comes to this government it is all about politics, which is where I will start.

This bill enables the Commonwealth Help to Buy scheme, and it enables the referral of the Victorian powers to the Commonwealth so that it can happen. But what we do know is that other states have not bought in yet. Other states have not bought into the scheme. Queensland, the only state that has yet done so, did so under the former Labor government, and of course they no longer exist. Only one state

has bought in, and yet we are rushing this bill through the chamber at a time when the two major political parties federally have different positions on this policy. What I expect will happen is that this bill will be debated in the Council in the middle of the federal caretaker period. The current federal government and Parliament will be prorogued shortly, I expect, and this Parliament will be debating a bill and enabling a policy that by the time it gets through this Parliament, if the federal Labor Party is not successful at the election, may no longer move ahead. Our party, by the time it gets to moving through the Parliament, effectively may have to rescind what we are debating. All it would have taken from this government was for them to say, 'Let's hold this bill off for one or two sitting weeks, because we don't know the outcome of the federal election, so that there is certainty around this program.' That is why I move:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words ' , noting the contrasting position of the two major federal political parties on this policy, this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the outcome of the federal election is determined.'

I would appreciate it if that was circulated. It seems only common sense for a state Parliament to know what the federal government is going to do with a policy before enabling it. We can be almost certain that this Parliament, especially in the upper house, will be debating a bill when the Parliament is prorogued. The federal government will effectively no longer exist as anything other than a caretaker government, and yet this Parliament will be pushing a policy forward at a time when we cannot be certain of the outcome of the federal election or assume that this policy will continue.

It is important to start there and to understand that this, like everything else this government does, was never about substance; it was always about politics. There is no doubt in my mind that the reason why this bill is being pushed here before the other states and before the outcome of the federal election is purely so this Premier and the federal Labor Party can try and play politics with these issues in Victoria, because that is what they do. It is never about outcomes; it is always about the politics. That is what will happen with this bill: this government will play politics with this bill in the middle of a caretaker period. They have been caught, and they are upset they have been caught. I understand they are upset that their dastardly scheme has been caught.

But when it comes to the substance of the bill it is important to put on the record some of the details of the scheme, both in comparison to the existing Victorian fund and what the Victorian government is proposing to scrap on their fund and replace with this federal scheme. For background, the current Victorian fund has a scheme size that provides 18,000 homes, over its almost four years of operation, at an asset funding cost of about \$700 million a year. That is being scrapped as we move to the government scheme.

What I think most people would not be aware of is under the new scheme Victorians are getting a heck of a lot less, and we have not read in the minister's second-reading speech any acknowledgement of the new scheme effectively being a cost-cutting exercise for Victorians, have we? We have not heard the government crowing about the massive reduction in the fund by comparison to what is currently being provided to Victorians, but that is what is going to happen.

The federal scheme will be providing 10,000 homes over four years. For those who are following, by comparison to the 18,000 under the existing scheme it is down to 10,000, and an annual funding change drops from \$700 million to just under \$350 million. So it is a halving of the annual asset allocation to this scheme, and that does not take into account recent Parliamentary Budget Office findings that 668,000 Victorians, or 29 per cent of those currently on the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, would no longer qualify under the federal scheme. So we see a federal scheme that is massively cut – I mean, it is halving what currently is in place – and then, on top of that halving, a third who are currently eligible would no longer be eligible. If you are following, it is a scheme that is halved, and then a third are knocked out from the half that remain.

Only Labor at this state level could manage to cost-cut on a scheme that they are crowing about having created. I mean, the government yesterday came into this chamber and crowed about the scheme and

how they paved the way for Australia. Well, they have paved the way for Australia to create a scheme that halves what they are providing and cuts a third of eligible people out from what is available to them in the remainder. I mean, only Labor could possibly manage to help design a scheme – and presumably when the ministers are crowing about the federal scheme, what they mean is they helped design the federal scheme. That is the only thing we can possibly take from their crowing – that they helped design this scheme that cuts deeply into the program that they constantly crow about.

When it comes to the politics of this bill, we know that the Labor Party is simply going to use this bill to play games through the federal election – there is no doubt about that – and when it comes to the substance of the bill there are serious concerns and questions that remain outstanding, which is why we have moved a reasoned amendment that the outcome of the federal election become clear before the bill proceeds. But if the amendment were to fail, we would not oppose the bill, because of course Victorians should receive a share of what effectively we are all paying for. I mean, Australians will all be paying for this scheme.

Therefore as Victorian members of Parliament and part of the Victorian coalition we of course would expect that our state receives a share of what we are effectively funding as taxpayers. So when it comes to the final bill we will not be opposing it, but there are – I mentioned the design of the policy around the scheme – a number of other issues that are worth mentioning. It is worth noting that the scheme parameters are not even finalised. The federal government scheme is not yet finalised, so this Parliament is considering something when we do not know what the final scheme will look like.

There are some draft parameters around the scheme, and they include at a Victorian level a price cap on Victorian property at \$850,000 or in areas other than capital city and regional centres \$650,000, a single income threshold of \$90,000 and a joint income threshold of \$120,000. They are the draft, not final, parameters. When you look at the prices you can understand I think how those parameters have led the Parliamentary Budget Office to conclude that a vast proportion of people who would be eligible for the current Victorian fund will not be eligible for the Commonwealth scheme, because the parameters are tighter, whether it is the federal Labor government that has tightened the scheme or the Victorian government, which I understand was consulted in the parameter design process and has helped them bring in the scheme. Those parameters are only in draft form. Not only do they squeeze eligibility, but they are only in draft form. Effectively this Victorian Parliament is being asked to give up a power to run a scheme to a party when we do not know who will be in government after the next federal election, on a scheme that is based on a framework which has not been finalised yet. I mean, that is pretty galling, isn't it? You would think that any Victorian Parliament would say, 'Well, why don't we wait a couple of weeks until we know the outcome of the federal election? Why wouldn't we wait until the federal government actually finalise the design of their own program?' Well, the only possible answer is: because this Labor government wants to play politics.

We hear the government again pushing on the bill, but I have not heard this government push the other Labor state governments. I have not heard a single one of the ministers push the other state Labor governments into this scheme. I offer the minister an opportunity – or any minister – to show us where he has pushed his other state Labor colleagues into this scheme. If this government wants this scheme to work, why doesn't Labor HQ ring up Labor HQ in the state next door and push them into it? Because it is all about politics. It is always about politics.

The other point that is worth noting with this bill is that there has been no consultation. There has been no consultation with the industry who actually build homes, so I asked the government how they consulted on this bill, which is a fair and reasonable question. If you are going to bring about powers, it is the first question you ask, especially when it comes to delivering homes – you would think the Labor Party would have consulted with someone who builds a home. And the answer I got from the department – I kid you not – was 'Yes, we've consulted other departments.' The government has not worked out that there is a world outside big government and the world outside big government is the world that actually builds the houses. So we have a bill that seemingly enables people to get into homes, but no consultation by this government has occurred outside of talking to itself.

I mean, you could turn that into an ABC comedy. The answer to the consultation question is: ‘We’ve talked to other departments; we’ve talked to each other.’ That gives me very little hope, and it just goes to show why when the minister talked in his second-reading speech – a very short second-reading speech, I might say – about the government’s ‘vision’, I think as one minister described it yesterday, to build 800,000 new homes at 80,000 homes a year, that vision has failed. The minister in his second-reading speech talked about this being part of the government’s strategy to deliver 800,000 homes, and we all know how quiet the government have been on their plan – or their vision now. I call it their promise, but the minister yesterday said ‘vision’. A vision to build 800,000 homes – I mean, vision almost sounds like a mirage, doesn’t it? They are using language that paints the promise as being in the absolute distance, and I think every Victorian now knows that that 800,000 promise, Dan’s promise, has gone with Dan. We know it was Dan’s promise and Dan is gone, and so is that promise.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: The members on the other side of the chamber ask, ‘Who’s Dan?’ It is not lost on us that we never hear that side of the chamber talk about Dan, but I think in not too long you are going to be asking, ‘Who’s Jacinta?’

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Brighton. I remind the member to use correct titles.

James NEWBURY: I digress, Deputy Speaker. But as I said, the minister talked in the second-reading speech about this policy being a part of the government’s plan to build 800,000 homes – 80,000 homes each year over the next 10 years – and I make the point that that figure, that promise, that commitment has not eventuated because what this government does with all policy is it makes an announcement after talking to itself. Department talks to department. One department creates an idea for a new tax, which is usually the genesis, I suspect, for most policies: ‘How do we create a new tax and dress it up as something else?’ And so that policy of 800,000 new homes, which was a series of new taxes, has not delivered new homes. In fact only Labor could have announced a commitment to building new homes and had the number of homes go backwards. It is perhaps one of the most astonishing failures of a Victorian state government in the history of this place that they announced a statewide plan to build 800,000 homes, as the minister spoke to in the second-reading speech of this bill, and yet the number of homes has gone backwards. This is partly because when the policies that the government announced were designed, I suspect they talked to themselves. In fact I am told the department’s plan was to commit to 600,000 homes at 60,000 a year, and the former Premier said the number was not big enough as his final announcement – ‘Up it to 80,000’ – because he wanted a big announceable as his going-out message.

So it is no wonder that when it comes to policy, when policies are designed in consultation with yourself rather than in consultation with industry when it comes to housing, your policies fail. And when the policies are built around taxes, is it any wonder that you do the opposite to incentivising industry? That is what we are seeing with housing.

That is exactly what we are seeing with housing. We are seeing a nation-leading collapse in investment into our state. You can see it. You can feel it. You cannot talk to a single person in the sector when it comes to foreign investment, when it comes to confidence, when it comes to businesses on the ground and their future confidence and not hear back desperation. At the core of that desperation, in part, is the tax regime of this state – what a disgrace. Of the 60 new or increased taxes and charges over the last 10 years, 30 have been in property. This government has attacked the sector so hard the sector is now on its knees. The government’s plan moving forward is to go harder, and we know that we will shortly hear about the government’s plan for the developer contribution scheme, which builds into the 800,000 homes announcement, which will be a new tax. It will be a new tax, and as sure as God made green little apples that tax will cream money off the top from the local communities and go into government coffers, because this government are a bunch of financial vandals. So its answer to everything is a new tax that goes straight into the coffers of the government that is wasting taxpayers

money because it has forgotten the golden rule, and the golden rule is that every dollar it spends was first earned through the blood, sweat and tears of some taxpayer. This government have forgotten that principle, and you can see it every time they talk about government spending. When you hear them talk about new taxes, you can hear they have forgotten the fundamental principle of how that tax came into the government coffer. Someone else earned it first, and someone else earned it through their own blood, sweat and tears, usually through running a business, perhaps a family business, a small business, which are the backbone of this state.

When it comes to this policy it is concerning that when asked about consultation on how this policy will operate, the government's answer was, 'We've talked to other departments.' Well, frankly, what would they know, because this policy is about getting people into homes, so why not talk to someone who builds a home? Why wouldn't you? When I asked that question I was told the federal government will not allow states to consult with anybody. The federal government will not allow any state government to consult with anybody. Can you believe it? They are blocking the states, who they have asked for a referral of power, from talking to anybody. Well, why would that be? It is because the states might find out there are problems and flaws with the scheme or there are eligibility issues with the scheme. It is extraordinary to think that the federal government has designed a scheme and blocked the states from talking to anybody about it, so I do not blame the department from only consulting with itself and holding all the team meetings I am sure it did to consult with other public servants. I am sure that was very fruitful work, and it is not their fault, because it turns out the Prime Minister is blocking the states from talking to anyone who builds a home about a program designed to bring people into homes.

Only this Labor Party could possibly bring about a scheme of that nature. That is why it is important to reiterate that the coalition has moved an amendment on the outcome of the federal election, because there are divergent views at a federal level on the future of this policy. Those divergent views are very, very clear. They are very, very clear.

Although the federal Labor Party wants to continue with a scheme – this scheme, a cut-down scheme, a scheme that will dramatically reduce the number of Victorians that are eligible – it is providing this scheme, and the coalition has said otherwise at a federal level. If we were midway through a term, if we were in a time when the federal government was underway with a mandate, you would say, 'Okay, perhaps it's fair and reasonable that the two parties have different views, but one of them has been elected and one of them is in government.' But we are at a time when the federal election is most likely days away from being called, potentially at the end of this week. So this Parliament will be debating a bill –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I am hearing Labor members calling out. It is Labor MPs who have been putting that about. It is federal Labor MPs who this week have been putting that about. I will not name them, but I am happy to if the members want – federal Labor MPs who have been telling everybody, including me, when the federal election will be called. This bill will be debated by this Parliament in the other place at a time when the federal Parliament is prorogued and when the government is in caretaker period, so we will not know the outcome of this bill. When I spoke to the government about that issue – I mean, it is a fair and reasonable question to ask, 'Why are we passing it? Why are we seeking to pass something that by the time we have passed it, who knows what will happen?' – I was told not to worry because the bill can effectively be rescinded. There are powers within the bill – and there are – that effectively enable the bill to be rescinded and spent before it is proclaimed. So, hang on, this Parliament will be debating a bill that is designed by operation to hit the floor before it is even proclaimed. Why not wait? Why not just wait a few weeks so that we know the outcome of the federal election. That seems very fair and reasonable, but no, there is no doubt that this government wants to play politics with this policy and the broader housing policy.

It is clear now in my view that Victorians can see that the government is playing politics with housing. There is no doubt that the government are playing politics with housing, and you can see it very broadly in relation to their commitments, promises and visions for the number of homes built, which has actually gone backwards, and with their broader housing announcements which attack Melbourne suburbs. You can see it in certain Melbourne suburbs, not others. You can see that it is all about politics, and that is why the community has lost confidence in this government. You can also see that in terms of industry, and it explains why we are seeing a collapse of confidence in the housing construction sector, because it has also lost confidence in this government. The only way to fix these fundamental problems is to see a change of government. The only way now is to see a change of government, because you can see that on all major issues this government has completely lost touch, misunderstands the issues and is trying to create fake announcements, which are usually designed around new taxes, and Victorians can see it.

On this bill, we will not oppose the final bill if the amendment is not successful. I do hope my debate convinced the government members to support it. I can see that they are so quiet because they feel that it did. But on the final bill, we will not be opposing that.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (11:14): I rise to speak on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. I will talk on the bill, but I do want to address some of the issues that the member for Brighton raised. At the outset I will say that the government will not be supporting the reasoned amendment. But I did enjoy the member –

James Newbury interjected.

Paul HAMER: I think I am fairly confident in saying that that will be the stance of the government. But I must say that the member did talk about ABC comedy, and I do hope that all of that video footage gets sent to some of the producers at ABC, because I am sure there is a comedy show in there just for him. The member for Brighton has a career waiting after Parliament.

James Newbury interjected.

Paul HAMER: And it was meant to be a compliment. I am amazed at the confidence that both the member for Brighton and the Liberal Party in general have coming up to what will be a heavily contested election and also the state election coming up in 2026. The Liberals already have a Shadow Minister for Transition to Government two years out from an election. They have already decided that they need someone to measure who is going to be in which room in the ministerial offices and who is going to sit in which chair at the cabinet table. At the same time, they are all about stopping and pausing –

John Mullahy: Doing nothing.

Paul HAMER: doing nothing and waiting, as the member for Glen Waverley said. The member for Mornington, when he was talking about this bill in the government business program, specifically mentioned the pause. I was thinking about this – and this goes across a lot of different sectors; they want to pause our housing policy, they want to pause our transport policy and now they want to pause this bill as well – and I thought back to the old VCR days, back when they existed, and what happened when you pressed pause. Eventually it would just cut out, fail and stop and you would get nothing, and you would probably have to restart it all from the beginning. When they say the word ‘pause’, that is all that I think about.

In terms of where we are now with coming up to a federal election, yes, we will have an election in a couple of months time. But as the member would know, the legislation has passed the Commonwealth Parliament, and if the legislation is to be repealed it would also need to go through the new Senate, which will not sit until July. We also do not know the composition of that Senate. We may not know the composition of that Senate for some time, and there is no guarantee that that Senate is going to be amenable to all of the policies of whichever party forms government in the lower house. We have the

opportunity to debate and present this bill and put this bill to the Parliament now so that opportunity is ready to be taken in the term of the next government however they wish to pursue it.

Another matter that the member for Brighton raised was about the substance of the Commonwealth legislation, and he was very dismissive of the fact that it will provide less to Victorians than the current very successful Help to Buy program and the home owner scheme that we have running in Victoria at the moment. If he gets what he wishes for, and that is a Liberal–National, Dutton-led government in a few months time, the one guarantee is that Victorians will be worse off and will definitely have less, because no scheme is always going to be worse than some scheme which is actually helping Victorians into the housing market and facilitating that opportunity to own their first home.

We know how difficult it has been for many people to enter the housing market and for many people to just get that foot in the door and how successful the scheme has been in Victoria. I think there are 13,000 grants which have been provided to first home buyers to make that first step into home ownership and another 2500 that have been approved.

Whatever the size of the scheme that is finalised in the federal system, it is more than nothing. If I understand what the member for Brighton is saying, the federal opposition is promising nothing to help these first home buyers get into the system in this way, and I think it is going to be a very stark choice for people coming up to the federal election to decide what a federal Labor government will deliver for them and what potentially a federal Liberal government will deliver for them.

In terms of the actual bill itself, as was briefly referred to by the member for Brighton, it is a fairly short and procedural bill which is required to allow Victoria to provide the Commonwealth with the powers to actually implement the program. Under the constitution Help to Buy cannot operate in a state unless it either refers the relevant state powers or adopts the Commonwealth legislation. This is why the current bill that we are debating today seeks to adopt the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act 2024. Under the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme Housing Australia will make financial contributions to the purchase of residential properties in exchange for an equity share in those properties. Yes, there are some details still to be worked out by Housing Australia, but the intention of the scheme is for it to operate in a very similar manner to the homebuyer scheme that is currently operating in Victoria. As I referred to previously, this has been a very successful program in actually getting people into the housing market for the very first time.

We know how much of a challenge it has been with housing affordability. I was at a planning forum last week that was put on by Whitehorse council. They had a very interesting graph about housing prices and how they relate to household income. The point at which they diverged was sometime at the end of last century, around 1999, 2000, and the multiple has changed from about three times household income up to about eight to nine times household income. That is why we are seeing so many challenges in housing affordability. The panellist who was making the reference made the point that this was introduced at the same time as the changes to capital gains tax and the accounting for capital gains and the discount to capital gains tax were made by the Howard government at the time. I have also heard commentary about how the changes that were brought in at the time were intended to make us a nation of shareholders but have, perhaps inadvertently, made a very large group of property investors. There is nothing wrong with being a property investor, but it also means that there is a larger group of people for whom it is much more difficult to get that first step into their own home – into the home that they will occupy and raise a family in.

It is an important bill and it is a timely bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (11:24): I am glad to hear that the previous speaker said there is nothing wrong with being a property investor. I wish he would tell his colleagues to stop the vendetta in this state against property investors, because it is that vendetta against property investors that is actually causing the housing situation here in Victoria. There is an old saying about treating the symptom or the cause. The symptom in Victoria is there is a shortage of housing, and housing is very,

very expensive and people have trouble getting into the housing market. No-one argues against that. But what is the cause of it? The cause of it is state government policy, taxes and charges. The Housing Industry Association has said that more than 40 per cent of a house and land package is actually state government taxes and charges. So all the MPs on the other side of the house, when you have constituents that come in to see you and say, 'We are struggling to get into the housing market,' why don't you be honest with them and actually tell them, 'It is our government, our government's policies, our government's taxes and our government's charges that are actually making up that huge price that you cannot afford for a house.' More than 40 per cent – I repeat, more than 40 per cent, according to HIA evidence – of the price of a house and land package in Victoria is state government taxes and charges.

If you are actually talking about solving the issue of the price of housing and the shortage of housing, go back and look at the Allan government policies, taxes and charges that actually drive up the price of housing and create the shortage. It is the red tape, the green tape, the black tape, the stopping of property going to market and the stopping of developers actually getting subdivisions done that is driving up that shortage of housing again. Look up Aesop's fable about the goose that laid the golden egg and actually look at that fable – I encourage those on the other side of the house to actually look that up. Go to Dr Google and have a look at the fable about the guy that had the goose that laid the golden egg, who kept pushing and pushing it to lay more eggs until it could not lay any more eggs. It is the same with property taxes and charges here in Victoria. I actually commend people who invest in property, I say for the previous speaker. I actually commend them for having a go, because they are actually being penalised in this state. I have got people in my electorate – and I am sure it is the same for everyone else in this in this chamber – who are actually selling their investment properties because of state government policies and state government taxes and charges and actually investing interstate because it is more attractive to do so. So go and actually solve the cause of the problem, not the symptom of the problem in this case, which is a shortage of housing because of state government taxes and charges and the huge amount that puts on it.

As has been said, this is a referral of powers to the Commonwealth. A number of speakers have talked about why we should be dealing with this issue when there is a federal election imminent and there is divergent policy from the two major parties in Canberra about what they would actually do with this particular piece of legislation and what they would do in the future to help the issues around housing. As I refer back to the previous speaker again, I live in hope that we actually have a Dutton-Littleproud government after the federal election. I think Australia desperately needs a Dutton-Littleproud government into the future.

If you think about the issues that are impacting on Victorians in this case, we need a reset of the energy policy in this nation to actually stop the huge increase in the cost of energy that is driving businesses out of business because of the cost of energy. From a northern Victoria point of view, we need a major reset of the water policy to stop the buybacks of water, taking water out of productive agriculture to effectively run down the river to put out to the sea in South Australia. We need a major reset of that water policy, and we are actually on a unity ticket with that. I commend the current and previous ministers for water here in Victoria in the Allan and the Andrews governments for actually fighting with us about those buybacks. But we actually have to have a change of federal government, because despite the fact that we might have a Labor government in Victoria and a Labor government federally, the Victorian Labor government are getting no traction with their federal colleagues around this issue of water buybacks. We actually need a change of government in Canberra and hopefully a change of the numbers in the Senate so we can get real reform into the water sector for people in northern Victoria.

As the lead speaker talked about, we have had a number of government policies in Victoria to supposedly solve the housing crisis. We have got the 800,000 new houses that are going to be built over the next decade. The lead speaker talked about a mirage.

One thing that the Labor Party in Victoria is very good at is having a policy position that is grand but is so far in the future that no-one will even know if it will ever happen or not, and particularly those on the other side of the chamber that actually form that policy, sell that policy, articulate that policy; they know they will be well and truly gone before they are ever going to be held to account for that particular policy.

We had this grand policy of 800,000 new houses over the next 10 years – 80,000 per year. They made a mistake in how they sold it. It is 800,000 over the next 10 years, but they actually detailed that that was 80,000 every year for the next 10 years. We have already failed that. You can never catch up what has not been built, because we are never, ever going to have 100,000 or 120,000 a year built to make up for the years when we have not got to the 80,000 houses there.

Again I come back to the issue of the cost of new houses. A policy decision of the Labor Party here in Victoria was to close down the native timber industry. What do you build houses out of? One of the key components of building a house is actually timber –

Members interjecting.

Peter WALSH: Bricks – you have got to actually have a timber frame behind them. Even I know that you have actually got to have a timber frame to hold the roof up and to put the bricks against. You actually have to have timber to build a house. So what is the policy position of the Allan Labor government? ‘Let’s close down the native timber industry here in Victoria. Let’s actually go and import billions of dollars of timber to build houses here in Victoria.’

We actually have forests that are well managed. You cut a tree down, you plant a new tree, that new tree grows and that tree stores carbon. Growing trees are the best carbon sink that we could have in this particular state. But when we talk about housing what does this government do? ‘No, no, we’ll close down the native timber industry. We’ll import timber into this state. We’ll get rid of the jobs right across Victoria but particularly the jobs in regional communities, particularly in Gippsland. We’ll shut that down. We’ll just import the timber.’

It will come from somewhere most likely in Asia where there are not the environmental controls that we have here in Victoria. It will actually come from Indonesia. You will actually have orangutan habitat destroyed so we can build houses in Victoria because the government has a policy that it will close down the Victorian industry that is well managed and that has good environment of controls. Why are they doing that? They could not stand up to the protesters. They could not stand up to the Greens. As I have said previously in this place, the vast majority of MPs that sit on the other side of the house rely on Greens preferences to be elected. The Labor Party says, ‘We can’t upset the Greens.’

Members interjecting.

Peter WALSH: That has got you very, very excited, because you do not want to lose your Greens preferences. It is the Greens preferences that have the majority of you MPs sitting in this house. Even the Premier went to preferences in the last election. There is debate about whose preferences, but mostly it was the Greens preferences that actually got even the Premier of Victoria elected at the last election. You have closed down the native timber industry because you do not want to upset the Greens and you do not want to lose your preferences.

I actually support the reasoned amendment from the member for Brighton that this bill be put on hold until after the federal election – until a Dutton–Littleproud government is formed – and we re-examine it at that time.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (11:34): First of all, I am rising to support the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025, and I think the contribution from the member for Murray Plains really epitomises the opposition. I mean, most of that contribution did not even talk about housing. It talked about everything else from conservation to energy prices, which really shows that the opposition is all about supporting those people that already have homes and own homes rather than

the future generations that cannot afford to buy a home. But that is not what I am talking about or what the Allan Labor government is all about.

We do care about the future of the coming generations and young people that live in this state, and that is why we have introduced this legislation to support the federal government program that is in fact a reiteration of our program for supporting homebuyers getting into their own home.

Going back to the lead speaker on this, I think there was a bit of sour grapes. Maybe he was upset that he had not thought of the idea as an election policy into the future or to advise the federal Liberal government. But it is good legislation and it is going to help Victorians buy a home. Rather than knock and block these sorts of programs, the opposition should get on board to help our younger Victorians into their own home. We all know that there is a huge problem when younger generations cannot afford to purchase their own home. In the past Australia had a strong history of home ownership, a country that had one of the highest levels of home ownership. But now this is not really the case, as we have seen the amount of home ownership dropping over the years.

This is a federal government program to assist Victorians to buy their own home. It is not legislation to build homes. Again, the lead speaker seemed to get confused between building a home and owning a home. This is legislation that we are talking about to allow Victorians to own their own home. It is not about building their own home; that is different legislation that Allan Labor government is also very focused on to ensure that there are more homes and that there are more affordable homes that people can get into. This legislation is facilitating legislation to allow a federal government scheme to operate in Victoria. Under the constitution and state rights and so on there is not an automatic right for the federal government to come into this space. The state has to then pass legislation to adopt that federal legislation in order to allow Victorians to buy into this program and have access to it.

I just want to give a few facts in terms the trajectory of home ownership and where it is going using the census data from the Thomastown electorate. In the past, when I was first elected, Thomastown electorate had some of the highest levels of home ownership in the state, but this is not the case anymore. When we are looking at the census statistics, 2021 is the most recent. This shows that 30 per cent of homes in the electorate were fully owned, 38.6 per cent were owned with a mortgage and just over 27 per cent were rented. This is quite a significant change from the previous census in 2016, where almost 37 per cent of homes were fully owned, almost 38 per cent owned with a mortgage and 25 per cent rented. This is a trend that the Allan Labor government wants to see in reverse so that there are more people owning their home and more people can afford to purchase a home.

In terms of the federal legislation that we are adopting here, which is building in many ways on the Victorian scheme that we have had for a number of years, this scheme was very successful. It supported more than 13,500 Victorians to become home owners, and there are also another 2300 approved to purchase under this scheme. The idea of this scheme – and I will now start talking about the Commonwealth scheme, which is what we are debating here – is that the Commonwealth government provides some funds to somebody that wants to purchase their own home and they provide an equity contribution. Instead of this catch 22 problem where people cannot afford to save for a deposit because they are paying rent, this allows the Commonwealth in this case to come in and provide the deposit or most of the deposit for the purchase of the house in an equity scheme. Therefore the Commonwealth will then have equity in that property. But it allows the person, people or family to purchase the home, and it could be up to 40 per cent of the purchase price on new homes and up to 30 per cent for existing homes. It also then avoids the home owner having to purchase mortgage insurance, because there is a larger deposit provided for that home.

Of course when the home is sold, that is the point that triggers the payback to the Commonwealth, so in a sense it is a future investment for the government as well. Eligible Victorians will only need a 2 per cent deposit to enter into this scheme, and applicants purchasing in Melbourne and Geelong should be able to purchase properties up to \$850,000 in cost and in regional Victoria up to \$650,000.

This legislation really puts into place the building blocks and the foundation in order for this program to come into being.

In relation to this idea in the reasoned amendment that we wait until the result of the federal election, I think we could pretty well say for certain that that would mean this program would be gotten rid of in the terrible case of the Liberal–National parties being elected federally. It would mean pulling the rug out from under the feet of younger Victorians who want to purchase their house.

While we were sitting here listening to some of the other contributions, I thought I would do a bit of a look through the Liberal Party website on their achievements federally while in government, because they have been in government for the majority of years in most recent times. You have to go back – this is on their own list of achievements – to 1966 to see any comment made on achievements that were to do with housing and building homes. This is the sort of lack of focus that the Liberal–National parties have on what is a human right – having a roof over your head. It is one of the biggest things that people want in their life. It is the biggest purchase. Having an affordable and a stable place to live is so important for all aspects of a person's life, whether it is their education, their health and wellbeing, their family's future, all of these things, and you have to go back to 1966 to have any mention from the Liberal–National parties about housing – except of course during the pandemic when we had I think it was the HomeBuilder program, again showing the priorities of the Liberal–National opposition when in government. That was a program where they were giving money to people to make renovations on the houses they already owned. So again, this is where the focus is. The Liberal–National parties only care about those that already have a house, that have already bought or own a house, whereas the Allan Labor government really want to see the younger generations coming up.

I know, for example, my two sons do not own homes. They do not really believe they will ever own a home, and it is really sad to see that there is no longer an aspiration, that people feel that it is a dream that they will never be able to action. But of course under this legislation and this federal government program there will be the opportunity. It will not be a pipedream; it can be a reality that people can start buying a home and getting into a place where they can have a much more stable life, knowing that the house that they are in is their own. They cannot be evicted. They can do with it what they want. They can adapt it to the ways that they need to live and what suits their lifestyle in all sorts of ways.

This legislation is extremely important. It means that the Victorian scheme will be wound down to allow for the federal scheme to come into place, and we look forward to seeing how successful this program will be in getting more people into their own homes.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (11:44): I rise to give a contribution on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. As we have heard, it is a bill that claims to address housing affordability, but I think it actually demands scrutiny, just as the Shadow Treasurer the member for Brighton put forward, as did the member for Murray Plains, across a whole range of issues in housing. I think we can all agree in this place that Victorians are struggling to find secure and affordable homes. This bill aligns state laws with the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act 2024, enabling Canberra to make full amendments. I understand that cooperation is necessary if this goes through. As the member for Brighton mentioned, we could be in federal caretaker period as soon as this weekend – two parties completely opposed on the Help to Buy scheme.

We understand that should the current government continue in power in Canberra this scheme will need to be put in place and move forward, but the coalition in Canberra has a completely different plan when it comes to housing. I have heard those on the other side say there is no plan. Well, I do not agree that with that whatsoever, and I am sure my colleagues in Canberra would also say that. We have a very opposing view when it comes to housing – one that says that the government should not own part of people's homes. They should be staying out of people's lives, assisting where they can. Also, there is this notion that the government owning part of your home through this Canberra policy put forward by the Albanese Labor government is going to assist in any way, shape or form. The member for

Brighton mentioned an article in the *Guardian* from last year about a Parliamentary Budget Office submission that has actually seen the number of people eligible under this scheme decrease by close to 30 per cent. Almost 700,000 Victorians will become worse off under this scheme should it be handed over to Canberra. We also know that the thresholds for income would be reduced and the price of a house would be reduced.

The member for Murray Plains made an interesting remark and one that seems to get lost on those on the other side of the chamber when it comes to the cost of housing in this state. For a government that has been in power for over 10 years now to talk about a housing crisis – one that has been created under their watch by them whilst they have been in power – there is no understanding from that side to say: you do not make housing cheaper by adding further taxes. The member for Murray Plains was right: 42 per cent of the charges on a new house and land package in this state are taxes, charges and fees that are going right back to those people trying to purchase those homes. If you want to make housing more affordable, instead of handing your powers over to the Commonwealth and saying, ‘You guys take care of it’ – and mind you, we cannot forget that we are nearly a quarter of a trillion dollars in debt in this state, and that \$2.8 billion burden that comes off the state’s books is maybe not a bad one for this government to relieve themselves of a little bit – just maybe look at the additional 30-plus taxes that you have added when it comes to property in this state. You do not make anything more affordable by adding extra taxes to it.

I will speak locally. People will have assumptions in this place and outside about my electorate, but believe me, most of my electorate is not Sorrento or Portsea, for those that may think differently. I know most people in here would have spent time down in my electorate at some stage. When you look at areas like Rosebud or Dromana that have a growing population where people are looking to get into houses, land tax bills have been hitting my electorate, which is not as densely populated as other areas. We love that because we have got our green wedge between Port Phillip and Western Port, and everyone loves that lifestyle. At the same time, in Rosebud and surrounding areas alone right now there are more than 700 properties on the market on realestate.com.au because people can no longer afford the land tax bills that come with owning those properties. For some of those people, yes, it may be a holiday house, but a lot of them are not the extravagant ones you might see on the cliffs in photos. They are ones that their grandparents may have bought 50 or 60 years ago that have been passed down through the family, or in fact they are properties that people actually rent out.

People seem to forget in this chamber, especially those on the other side, that anyone who is renting is actually doing so from a person who owns the property and has decided to put that house on the long-term rental market. If you keep increasing land tax on the owner, at some point one of two things is going to happen: the rent on that property is going to go up, so it will be more expensive for renters to be able to rent that home, or the owner makes the decision that they do not pass it on and they wear the cost until they can no longer wear it and then put that property on the market. We know that for every three properties on the long-term rental market that go up for sale, only one-third of those come back onto the long-term rental market. So you are actually creating this process whereby you are taxing a diminishing supply of properties on the long-term rental market and those numbers are decreasing and decreasing.

We need to make sure we have policy in this area that is sustainable for the state and is sustainable for keeping the long-term rental market ticking over, but also we have got to be able to create an environment for young families and young Victorians.

I heard the member for Thomastown say that we do not want young people to buy homes. I think that one of the biggest –

A member: What?

Sam GROTH: That is exactly what the member for Thomastown said, that the Liberal Party does not want young people to be able to afford homes. I would argue that one of the core values that we

believe in on this side of the house is home ownership – that is personal responsibility, aspiration and the opportunity for someone to get ahead. We do not necessarily believe that the government should be owning a part of your home. We want to do everything we can to create an environment where young people can get into the housing market in a sustainable way and be able to do so without the government having an impact in their everyday lives.

The member for Brighton introduced a reasoned amendment, and I support the Shadow Treasurer in that reasoned amendment that reads:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘, noting the contrasting position of the two major federal political parties on this policy, this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the outcome of the federal election is determined.’

I think we would all probably do well when it comes to federal issues currently passing through this house to maybe just hold stock for 5 minutes. Maybe on a range of policies we should go, ‘Let’s just wait.’ As it currently stands, this bill has been on the floor of the federal Parliament for some time and was originally meant to come into place on 1 January 2023. We are still at a point where the federal Labor government does not actually know how this policy looks right now. We are still waiting on the final model. We are going to go and hand off powers to the Commonwealth in the middle of a federal caretaker period on a scheme that we do not even have the final detail on. I mean, to me – and maybe I am wrong – it would make no sense to hand power over on something that you do not actually know the final detail of.

Members interjecting.

Sam GROTH: I heard members over there saying that I was wrong, and I was listening to the member for Box Hill’s contribution when he said that we on this side of the house do nothing and took up an interjection from the member for Glen Waverley. I can tell you what, in about 20 months time the member for Glen Waverley will be doing nothing in this place, because if this government continues the way they are going, he will be sitting out of a job. He will be out of a job with a bunch of other backbenchers on that side of the chamber. A bunch of them will be out of a job because they are following a Premier right now who is more focused on ideology than the concerns of Victorians. This legislation is an exact example of that. They are handing over powers to the Commonwealth on a scheme that is not finalised.

To the backbenchers on the other side, I would encourage you on this issue, on the issue of crime, on the issue of health and on the issue of education and on all the things that we are reading in the newspapers or that are on the TV and on the radio and that get debated in this chamber regularly, if you are serious about having an impact on Victorians, maybe you just want to worry about keeping your job. Start to do things that are actually affecting the lives of Victorians instead of being just a group of nodding heads at the back of the chamber who read from the notes that are handed to them by the advisers with 2 minutes of a contribution on something local so they can get a grab on Facebook. The reality is in the end, in 20 months time, we are not going to have to worry about them. I am sure the other member at the table is going to be here. We are going to sit here. We will see a change of government. Those members will no longer be in this place, and I tell you what, it will be for the absolute benefit of all Victorians.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (11:53): Well, the member for Nepean has a bright future shouting at clouds. That was almost as special as the member for Brighton’s contribution. That was the cognitive dissonance of someone who spends his weekends with a megaphone protesting out on the streets of Brighton – because heaven forbid anyone else should aspire to live there, especially a young person or a person who has experienced disadvantage – and who gets up to complain about the Allan Labor government’s efforts to build more homes so that young people, particularly millennials and younger generations, can purchase their own homes.

I am very pleased to make a contribution to the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. This bill, like much of what the Allan Labor government does, is centred around delivering more homes and more opportunities for Victorians.

As someone who represents, I believe, the second-youngest electorate in Victoria, I am very pleased to see these reforms, because I have twice the state average of renters in the suburb of Footscray and I know that many of those young aspire – he is off to go and shout at some more clouds – to purchase a home, and the Commonwealth Help to Buy scheme will help them do exactly that. If it seems familiar to those playing along at home, it is because the proposed nationwide shared equity scheme is modelled on our very own Victorian Homebuyer Fund. Victoria has been leading the nation in just about every area of housing reform, including helping young Victorians to buy their first home. Our colleagues in Canberra loved our idea so much that they have come up with their own scheme, Help to Buy. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund has already supported more than 13,500 Victorians to become home owners, with another 2300 approved to purchase under the scheme. That is nearly 15,000 Victorians who have a permanent place to call home and 15,000 fewer people in the rental market.

Turning to the purpose of the bill, under the Commonwealth constitution Help to Buy cannot operate in a state unless it either refers relevant state powers or adopts the Commonwealth legislation. This is why the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025 adopts the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act 2024. It means that Help to Buy will be able to operate in Victoria and assist more hardworking Victorians into the housing market.

Under the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme Housing Australia will make financial contributions to the purchase of residential properties in exchange for an equity share in those properties. The amendment referenced in this bill is a specific and limited referral of power to the Commonwealth Parliament. It is only for the purpose of the maintenance and operation of the Help to Buy scheme. Without this, any future amendments would not apply in Victoria, which would be impactful and could potentially prevent Victorians from accessing future benefits under the scheme.

The bill also makes minor amendments to the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000 and the Land Tax Act 2005 to clarify that the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme should be treated the same way that the Victorian Homebuyer Fund was under these acts.

Without a referral or an adoption under section 51 of the Commonwealth constitution, the Commonwealth Parliament does not have the constitutional power to operate Help to Buy in states. Helpfully, the former Queensland Labor government led by Premier Steven Miles referred power to the Commonwealth for the purposes of a nationwide shared equity scheme in June last year. The Commonwealth enacted its Help to Buy Act 2024 in December, meaning it is now ready and waiting to be adopted by us here in Victoria. Victoria will be a participating state once it has adopted the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act and referred the amendment matters to the Commonwealth Parliament.

The Help to Buy scheme is an exciting opportunity for the rest of Australia to access a shared equity product that has been available to Victorians under the Victorian Homebuyer Fund. The Commonwealth will now offer an equity contribution of up to 40 per cent of the purchase price for new homes and up to 30 per cent for existing homes. Eligible Victorians will only need a 2 per cent deposit to enter the scheme. Applicants purchasing in Melbourne and Geelong are expected to be able to purchase a property up to \$850,000 and in regional Victoria up to \$650,000.

The Victorian Homebuyer Fund has been nation-leading and tremendously successful in reducing the cost for many Victorians looking to purchase a home. The government has committed a total of \$2.8 billion into the Victorian Homebuyer Fund. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund has delivered great outcomes, as I mentioned, for more than 13,500 Victorians to be homeowners so far, and now it is

time for the Commonwealth to do its part to support Victorians into home ownership. Staggered allocations through the Victorian Homebuyer Fund will continue to support Victorian home ownership until Help to Buy is established.

The Victorian Homebuyer Fund will close to new applicants on 30 June 2025, when the state will transition to Help to Buy. The State Revenue Office will continue to administer existing Victorian Homebuyer Fund participants. The Commonwealth will provide up to 40 per cent of the purchase price as an equity contribution under Help to Buy, a higher proportion than the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, through which the government provided up to 25 per cent of the purchase price or up to 35 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians. Help to Buy has a lower minimum deposit of 2 per cent, compared to 5 per cent for the Victorian Homebuyer Fund or 3.5 per cent for Indigenous Australian Victorian Homebuyer Fund applicants.

Off-the-plan and other types of new homes are eligible under the Help to Buy scheme, whereas they are not eligible under the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, and this will help stimulate the supply of new housing. Help to Buy is expected to support another 10,000 low- to middle-income Victorians over four years to purchase a home.

Like the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, Help to Buy will reduce the overall mortgage for homeowners, help overcome the deposit hurdle and avoid the need for lenders mortgage insurance, and Help to Buy participants will have lower ongoing repayments from a smaller home loan as the Commonwealth will share the capital cost of purchasing the home. The financial risk and benefit are shared between the participant and the Commonwealth proportionally to their interests, and crucially, participants in the Help to Buy scheme will be able to skip lenders mortgage insurance. For anyone trying to save up a deposit for a home, getting to 10 per cent is really challenging; getting to 20 per cent can seem insurmountable to avoid that lenders mortgage insurance. So that will be a great help to participants.

I think this is a really exciting reform. It shows that the Commonwealth are willing to do their bit to help Victorians get into the housing market as we build more homes for Victorians in places where they want to live. I commend the bill to the house.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (12:03): I just want to make some comments on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025 and support the member for Brighton's reasoned amendment on this bill, because basically, as the member for Brighton said, we are referring powers or trying to implement an enabling bill on a piece of legislation for the feds when we do not know the outcome of the Commonwealth election. This is quite pivotal on this whole topic when the current federal government are saying that they apparently want to get onto the Help to Buy initiative – and I will come to that. The federal opposition have a different point of view, and we are trying to rush through enabling legislation for the Help to Buy scheme under a current regime that federal Labor itself might change after the federal election, contingent on whatever that outcome might look like. And now we are rushing through enabling legislation for something that may not even exist.

I think the reason for the member for Brighton's reasoned amendment is because it does not make sense. The only other government in the country that passed this enabling legislation was defeated and now does not exist anymore – the Queensland Labor government. Now the Victorian Labor government is desperate to rush this enabling legislation through the Parliament when, as the member for Brighton said earlier, the upper house of our Parliament could be debating it in the middle of the federal caretaker period.

Yet I say again: we do not even know what the outcome of that election might look like. Should it be a coalition government or a Labor government federally – even a Labor government might have a different point of view on this scheme should they be in some form of power-sharing arrangement, which a lot of people in Canberra say could be an option, because the Greens have made their view on this as well.

So it does not make much sense that we would rush a piece of legislation through under the circumstances, when clearly we are not sure what the outcome will be. We can debate the merits all we like: ‘It’s going to do this’ and ‘It’s going to do that’. That all might be believable truth should that be what actually comes to pass, but I think the whole point of the member for Brighton’s reasoned amendment is that the likelihood of that coming to pass is so limited.

We then question again why this legislation has come to the Victorian Parliament at this point in time. We can only then deduce that it has come to the Parliament at this point in time for the sake of, yet again, politics. That is the only thing we can deduce. We heard some of those opposite arguing, ‘The opposition would say that.’ Yes, we would say that, because every time we look at the issue of housing, it has been politicised. The government has not even met its own targets – not federal or state. We did not make these targets; they did. Both the Commonwealth Labor government and the state Labor government have made targets on housing that they have not met.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Matthew GUY: Would you mind, sir? I am having a general conversation here.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! Through the Chair.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Otherwise, you can go back home.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Go back to your BMX bed and have your sheets tucked in.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Bulleen, through the Chair – without assistance, Minister.

Matthew GUY: He is still living at home aged 45.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: I’m talking about you, brother. Anyway, having been brutally interrupted by the member for Oakleigh – I am trying to get over that – I say again that we can only deduce that this is around politics. We on our side of the house, who had greater levels of approvals and a greater level of home deliveries under our period in office than at any period of the state Labor regime, say: why on earth are the government making commitments to the Victorian people, building up young people’s hopes and building up the dreams of so many young Victorians, when they just do not meet those commitments and in fact, as the member for Brighton said in his contribution, we are going backwards? The state is going backwards. The state is not meeting the commitments it made. They made a commitment to building – firstly, under Premier Andrews, they were government-built – 800,000 homes in 10 years. Then that morphed, because it was considered completely ridiculous – which it was – to a mix of 800,000 government and private. Then it morphed again to 800,000 predominantly private. And now there is no target. It is a kind of indicative target.

The minister – and I will not invite him for a second time – said, ‘We’ve got a vision.’ Well, a vision might actually be more than a press release; it might be the building opening.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Matthew GUY: Well, you can build more than other states, but if you are still building sweet FA compared to when we were in office, mate, then I have got to tell you it does not really matter. It does not really matter, compared to when we were in.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, that language was definitely unparliamentary – ‘sweet FA’. Can you ask the member for Bulleen to explain what the ‘f’ and the ‘a’ mean?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I am not going to dwell on the football association and any relevance it might have to this debate. I remind and encourage the member for Bulleen to ensure that his language is parliamentary. I presume it is, and I ask him to continue.

Matthew GUY: I withdraw, if it has upset the member for Oakleigh. I think he just wants me to actually mention it, but I will not. I will just take him up at another time and mention it to him when the cheese wheel comes out.

The key point, as we have said, of this piece of legislation is that we do not believe that governments should keep making promises to the Australian people or to the Victorian people that they clearly have got no intention of meeting. Thus this piece of enabling legislation is yet another almost hoax upon Australian people who want to get into a home.

There are ways to get new homes built, as I have said in this chamber so many times. For goodness sake, the Minister for Planning has – and I cannot stress this enough – such wideranging powers to actually intervene and bring through PSPs, precinct structure plans, to actually loosen rules around high-rise construction and high-density construction, particularly in the CBD, where it should go. But instead she is choosing not to do that and choosing to make every excuse as to why she should not do that, and I do not understand why. I really do not, because now there is a will for people to do something, like there has never been, and the minister seems to be obsessed with saying she is doing things but not actually doing them. I do not understand why, because now there is the ability for public readiness to say we need someone to actually step in and do something and all we are getting is this government stepping in and issuing press releases – but press releases do not build homes. The Commonwealth government saying they are going to build 1.2 million dwellings by 2038, or whatever it was, is also just a great press release, but it is not real and it is clearly – as the Senate estimates showed last week – not happening.

Why perpetrate that kind of hoax upon people? Why rush this piece of legislation through the Victorian Parliament when at the end of the day it is not necessary at this point? If it is necessary after the federal election, then sure, we will have that discussion. But as the member for Brighton said on his reasoned amendment, it is not necessary at this point in time because we do not know the outcome of the federal election. No election is a lay-down misère for anyone, but when you look at the results, it clearly could go any way federally, and I think we are all looking at that and saying there are a lot of scenarios that might play out. There really are. Therefore it would be silly to then pass enabling legislation that might suit the current federal Parliament, which is about to be prorogued, potentially in a week, potentially in three weeks. Again, we do not know, but it is likely not to return, and if there is a catastrophe in south-east Queensland, it is very likely not to return. Therefore it does not make much sense for us to be doing this at this point in time. I reckon I have laboured that, and I have laboured that for a reason, because as I said, it really does not make much sense.

What I do want to just concentrate on in the last minute is the federal government’s scheme on 1.2 million homes. This promise from the federal government is really – I mean, they have no ability to deliver this. When they have no dialogue with non-Labor states about how these promises are going to be delivered, then you get an outcome like what appeared in Senate estimates in the last week or so where the minister herself claimed they had built thousands of homes, but then when you drill down it is 350 – actually, it is none. You cannot buy an existing home, change the colour of the kitchen and then say, ‘We built another house.’ No, that is not how it works. Your commitment and policy says 1.2 million new – N-E-W – homes. Then of course the definition became a discussion point at estimates, which it should not have been, because the outcome should be trying to get people into homes. Surely if the outcome is trying to get people into homes, then the Parliament, both federal and Victorian, should be better focused on actually doing that and debating doing that, rather than passing

enabling legislation on bills and schemes that may be completely redundant even under a federal Labor minority government.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (12:13): I rise to also support the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025 and to oppose the reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Brighton. I did notice that yet again we have a very procedural reasoned amendment from the member for Brighton. It did not really address the substance of the policy proposal that we have in front of us, but instead he just suggested that we hold off until the federal election. Regarding the member for Bulleen, perhaps the only substantial point he made in his contribution was to repeat that notion that we should wait until after the federal election. Of course, as all of us here know, that has never been the way any government has acted. We would all be in permanent paralysis if we spent all day thinking about what future governments might do. This government, and indeed governments of a Liberal–National persuasion have governed as they govern, and when the federal government changes, we can always come back and change our rules and legislation if we need to do so.

Disappointingly, the member for Murray Plains is no longer here. I did note with interest his contribution, which suggested that the state government's policy to end the harvesting of native timber affected the building of homes. I can only direct the member for Murray Plains to a fantastic consultancy run by a guy called Tim Woods – IndustryEdge. He used to be a neighbour of mine down Geelong West way. Tim could give the member for Murray Plains some very good statistics on how many homes actually have their frames built with native hardwood, but I suspect it is approximately zero. I think that was an attempt to draw a very long bow connection between that policy and the policy we have before us today in this bill.

I will not be supporting the member for Brighton's reasoned amendment. Indeed I am supporting the bill. I had the opportunity many years ago to work for the former Treasurer Tim Pallas. I do see that we have the new member for Werribee in the chamber, and I am very pleased to see him here and look forward to his inaugural speech later today, as I understand it. But I know that the former member for Werribee would have had a great interest in the bill we have before us. When I did work in his office we had a document that went around which was a list of tips for new ministerial advisers. I do not know who had originally written it, but one of the tips was that it is easy for all of us to underestimate the extent to which any minister's powers are restrained by the powers of Parliament and indeed by the constitution. The constitution is a very live document that affects people's decisions on a weekly basis, and we see that here with this bill in front of us. Section 51, which sets out the powers of the federal government, has many things in it, but it does not have shared equity schemes. As a result our fantastic federal Minister for Housing Clare O'Neil, who is well known to many in this place, has moved federal legislation and then is working with us to move the legislation we have before us today in order to implement the federal government's scheme.

As previous government speakers have noted, the federal government's scheme builds directly on a scheme pioneered here in Victoria. I think it was John Cain who first introduced a different form of shared equity scheme in 1989 or thereabouts as part of that Labor government. But then, as I said, the Treasurer for whom I previously worked, the former member for Werribee, had a great interest, and it was him who reintroduced the modern incarnation, I think announced first in 2017 as a pilot program, and then expanded it, as we know, into the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, which has helped now 13,500 Victorians into homes. I understand there are another 2000 or so waiting for approvals. It is worth noting just for the interest of the chamber that this scheme was actually praised at the time, if I remember correctly, by former federal Treasurer Scott Morrison, who said it was a great idea, and we appreciated his support. If only he could talk to his current federal colleagues – or his former colleagues, as they are now.

I want to speak to the reasons that the Treasurer introduced his scheme and the reasons that the Commonwealth are introducing theirs. That of course went to long-term trends in the cost of housing. We know that while the ratio of mortgage payments to income has been relatively stable over time, it has always been difficult to meet mortgage payments for those who are on lower incomes, and this

scheme seeks to address that. We are very well aware – and I have spoken on this before – that deposits in particular have become very difficult as interest rates have fallen and asset prices have gone up, and the time it takes for a young person or for any person to save for a deposit is significantly longer than it was for the previous generation. Those factors vary a bit across the state, but clearly for anyone seeking housing close to jobs, educational opportunities, cultural opportunities and so forth those costs have risen. They have particularly risen in recent years for people on low incomes who are trying to purchase a house, and as I said, the deposit for those people is a real challenge.

That brings us to the policy imperative behind the scheme in front of us. It is important to remember that not everyone needs to buy a house. There are other jurisdictions – Germany, most famously, and Switzerland – where rental rates are very high, reflecting the different rental laws there and better support for renters. It has been fantastic to see this state move in that direction with stronger support for renters under this government and very good to see our federal colleagues increase the rate of rent assistance as they have done so significantly, which is probably the single best thing you can do for those who really need help, being those whose main source of income is government payments.

But home ownership is most people's preference here in Victoria, as it is in most jurisdictions around the world, so the key questions for us are: how can we help people to purchase a home and service their mortgage and, as I said, in particular how can we help them save up their deposit? I do want to speak, as others have, to the exact mechanisms of the Victorian Homebuyer Fund. There is a concept of the bank of mum and dad, where some people are lucky enough to have their parents assist with their loan, and in many respects the Victorian Homebuyer Fund provides the same role for those people who do not have that option.

It first and foremost only requires people to reach a 5 per cent deposit, which as we know is less than the 10 per cent most institutions ask for. That is very important for the reasons I have just set out. Then, when the homebuyer does purchase their home, the state contributes 25 per cent up-front. Importantly, with the state contributing 25 per cent and the homebuyer contributing their 5 per cent deposit, that means the bank is left with only a 70 per cent liability to the value of the home. That is important for the bank because it means that it is a lower risk loan for them and they do not charge the homebuyer lenders mortgage insurance. Anyone who has paid that knows it can often run to \$10,000 or more if people are required to pay it. So we save them that cost, we save them having to have such a large deposit and then finally when the homebuyer over time buys out the state government's stake they do not have to pay interest on that portion. In effect the interest rate they pay over the life of their loan is lower.

I set out all those details just because the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme mimics all of them, I believe, exactly. I think we are still yet to see some final directions from the Commonwealth. We certainly expect that it will. As they say, imitation is the highest form of flattery. It is for that reason that we will wind down Victoria's scheme and that this scheme will replace it, I believe, in the middle of this year. Anyone in Preston, Reservoir or anywhere else around the state, if they are looking to buy a home, still has the opportunity to apply for the Victorian Homebuyer Fund at this point, and it has all the benefits that I have just set out.

Finally, there has been some criticism from the federal opposition that these sorts of programs would just have the effect of increasing house prices. First, I do not think that is true as an empirical fact. The scheme is small, there are many other things that play into house prices and I think the equity advantages of this scheme would overwhelm any tiny effect that it might have. But I think it is also important just to touch on our important complementary scheme. We are not letting the supply of housing stay flat in this state. As we know, we have our housing statement and a fantastic Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing and Building, who are undertaking a great deal of work to increase housing supply in order to lower housing prices through that mechanism.

Locally, in Preston we have the new Preston activity centre, which we have just finished a long period of consultation on. We appreciate the minister taking on board some community feedback with respect

to the catchment area size and with respect to overshadowing requirements and the new 1000-square-metre requirement for some of the taller buildings. Particularly, the tree canopy requirements that were in the minister's final policy were, we would like to think, directly inspired by feedback she received from our community reference group, who put that idea forward with a great deal of passion, and it is an idea that we certainly supported. All those policies act importantly together to improve housing affordability for Victorians. I commend the bill to the house. I thank the Department of Treasury and Finance and all the team for their work on it, and I look forward to further debate.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:23): I rise to speak on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025, which comes through the house today. I see that the member for Brighton has moved a reasoned amendment, and I do support that. I think on this side, as we have spoken about, with a federal election in the wind we wonder whether we are jumping the gun trying to push this through at this particular stage. Should we at least wait until that goes through? But it is here in the chamber today, and I do rise so I can speak on this. We will see after the federal election whether we are back here again amending or changing as needed.

It just so happens that the committee that I am on at the moment in Parliament is looking at the supply of homes in regional Victoria, which is very apt as this bill comes through. I notice that we do have some members in the chamber and we have the secretariat at the table as well. It is very interesting to travel around regional Victoria and listen to the issues raised by everybody, from people that are trying to break into the housing market to those that are supplying materials to build houses to developers. It is very interesting to get their take on why housing is at a very high premium at the moment, why it costs so much and why it takes so long to actually be able to build a house.

Chris Couzens: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, you might want to remind the member that talking about a current committee inquiry is not appropriate.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Thank you, member for Geelong. Member for Morwell, if you could continue without pre-empting the work of that committee.

Martin CAMERON: Yes, I can do that. In my area in the Latrobe Valley I also get the opportunity to talk to people that are developers, people that are builders and people that are wanting to be home owners. I am not talking about our committee now, because it has been pointed out to me that I cannot do that. I do not want to tell anybody what we are talking about in that. But there are hardships and the process needs to happen, so I will relay my story from what happens down in the Latrobe Valley. With our housing in the valley, we have a lot of younger people trying to break into the market, and it is a challenge for them to be able to get that deposit together, to go to the bank or a lender, to try and come up with the funds to get a housing loan and to be able to go to a builder and put down that deposit and get the process started.

The member for Murray Plains spoke about the timber industry and what has been going on there. What we have found in the Latrobe Valley is that the younger generation that were involved in the timber industry unfortunately have had their line of secure jobs ripped out from underneath them, so they have had to go looking and travelling for other work and to move away from their families as they try to get the money to make up these deposits that they need. Talking to the builders and also the tradies, there is a real stretch on the trades at the moment to supply their trades to build all the houses that are needed in regional Victoria and also in and around Melbourne. You will find that in regional Victoria we have a lot of individuals that do not want to move to Melbourne and live in a high-rise townhouse around a railway precinct. They want to be able to stay in the country and have their backyard. They might want to stay on an acre lot, as their parents have beforehand, and have that regional lifestyle and not have to move to the city to be able to afford houses. The housing in the city is a little bit more expensive, and it is getting that way in the country as well. We need to make sure that we are doing everything possible to allow regional Victorians to stay in the regions, because that is what makes our regions so much stronger. So we need to make sure we are supplying them with work and jobs but also houses that are affordable, and at the moment it is very hard to get affordable

housing. It is also very hard to secure long-term jobs in some parts of regional Victoria without moving outside of that.

One of the other issues we have, from talking to developers down in and around Gippsland, is with the coal overlays. These coal overlays obviously sit around our mines, and we are not allowed to develop the land around them. It is for a good reason; we are supporting and protecting the mines. But we do have some coal overlays which are 40, 50, 60 years old that are now becoming redundant, and they are holding up our local councils' ability to be able to release land that developers can build not only domestic houses on but also commercial aspects so that people can have secure jobs moving forward. I think that is a really key issue, all the red tape that is thrown on our developers to jump through hoops to secure land and actually bring land to fruition so they can build houses on it for our young people trying to get their first home loan and secure their first house.

I think at the core of every individual is the right and the want to be able to purchase their own home. I think that is the one thing that does make people feel secure – that they do have that asset. We are changing as a society in that we are going to have a generation of people that will not be able to own their own house and will be renters. I think we do enough in that space to facilitate that, but we really do need to make sure that the supply of housing from when we first turn a sod to when people can walk through the front door of their house is paramount in what we do in this chamber. Once we actually do purchase our house and can move in, the other issues that young people are finding at the moment – and it is not just young people, it is probably people right throughout any stage of life – are the costs of being able to maintain that house, with rates and power bills that do come in, so we also need to be able to be doing a lot of work in that area.

I think every member in the chamber is confident of doing their bit to make sure that we can ease those burdens moving forward. I have people that come into my office asking me what we can actually do to move forward more quickly the development of more houses. I know that we get accused sometimes from the other side of being blockers and not wanting new houses. Well, there is nothing further from the truth. I am dealing with ministers with these coal overlays that will not look at changing them. It is fine to be moving forward and building townhouses in inner-city Melbourne, but we do not want that to be at the detriment of people in regional Victoria. We need to make sure that we are capturing everything and everyone to make sure the dream of owning your own house can absolutely be achievable whether you are wanting to live in inner-city Melbourne or regional Victoria.

As I said, there was a reasoned amendment put forward by the member for Brighton. I do support that. There is a lot more work that needs to be done in this space.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:33): I absolutely loved the member for Morwell's statement that the coalition are not blockers, and then I thought, 'Has the member for Morwell read the reasoned amendment?', because it is literally the absolute definition of being a blocker – a blocker to housing, to the Help to Buy scheme – and I found this a curious policy position that was cooked out of shadow cabinet. I would have loved to be a fly on the wall because there are so many analogies you could come up with of policy malaise and laziness on that side around not making a decision because of a change in government or a change in leadership. I thought, 'You can't approach policy like this', but then I realised that maybe that is why they have not had a housing policy, because they are waiting for changes in scenery around state or federal outcomes. Maybe that is why they have never had an energy policy – because there have been so many leadership changes and so many changes that they wait for a new leader or a new change of government. I thought it underpinned the most simple reasoned amendment I have ever seen: wait for the federal election to see what happens. It underscores something a lot broader than policy here, because we do not have a bipartisan approach to housing in this state. There is a government that wants to build and put people into homes and make it easier for people to afford a home, and we have blockers and knockers on the Liberal–Nationals side who do not have a housing policy, who have not offered any constructive debate around one house that they would build, besides the member for Bulleen. The member for Bulleen is an exception to this, who has said on the record, 'I built more than any other, it was 62,000, and I'll keep doing that.' I

acknowledge the member for Bulleen has a big statement to make there, but everyone else on that side is a knocker and a blocker of affordable housing in our state. We put up the Big Housing Build – opposed, ‘Not in my backyard. I don’t want to see any more houses built’, even though we are leading the nation in that contribution, which the Minister for Planning greatly articulated recently.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: Then we had over there the fish on the hook, the member for Polwarth, who yells at the clouds about housing and yells about wire rope barriers and wind turbines. But his greatest contribution last week was his analogy of housing activity centres in our state to Eastern Europe and Russia – the equivalence of millions of people who lost their lives under regimes of dictatorship. He made an analogy between those regimes and trying to get Victorians into a home. How insane is that. The ludicrous nature of this should play out in its own right. I think the member for Polwarth, the shadow minister, knew it. He knew it at the time. He wanted the grab for the nightly news. I reckon even he thought, ‘I’ve put too much egg in this pie,’ because that was an extraordinary statement. It was not serious policy – what we need in this housing debate. It was not serious around how we get more people in, because someone is going to have to make a decision at some time.

Those on that side have got muscle memory. They have been in opposition so long that they just oppose everything that is ever offered up. It is never about the merit of the idea. If you are opposed to the activity centres, what, are you just going to keep putting people in precinct structure plans out in the growth corridors? Is that the answer? Are you going to carve up the green wedges? We need 2 million more homes in Victoria. Are you going to stifle the growth and the aspirations of millennials and gen Zs who want to own a home, who are stuck with their parents, who will be priced out of their area and their communities and will not get the right to live in the areas that they have grown up in, loved and cherished for two decades of their lives? Is that the policy scenario? When you front up to a debate in months to come and you have the leaders standing up there, you are going to have to answer these questions. You cannot come up with, ‘We don’t want more housing in this particular area. We want to push more’ –

James Newbury: Do you want one in yours? Do you want an activity centre?

Tim RICHARDSON: We will have more housing in the City of Kingston. In the communities I represent we will have more housing coming through – Mentone and Cheltenham. We have had the growth areas development in Keysborough South, which added 15,000 more residents in the southern part of Keysborough. That is the journey we have been on. But everyone has to give a little in this, because we have to make a decision here: should the kids of tomorrow have the right to rent and live in the communities that they have loved, cherished and grown up in? That is my question.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Polwarth says, ‘At what cost?’ I will tell you what cost it is: nine times the cost of the average income. That is intergenerational poverty in housing – people not able to rent and not able to afford a mortgage, who work two to three jobs a week trying to pay off their HECS debt or trying to get by just to feed themselves or heat themselves and cannot get anywhere. That is the cost of maybe an extra townhouse in the street or an activity centre around a train station. The cost is putting people into poverty in the future. This Victorian government is trying to do something about it – something in this moment that says, ‘We’re on the side of Victorians.’ And the member that raised the reasoned amendment walks out because he is on the record as opposing time and time again, in the City of Bayside, very incremental growth changes. The City of Bayside has a 33,000 additional housing capacity and in the City of Kingston it is 51,000, and the member for Brighton says, ‘What will your communities do?’ My communities are taking more housing than the member for Brighton’s. But where is the unity here? Where is the bipartisan approach to precinct structure plans?

I will give credit to the member for Bulleen, because there is an intellectual discussion here: how many more are we going to put in existing growth areas, how many are we going to put in PSPs and where is the pinch point? Someone has to make a decision. We have made that decision as a government. We have said 30 per cent in precinct structure plans and land supply into the future, and we have said 70 per cent in existing suburbs. Yes, there is an opportunity cost here. Yes, we are going to see more people living in more densified areas, whether it is a townhouse or apartment developments, but that is not something that has just come to be; that has been the experience in communities across metropolitan Melbourne over the last 15 years. We have seen incremental change. It has not led to horrible outcomes in our communities. It is a changing element in recognition that, as our population grows and as those in my community live near transport hubs and connection points, we are going to have a little bit more housing in that area, and that is to make it more affordable and support people into the future.

How many people will you see put into homelessness who do not have the superannuation basis to fund a home? We see women over the age of 55 as the largest growing cohort of homeless, whether they are not able to generate the superannuation that they need to support their housing outcomes or they have no choice – not able to rent, priced out, experiencing homelessness. I ask those opposite: what is your policy narrative and story for them? Because you cannot just knock and block and have a crack every time, you have got to come in with some ideas. The notion that, with the Help to Buy scheme from the Commonwealth, we should wait for whether opposition leader Mr Dutton or Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is elected, is outsourcing the work to others. What is your policy on it? Are you opposed to another attempt to make housing more affordable and more inclusive in our state? At the moment the coalition have blocked the Big Housing Build, they have blocked the activity centres and they have blocked some of the incentives for people to get into the housing market. They are now waiting for a unicorn to come. They are waiting for something else.

As we know, when in doubt, they go to the playbook that we see playing out internationally – go after minority communities and start talking about immigration. Let us really get to the playbook here: front up to new and emerging communities at multicultural events time and time again and then walk out there and say, ‘Block any more residents coming into our state and into our nation.’ That is really what the policy narrative will be federally. We have seen the really dangerous conversations around where our multicultural communities and new and arriving communities are, even though 65 to 70 per cent of our migration program is via skilled visas in our state. People should never forget that – the overwhelming majority of visas are filling skills shortages in our nation and in our state. We know what the playbook will be. It is actually by design, it is not just laziness. There is only one shot in the locker they have, and that is depopulation – that is, to take down population and say, ‘Look, gen Zs and millennials, the coalition members are of the view that they have worked hard during that time and people should be pushed out.’

This is a narrative that comes through in communities: ‘Well, can’t young people work harder?’ or ‘Can’t young people do this?’ But when that generation bought houses that they own in the community now, the price was three to four times their income; it is now eight to nine times. If we do not make a decision soon; if we do not have a Help to Buy scheme that gets people onto the ladder, that helps them have some sort of ownership and supports them in their mortgage outcome; if we do not have rental assistance and rental reforms; and if we are not building more homes, we are acknowledging that we are not solving the problem and it is only going to get worse. That is the challenge in this bill.

Do not come in with a sentence of a reasoned amendment, like your standard form in here is – to just outsource the work. The muscle memory of underperformance and underwhelming continues. Come in with some ideas. Let us have a policy debate. Tell us what your ideas are. Do they stack up and actually build more homes and get more Victorians into homes? That matters most.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:43): It is a delight this afternoon to listen to the member for Mordialloc read out his speaking notes from the Premier as he desperately tries to curry favour with the leadership in uncertain times on the other side. He is sitting there going, ‘Look at me, I’m a loyal

servant. I'll read the notes out no matter how ludicrous they are, how nonsensical they are. I'll read them out. I'm down on the second tier now; they've moved me from the backbench. They're going to move me a little bit closer forward – one more row to go. With 18 months left in government I've got one more row to go, and I'm going to do whatever I have to do. I'm going to be a good boy.' Well done, member for Mordialloc. You certainly did a good job today. But of course the rhetoric that you have read out is the rhetoric Victorians have been hearing now for two weeks in the government's clasp to try and deal with the housing crisis.

This housing crisis is 100 per cent the fault of this government. Within the last three years – the last 18 months in fact – the former Premier and the current Premier said, 'We can build 80,000 homes a year.' We know that to help get the price of renting, the price of new home ownership and the price of homes down, we have got to get supply up, we have got to get homes to market and we have got to provide those opportunities, and this government has singly failed.

They have failed, because home starts and home approvals are at record lows for recent times. It is insane. We are barely getting over halfway to the targets that this government has set itself. Where is the accountability for that?

We see state Labor are quick to piggyback off federal Labor's very late-to-market policy, in the nick of time before the election, with the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025, which at the end of the day is not really going to make much difference in the Victorian landscape. We have had similar policies by the state government that have not been taken up and have not been fully subscribed to. Victorians, young Victorians in particular, are singularly being kept out of the market not because of any other cause than the basic cost and affordability of land. Why is land and housing so expensive? Well, this government has now for a long time waged a concerted campaign against property owners, people who are prepared to invest in rental tenancies and others. What this government fundamentally does not understand is if you want to build the towers that this government says are going to be the solution to housing affordability for 70 to 80 per cent of our population over the next 30 years, then you have got to have people prepared to invest in it.

While you overtax foreign investors, who have traditionally made a significant contribution to the apartments built that we have seen in towers in the city, and when you have gone and waged a tax war against those investors, that is less people to invest in property. When you wage war against landlords and publicly demonise landlords through pieces of legislation and regulation after regulation – just continually demonise them and then tax them through an egregiously aggressive land tax policy – then you are putting the settings in the wrong direction, and you will not get the properties to market. Basically, young people, first-time property investors and those wanting to get into the market in the suburbs the government so regularly talks about cannot do it alone. They have to do it within a vibrant and dynamic property investment ecosystem, which this government has fundamentally destroyed. They have literally poured the herbicide over the investment and property market here in Victoria to such an extent that people are not investing at that rate. The member for Mordialloc made much of the fact that the opposition is somehow bringing –

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member on his feet has to be at least partly factual. We have built more houses than any other state and we have more approvals than any other state, so he is absolutely, fundamentally being unfactual, incorrect and in fact mendacious.

Richard Riordan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I will rule on the point of order, member for Polwarth. It is not for me as Chair to adjudicate the facts of this debate. I encourage all members to ensure that their statements in the house are factual. The member for Polwarth to continue.

Richard RIORDAN: I will point out to the government, because it is something that they fundamentally do not understand, that approvals do not allow someone to live in something. An approval is a process that should lead to building. Unfortunately, we have seen example after example

of approvals sitting idle, and none more disastrous than the much-touted hundred-storey building in South Melbourne that was going to be full of apartments and housing opportunities. What has happened there? The developers, the builders of that, have walked away. Yes, they had an approval, but the Beulah project did not stack up, like so many other projects in Victoria that do not stack up because of the affordability crunch that this government has caused through its poor taxation and regulation policies that will see the housing crisis continue.

When the member for Mordialloc starts pulling the race card, which the Labor Party love to do on anyone who dares criticise them, I point out to him that if you are going to encourage people to come to Victoria, which is a basic policy of any good government – we want to see more vibrancy and more people coming to our state – you have got to have somewhere for them to live. When you see a housing homeless list that has more than doubled, trebled, quadrupled in the time of this government, from some 9000 people in 2014 to now a figure of some 64,000 families who do not have somewhere to live, then it is only reasonable that the average person on the street would say, ‘Hang on a minute, why do we continue to increase our population when we can’t get the housing stock to match?’ That is a reasonable complaint that the people of Victoria have. It is not a racist rant or slant on any of those things. It is a common observation from people that a government, if it is going to have an aggressive growth policy – which certainly the Liberal Party would have also – has got to match it with places and spaces for people to live and grow, and this government has fundamentally lost the ball on that.

When it seeks to look like it is doing something with the Help to Buy bill, working with the federal government, it is fluff around a broader desire from the Victorian community to actually see some real results in housing. Until this government can demonstrate that its policies and actions will lead to more homes – not planning approvals, not policy statements, not press releases released by this government but an actual increase in housing supply – then it is all for nothing. It does not matter how rosy a spin this government chooses to put on its policy positions; until we actually see concrete poured, bricks laid and weatherboards nailed, it does not provide housing for Victorians.

More importantly, when we talk about helping people to find a home – an affordable, respectable home – it distresses me no end to think that not only have we failed to get extra homes but when we have extra –

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: We do not block it. It is distressing to think that this government is so deficient in its ability to manage housing. We have specialty housing in Victoria for groups. We have, for example, homes in St Albans designed for women. It is women’s housing for women escaping domestic violence and others, and yet it is riddled with not only men but bikie gangs and criminal groups who have been able to take over brand new housing that has been provided for a very, very desperate and needy cohort in Victoria. And this government refuses to act. It refuses to enact regulations and procedures to enable the operators of those accommodations to evict the people in them causing problems, making them a completely unsafe environment.

I attended a community meeting only last week with some 40-odd mums and elderly women who have been given the opportunity for new homes but cannot live in them. So not only is this government failing to get the new homes built, but when they do actually get some new homes built and some places for people to live, they singularly fail to manage them in an appropriate and safe way so the people who are supposed to be finding a new home and supposed to be finding somewhere affordable to live cannot live in those places in peace, security and safety.

In fact it was unbelievable to hear that after the SWAT team turned up and arrested five men in the morning, because of the catch-and-release bail laws of this government, those same men were released and back in the accommodation before the sun had set that day. This speaks to how this government is out of control on housing affordability and accessibility. Much needs to be done to improve what

we are actually building and when we build it, and most importantly, we have to have an environment where people want to build.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:53): It is a great pity the opposition do not have a lot to say on this bill, but I think that is emblematic –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: No, I am talking about substance here. You can say a lot of words; I am talking about quality and talking about substance. Further to other comments from other colleagues in the chamber, housing is not really their big thing. It is a structural reform. They do not want to know about it. It is like, ‘Oh, just put up a reasoned amendment. That’s a nice, simple, straightforward solution. Then we don’t have to talk too much about it, because we haven’t really thought it through. Millennials and gen Z – who knows with them? They can luck it. Or maybe they’ve got wealthy parents so they can afford it.’ There is nothing wrong with parents helping, I should say, their children to get into homes; I just want to make that caveat. That is a fantastic thing that families can do, but obviously as a Labor government we have to allow for all the contingencies for all Victorians and make sure that they have good structural mechanisms to have the best possibility to get into a home. That is exactly what the Victorian Homebuyer Fund has been all about. I just want to put this on the table, because as I said there was a lot of fluff and dribble from the other side there. I really want to counteract that, because I think it is very important that Victorians know what is actually being done.

The scheme has already supported over 13,500 Victorians to become homeowners, with another 2300 approved to purchase under it.

Obviously that structural reform has made an important pathway for Victorians to be able to get into the market, because we know how hard it is to be able to save that first deposit. Some people just will never get there. We know that. That is the reason why we are having to put these really important structural reforms in that lower the burden for first home buyers and also increase the probability that they can actually get there. But, lo and behold, as was said by a colleague, imitation is the best form of flattery, and the Commonwealth have said, ‘Hey, these Victorians are onto something here. We think we’ll adopt this scheme. This sounds pretty fantastic’, and that means that more people around the country can actually benefit from this equity share scheme which enables them to get into a home. This is a really terrific plan, and I congratulate the Commonwealth for taking it on board. It certainly has worked in Victoria for thousands of Victorians – dare I say thousands – so why not for more Victorians? Relatively speaking, this scheme will run until 30 June 2025, but then when it goes to the Commonwealth that will open it up to Victorians further still and then people around the country, subject to where all these things go at a Commonwealth level.

But heaven forbid if we just said, ‘Look, the Commonwealth might change their mind and this might happen and that might happen.’ Of course it could. Of course there are many, many contingencies with any government, but that is not a reason to just say, ‘Look, we’ll just sit back. We’ll do nothing’, because nothing delivers nothing. On the other hand, if we actually step forward and make sure these structural reforms can work, then we can actually deliver outcomes, as has been proven already, for Victorians in our state.

I do want to just qualify one element, talking about caveats surrounding the referral of this power. The amendment reference in this bill is a specific and limited referral of power to the Commonwealth Parliament. Importantly, it is only for the purpose of the maintenance and operation of the Help to Buy scheme. You can see that these are very specific controls. It is not wideranging beyond the remit which is specific to the Help to Buy scheme. I think that will hopefully give some comfort to those opposite when they are concerned about the referral of that power and the controls which will ensure that it is contained within the remit of the scheme’s functionality.

I want to also speak to some of the further benefits of the scheme, because we have listened to the opposition, who think there are absolutely no benefits to anyone in terms of taking part in this scheme

and getting into the market. The Commonwealth will offer an equity contribution of up to 40 per cent of the purchase price for new homes and up to 30 per cent for existing homes. That is a huge chunk. That would be most welcome, I am sure. I do not want to speak for other Victorians, but in anyone's language we know that that is a huge chunk of the purchase price. Eligible Victorians will only need a 2 per cent deposit to enter the scheme, and that therefore is lowering the risk and making it a possibility where otherwise they might never have that opportunity to get into a home. Applicants purchasing in Melbourne and Geelong are expected to be able to purchase a property up to \$850,000 and in regional Victoria up to \$650,000. Program directions will sit alongside the Help to Buy act and will assist –

James Newbury interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Well, let's just do nothing! Let us just sit on our hands because X or Y might not happen. Let us sit on our hands and do nothing, which is exactly what the opposition are suggesting. No, we are going to plough on here because these are important structural reforms. They have proven themselves already, so that is why we are following through. I should say that the bill expressly preserves Victoria's existing or future shared equity schemes from inconsistency with the Commonwealth act and the Commonwealth act also contains mechanisms to avoid state shared equity schemes being excluded or limited by Help to Buy. So you can see those very important controls. You need these kinds of controls, particularly when you are referring powers, to make sure that we are looking after our good state of Victoria for the benefit of all Victorians.

Sitting suspended 1.00 pm to 2.02 pm.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

The SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge a number of guests in the gallery today: former member for Western Metropolitan Region Khalil Eideh, the former ambassador for the Republic of Türkiye His Excellency Korhan Karakoç and Consul General Doğan Işık. I would also like to acknowledge a number of mayors in the gallery from Cardinia shire, the City of Wodonga, Indigo shire, Towong shire, Alpine shire, Mansfield shire and the City of Albury.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Crime

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday Adele Andrews was left terrified after her home was invaded by machete-wielding thugs while her children were sleeping. Adele has pleaded with the Premier, stating:

What you're doing is not working. Putting your head in the sand isn't working.

Why won't the Premier listen to Victorians like Adele?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): In acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition's question, can I convey my thoughts to Adele Andrews and her family. What her family experienced this week is absolutely shocking. This unlawful criminal behaviour is unacceptable. As a parent you cannot imagine – it would be unfathomable to imagine – the horror and the trauma that Adele and her family are experiencing, and my sympathy is with her and her family. I say to Adele and I say to the Leader of the Opposition and indeed to all Victorians: we have been listening to the concerns of the Victorian community, which is why last month we made it very clear that we understood that the current settings were not working and that we needed to do more. I do find it unacceptable that we are seeing too many Victorians not feeling safe. We are seeing too many families, like Adele's family, having this experience. I do point to the changes that were made last year in the legislation that was put to this place, reforms to the youth justice system that have given Victoria Police and the courts more powers. We are seeing these changes make a difference.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. This is about issues that are happening right now. Why isn't she listening to Victorians right now?

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was asked whether she is listening to Victorians, and she is outlining in some detail exactly how she is doing that. I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: I do not uphold the point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was outlining, in terms of listening to and understanding the concerns we have heard from the Victorian community, it is why the youth justice reforms were made last year that did strengthen police powers and did strengthen the powers of the courts. We are seeing those changes making a difference, but it is absolutely clear that we need to do more. It is unacceptable to me that we are seeing this repeat pattern of behaviour – this repeat pattern of offending – that is making Victorians feel unsafe, which is why it is clear –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: In terms of respecting the trauma that families like Adele's have gone through, I would suggest that that is why we have already made changes. Those opposite opposed those changes last year. That is for them to explain.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now clearly debating the question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Environment can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Environment withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: The Premier is now clearly debating the question. The question is about a comment just yesterday from a Victorian about why the Premier is putting her head in the sand. She is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I am aware of the question. The Premier is not debating the question. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I repeat what I said at the outset: that it is clear to me that we do need to do more. We absolutely do need to do more. It is clear that the current laws need to be strengthened, which is why the work that the Attorney and the police minister are undertaking with urgency right now is so critically important to strengthen and support community safety in this state.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): Yesterday a security guard was violently attacked by thugs at Bendigo Marketplace in the Premier's own electorate. The Premier clearly said on Nova FM in relation to the rise of crime in Victoria, 'If we need to do more, we will.' How many more Victorians need to be victims of violent crime before the Premier finally takes action?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question I would like to point out to the Leader of the Opposition that the incident at Bendigo Marketplace happened on Monday afternoon. It happened on Monday afternoon, not yesterday, and it was a shocking incident. I was at the Bendigo Marketplace only 48 hours earlier with my own kids. I am there almost on a daily basis when I am in Bendigo, doing the shopping. It is a place where families should absolutely go and feel safe. That incident at the Bendigo Marketplace was a shocking one, and I thank the community who supported the security guard and also the quick response from Victoria Police, who have already arrested four of the young people involved in this incident. In terms of the work we are doing, we know that there is much more to be done. There is more to be done to –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, it is quite some time into the Premier's answer, and she has not gone anywhere near answering the actual question. On relevance, the question is about taking action now.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will conclude by saying my thoughts are with the security guard who had that awful experience and thanking Victoria Police for their work as we work further on these matters.

Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): On Monday I had the opportunity to visit the future Box Hill station site with the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, but I was also joined by local Labor members of Parliament the member for Box Hill, the member for Ashwood, the member for Bentleigh and of course the member for Glen Waverley, who were all there.

We were also joined by a young planning student named Caden. Caden is part of the Suburban Rail Loop's youth panel, and he is helping. He is participating in community engagement to shape the future of his community for young people just like him. When he spoke to us, Caden told us how he was excited to contribute to a project that is going to support great public transport connections and excited to be studying his degree at a time when skills like his are in demand on some of the biggest projects that are underway in our state. He is also excited because, alongside building public transport, the future of this project is building homes for young people exactly like Caden – more homes for his generation, in the community he lives in, near the public transport he uses everyday.

There are some who build nothing. We know that when you build nothing you send the economy, you send the community and you send the future for young people like Caden backwards. We know that we have to build the transport connections, build the homes close to those transport connections and get on and do it now, not block them. There are some who want to back the trucks up and fill in the tunnel-boring machine holes that are being dug right now. Well, we are getting on and building the transport connections and building the homes in exactly the right places so young people like Caden, who is invested in his future and in his local community, know that they have got a government that is on their side.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narre Warren North can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Narre Warren North withdrew from chamber.

Youth justice system

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:13): My question is to the Minister for Education. On Saturday afternoon a Victorian government spokesperson stated that the government's plan to put high-risk youth offenders with ankle bracelets in Victorian schools would proceed. Given the minister said yesterday that it was 'wrong on so many different levels', was the minister consulted on that statement?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour. The member for Pascoe Vale is warned. The member for Cranbourne is warned. The member for Eureka is warned.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:14): I do love how the shadow minister could read my mind – what I was doing on a Saturday afternoon. If only she had read her backbenchers' minds before she ran for the leadership and then decided to run for the deputy leadership. Here he is; he has only been a member of the Liberal Party for 5 minutes.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, clearly the Deputy Premier is very concerned about actually answering this question. The former Speaker ruled about a time for attacking the opposition; question time is not it.

The SPEAKER: I remind the Minister for Education to come back to the question that was asked.

Ben CARROLL: Yes, I am shaking in my boots. Can I be very clear that there is no daylight between me and the Premier when it comes to making sure our kids get the best start in life. As I said yesterday –

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: Do you know what I did on the weekend? I actually spoke to the new member for Werribee, one of our schoolteachers. I worked right across the weekend with our school principals, our schoolteachers, the Premier’s office, the Premier, the youth justice minister, the corrections minister and the Attorney-General. We make sure that every child –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Sunbury is warned.

Member for Laverton withdrew from chamber.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was not related to which members of the Labor caucus the Deputy Premier was courting for their vote, it was about whether he was consulted on the statement.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ben CARROLL: I bet the Manager of Opposition Business loved that point of order. She just showed how well she is going. It is very clear. We have about 78 flexible learning options right across our great state of Victoria, invested in by the Allan Labor government, and about another 35 in the non-government sector. These are flexible learning options with a wide curriculum, set hours and wraparound services for these young kids that need support.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very narrow question: was the minister consulted?

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Deputy Premier has been entirely responsive to the question. He has sought to outline the conversations that he had with his colleagues over the weekend.

The SPEAKER: The minister will come back to the question.

Ben CARROLL: Young people that are disengaged, have low attendance and have behavioural exclusion from school – the right pathway for them is an alternative education setting, and that is what I spent my weekend working on. While on that side of the chamber they bloody just take a three-day weekend, we make sure we get on and do the work that is needed. Flexible learning options and making sure alternative education settings –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on your excellent ruling in *Rulings from the Chair*, language ‘should not be used to disparage a colleague personally’, and it is unparliamentary language I think the minister has used. I would ask you to rule that word as unparliamentary.

The SPEAKER: I remind all members that it should be possible to be on your feet and make a contribution in this place without disparaging other members.

Ben CARROLL: What drives me every day is making sure our most vulnerable kids get the best start in life. As a former youth justice minister that has read the Armytage–Ogloff review from front

cover to back cover several times, I know the best start for these young people, who have often had very difficult circumstances – but for the grace of God, we all could have been in their shoes once upon a time – is to make sure they get the best education they can. It is an alternative education setting. It is making sure that they are either in vocational training or in work and they are getting the best start in their life.

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, I was trying to take less points of order, but the minister is debating the question. It was a very narrow question: yes or no, was he consulted?

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the minister how to answer a question. The minister was being relevant. The minister has concluded his answer.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:20): Yesterday the minister also stated:

As soon as I learned that government schools were potentially being placed with electronic monitoring, I stepped in and stopped it.

If the minister really felt that strongly, why did it take the minister three days to step in and stop it?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Nepean, this is your last warning.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:20): Every day some 1 million school students across Victoria put on a school uniform to go and make the best start in life. They are taught by some 60,000 hardworking teachers every day. Their safety is my priority. So, as I said yesterday, as soon as I learned about this I stepped in and I stopped it, because my priority is the safety of our school students and making sure they get every opportunity to learn and put their best foot forward in the classroom. That is why the school principals association have come out and supported us, it is why teachers have come out and supported us and it is why stakeholders have come out and supported us, because we know flexible learning options and alternative education are the best way forward for these young, disengaged youth.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, why did it take three days for him to step in and stop it?

The SPEAKER: I ask you not to repeat the question in a point of order. The minister has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: housing

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (14:22): Last week I was lucky enough to join my friend the member for Northcote at the brand new Oakover Road social housing apartments in Preston. We got to meet one of the residents, 80-year-old Tom, who told us how much his new home means to him. Tom is living in one of 99 homes we have built in Preston – comfortable, sustainable, accessible, safe homes. These homes form part of the \$6.3 billion Big Housing Build, where more than 10,100 social and affordable homes have been completed or are underway. These homes are absolutely transforming lives, and we are delivering them in partnership with community housing providers. Through the Housing Registrar we regulate community housing to ensure community housing delivers on the social and affordable housing we need.

Sadly, there are some in this place who have spent years opposing community housing. In Ashburton, in Flemington, in Preston – you name it – they have tried to block it. The Greens political party do not care about building more housing in the community. They only care about the protest figure. They do not want the fix; they just want the fight. Community housing provides tailored solutions, and that is what it is all about. That is why as part of the Big Housing Build 10 per cent of new social housing will be for Aboriginal Victorians. The single biggest transfer of wealth in this state's history to First Nations people occurred when this government transferred housing to Aboriginal-controlled

community organisations, because on this side of the house we know that Indigenous Victorians are best placed to care for their communities. But we know the Greens political party do not agree. They believe that they know better and the communities do not deserve a say. It absolutely reeks of paternalism and colonialism. While the Greens and the opposition are on a unity ticket to block new housing, we will keep on fighting to build new homes.

Electricity prices

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:24): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. Modelling attached to Infrastructure Victoria's report released yesterday reveals Victorian wholesale power prices are forecast to increase by around 140 per cent by 2030. Why does the minister keep saying electricity prices are going down, down, down when her government's own report shows they will keep going up, up, up?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:25): I thank the member for the question. Victoria has the lowest wholesale electricity prices in the country – that is absolutely fact – and Infrastructure Victoria's report shows that, if we continue to pursue the bold and ambitious and doable reforms that we have in place, power prices will be lower still over the coming years. That is the reality of it. What is clear is that the report has made six recommendations in relation to energy, and we are progressing every single one of those. We know that with the transition that is underway, replacing ageing infrastructure that has an end of life in an engineering sense – things close down; they do not last forever – the plan is that we have sufficient electricity supply coming into our system to mitigate that and also ensure that we keep the lights on and power bills as low as we can have them. The alternative scenario –

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, I do not believe the minister has actually even read her own report, which shows that prices will go up.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, if you wish to ask your supplementary question, you will come to order.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: I also add that with projects or power plants that reach their end of life there are choices to be made. The scenarios that have been canvassed by Infrastructure Victoria are that you can do nothing, in which case the lights go out, and we know what happens when there is not enough electricity: prices go through the roof. If you sit around waiting for Peter Dutton to give you an answer, you can take the long road, the slow road, and absolutely ensure that people's electricity prices go through the roof at astronomical levels, or you can take the road of a steady increase in replacement electricity – the cheapest electricity that you can build, which is renewables – and continue to have the lowest wholesale electricity prices in the country for years to come. I point to the Australian Energy –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: He is not interested in the answer, I think, because they never are. What they are interested in is Peter Dutton coming along, promising nuclear, doing nothing –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed without warning.

Nick Staikos interjected.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Consumer Affairs can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Consumer Affairs withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, Speaker Maddigan ruled in *Rulings from the Chair*, page 156, that you cannot discuss possible future federal governments, because it is hypothetical.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The fact that the member jumped up the minute the minister on her feet mentioned the word ‘nuclear’ is only exposing how touchy those on the other side are in relation to this topic.

The SPEAKER: The minister to come back to the question.

Lily D’AMBROSIO: Can I just say, when you do have the lowest wholesale electricity prices in the country and you have a modest fluctuation in spot prices, they represent a significant increase percentage-wise. You only have to look at the fact that you have gone from one opposition leader this year to a second one – bang! – a 100 per cent increase. Wow, that is a big number. We are investing in replacement electricity. The cheapest is renewables, and that is what will keep Victorians better off whether in the household or in a business.

Danny O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:29): In a cost-of-living crisis, how will Victorians who are already struggling to pay their power bills cope with a 140 per cent increase created by Victorian Labor Party policy?

The SPEAKER: Would the Leader of the Nationals like to rephrase his question so it is in line with government administration?

Danny O’BRIEN: In a cost-of-living crisis, how will Victorians who are already struggling to pay their power bills cope with a 140 per cent increase created by Victorian Labor government policy?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, it is unacceptable for you to interject over the table after you have asked your question or while the minister is on her feet answering your question. You will be removed from this chamber.

Lily D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:30): Victorians will know that it is always this side of the house, Labor in government, that will deliver cost-of-living relief each and every day – and the lowest wholesale electricity prices. The Australian Energy Market Commission in their independent report late last year revealed that over the next 10 years Victoria’s retail prices – that is, the bills that people get in their mailbox or in their email – will be 9 per cent lower over the next 10 years, lower than any other state. It is about understanding, mapping it out, doing the work to ensure that we have got sufficient electricity supply, doing that as quickly as you can and keeping those prices down.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, it was a very narrow question about how people will afford a 140 per cent increase in their energy bills. On relevance, I would ask you to ask the minister to come back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question. As the Manager of Opposition Business knows, a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question and I cannot direct the minister how to answer a question.

Lily D’AMBROSIO: The choices are very stark. You can listen to the opposition, who are keeping the door open on nuclear energy, which will send people’s bills skyrocketing for decades to come and keep the lights off. That is what their program is.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: Minister.

Lily D’AMBROSIO: Labor is keeping power prices as low as possible, lower than every other state, and only a Labor government will deliver.

Ministers statements: Pride in Place

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:32): Like all Victorians, our LGBTIQ+ communities deserve to live a safe, healthy and meaningful life where their human rights are respected. Through experiences of social isolation, discrimination and stigma when accessing services, LGBTIQ+ Victorians face significantly higher rates of homelessness compared to the general population. We are committed to addressing this and continue to create inclusive and supportive communities and services for all Victorians. This includes the work with Pride in Place, which is co-led by VincentCare Victoria and Drummond Street Services in partnership with Uniting and Family Access Network. The Pride in Place program currently operates in Hume, Merri-bek, inner western metro, outer eastern metro and Central Highlands and offers a holistic and comprehensive approach for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The services include initial assessments, peer navigators with lived experience, flexible case management and supported accommodation. This provides clients with individualised support to assist their transition from crisis to recovery. Pride in Place has been a resounding success. Since its launch in August 2022 to now, Pride in Place has provided over 900 service responses to LGBTIQ+ Victorians experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and it will support over 300 people in 2024–25. Pride in Place has also assisted over 60 services across Victoria to deliver safe and inclusive responses to LGBTIQ+ clients, along with a training toolkit to equip agencies with the knowledge and skills that they need. This government will continue to stand alongside our diverse rainbow communities, ensuring that they are always respected and always supported as they deserve, and we will always show up.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:34): My question is for the Premier. The Victorian Labor government has already displaced hundreds of residents from their public homes in Flemington and North Melbourne. The remaining residents are under extreme pressure to move out. The contract to demolish their homes has been signed and this government is champing at the bit to bring in the bulldozers, but the people of Victoria still do not know how much this project will cost. An independent expert report by OFFICE has costed an extensive refurbishment of the entire Flemington estate, including building more public housing, at about \$500 million. Premier, how much will Labor’s demolition and construction plan cost at the Flemington and North Melbourne estates?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): In acknowledging the member for Richmond’s question, I have in previous answers to the member for Richmond canvassed the issue of how this government is getting on and building more homes. We are getting on with the largest urban renewal project in replacing the public housing towers because we want Victorians, particularly those Victorians who rely on the government to invest in them and to invest in a roof over their heads, to have modern homes and energy-efficient homes so their power bills are not as big a cost as they otherwise would be. That is about showing those Victorians dignity and respect, which they do not get from questions like this from the member for Richmond. What we are focused on in terms of costings and advice – and this is again something that has been made publicly available – is independent advice we have received from structural engineers about the towers and about what it would cost in terms of keeping them just in a habitable condition, remembering that these are not modern homes and not energy-efficient homes. It would cost billions to do that –

Gabrielle de Vietri: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, I was not asking about the maintenance costs, which this government is notoriously stingy on, I was asking about the cost to demolish and build.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was responding directly to the member for Richmond’s claims around refurbishment costs with the advice I was referring to, which has been previously made publicly available. We do need to get on and build more homes. We do need to get on with replacing these public housing towers, and we will do so treating the residents with dignity and respect, not running around these communities with disgraceful misinformation designed to run a campaign of fear. We will treat public housing residents in our towers with respect, and I would love the member for Richmond to join us in that approach.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Finance, this is your last warning.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:37): This is a major infrastructure project that is currently impending. It has life-changing impacts on tens of thousands of people, and the Premier seems to struggle to tell us how much it will cost. Not only are the government unable to provide any evidence to back up their decision in the first place, but they seem unable to produce any plans for what will be built in their place before they tear communities apart and destroy the buildings. With demolition impending in the next few months, Victorians have the right to know what it is supposed to cost. Is the Premier planning on writing a blank cheque to developers, or does the government actually have a budget for this project?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:38): Speaker, I was hoping for some guidance on where the question was in that supplementary, but I will do my best to bat on regardless. The member for Richmond in her contribution in the supplementary question littered it with falsehoods and fearmongering. That is not what public housing tenants in this state deserve. What they deserve are local members of Parliament and a government that are on their side, that are investing in their modern homes and that are investing in their future for them and their kids, and that is exactly what we will continue to do.

Ministers statements: schools

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:39): We are planning and building new schools in growing suburbs for growing families right across our state. At the 2018 election we promised to build 100 new schools across our state; they promised to build four new schools – 100 versus four. We are on track to open up 100 new schools by the time of the next election. Nineteen will open next year, and that is some 90,000 additional places for school students right across our state – or an AFL Grand Final. Fifty per cent of schools built across Australia are built right here under our Labor government because this is what Labor governments do and what Liberal governments undo. When it comes to education we will always invest. I opened just a few weeks ago three schools in Clyde North, in the Leader of the Opposition’s electorate – and I can tell you they were not promised by the Liberal Party in 2018 or 2022 – because under Labor, no matter your postcode, no matter your bank balance, no matter the colour of your skin, we will always invest in young people and always invest in education.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be factual. I think it does depend on the postcode, because there are many Liberal electorates that you do not invest in.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ben CARROLL: In Melbourne’s western suburbs – and I welcome the new member for Werribee – a whopping 34 brand new schools will be opened by our Labor government by the end of next year. I was with the member for Melton opening up and doing the sod turning for Cobblebank just on Monday, because we are getting on with it right across our state. In the northern suburbs, member for Greenvale and member for Kalkallo, we are opening schools every single month. Member for Laverton and member for Tarneit, we are getting on and building new schools wherever there is a

growing suburb, because we know that 21 new schools in the City of Wyndham, investing in Melbourne’s western suburbs – *(Time expired)*

Albury Wodonga Health

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (14:42): My question is for the Minister for Health, a born and bred border Victorian. Albury Wodonga Health starts every day, every single day, at least 50 beds short, with ambulance ramping and increasing surgery waitlists. Despite committing to a 10-storey hospital, helipad and multistorey car park on the one site, this promise has been broken. For a long time locals have been calling for a new hospital on a greenfield site. Why won’t the minister listen to Albury and Wodonga locals – once again, all up there, here, everywhere –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Benambra knows not to acknowledge people in the gallery.

Bill TILLEY: and build the new greenfield hospital the community desperately needs?

Interjections from gallery.

The SPEAKER: Order! The gallery will be cleared.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:43): I welcome the question from the member for Benambra because it gives me an opportunity to inform the house that works on the \$558 million redevelopment of the Albury Base Hospital will commence this year. This redevelopment will deliver –

The SPEAKER: Order! Before I ask the Manager of Opposition Business for her point of order, I remind members in the gallery that you cannot interrupt the process of this chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is already demonstrating that she has failed to listen, because she is not answering the very narrow question about a new greenfield site. It is on relevance, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The minister has only been on her feet for 20 seconds. The minister to answer the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I am very happy also to inform the house that I have met with many representatives from the border community. I have met with the member for Benambra on a number of occasions. I have met with the member for Indi Helen Haines. I have met with Better Border Health. I have met with the border doctors association. I have met with the mayor of Wodonga and the mayor of Albury. But I have been very clear and up-front with every single one of those people that I will not stand by and delay the building of much-needed health facilities for this community. We are commencing work here on a project that will deliver more than 80 additional beds for medical and surgical care; a new state-of-the-art intensive care unit; better and safer maternity and birthing services, including a special care nursery; a 32-bed mental health inpatient unit; new operating theatres; and a CSSD.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Euroa, I will not warn you again.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. It is about a new greenfield hospital site.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked. She so far has not debated it. I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Again, I will try and be clear. I have always been up-front that this government will not support this proposal, for which, to be clear, there is no site, no plan and no funding other than that which has been agreed to and announced by the New South Wales government

and by the Victorian government. Let us be clear: this is a project with bipartisan support. It was announced by New South Wales Liberal Premier Dominic Perrottet and our Premier Daniel Andrews at the time. Not only that, it is supported with funding from the Morrison government. We will not be changing our minds on this, member for Benambra. I have always been very clear with you about this. I have listened, but we need to get on and deliver the care and the upgrades to facilities that are needed in this community. We will build –

Interjections from gallery.

The SPEAKER: Order! Clear the gallery, Serjeant. The chamber is suspended.

Sitting suspended 12:47 pm until 12:55 pm.

Pauline Richards: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask that you review the footage and the activities of this chamber in the lead-up to the clearing of the gallery. From the member for Euroa and others, we observed behaviour that was more typical perhaps of members of the Green party when people who were in the lower galleries stood and behaved in a way that was threatening to the safety of not just the members but the staff of the Parliament.

The SPEAKER: I will review the footage, member for Cranbourne. The house will return to questions. The Minister for Health has time on the clock for her answer.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, I have met with many members of the community and I have always strived to be up-front and clear. We will not delay the delivery of upgraded health care and facilities to the people of Albury–Wodonga.

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (14:56): On a supplementary – maybe you might change your mind on this one, Minister – over 14 months ago –

The SPEAKER: Member for Benambra, through the Chair.

Bill TILLEY: Through the Chair. Thank you. Over 14 months ago this Labor administration proposed co-funding 20 extra beds at Mercy Health. Given Albury Wodonga Health remains under-resourced and in crisis, why has your government failed to deliver these beds that would take the pressure off the local health system?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:57): In responding to the question, can I just underline that less than a year ago I was in Albury opening a new \$36 million emergency department at Albury Wodonga Health. A short-stay unit is due to come online any day.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be succinct in her answer, and she is not answering; she is debating the question.

The SPEAKER: I will give the minister an opportunity to answer the question. She has only been on her feet for a short time.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As I was saying, our government continues to invest in the facilities that the people of Albury–Wodonga need and deserve, and we are proud to do this in partnership with NSW Health. NSW Health are leading the delivery of the new redevelopment at Albury, and I look forward to work starting on that later this year.

Ministers statements: planning policy

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:58): It has been 30 years since we have had a strategic plan for all of Victoria, but last week we fixed that when we launched *Plan for Victoria*. This follows the biggest community consultation ever undertaken in Victoria. More than 110,000 Victorians told us what they love and value about where they live and about their vision for Victoria. This is your vision and your plan. *Plan for Victoria*, for all of Victoria,

is our pathway to get us there, starting with 22 concrete actions which are going to really shift the dial – actions to deliver more homes in activity centres across Melbourne and more homes and opportunities in our regional areas, including Ballarat, Geelong and Bendigo, close to jobs, close to public transport and close to services. We have got housing targets for every local government area and maps to show us where they need to go.

We have got an action to put in place regional city and town boundaries so homes go in the right places, we manage outward sprawl and we protect and preserve what we love and what we value about regional and rural Victoria – things like our food supply, valuable agricultural land, natural resources, biodiversity, landscapes and tourism. Melbourne’s urban growth boundary helps to protect what we love, and now regional cities and towns can be sure we will protect regional values and the great lifestyles regional Victoria offers. There is also an action for more trees – more street trees, trees on nature strips, greening our streets and neighbourhoods, reducing the urban heat effect and improving our quality of life in every single suburb. Whether you are in metropolitan Melbourne or a proud out-of-towner from regional Victoria, *Plan for Victoria* is going to deliver for everyone and so is this Allan Labor government.

Constituency questions

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:01): (1020) My question this afternoon is to the Minister for Health, and the question I have for the minister is: will she restore the funding to Colac Area Health for the Birregurra community health service? Word has been received from the Birregurra community, and I had the great pleasure this week of presenting a petition of well over half the township to this Parliament this week expressing the community’s desire to have their funding restored and returned so that the viable, valuable, important health service in the township of Birregurra can remain. Without a guarantee of basic delivery of services at Birregurra, such as phone answering, cleaning, maintenance and care of the building, the long-term viability of a doctor, the local pharmacy and other important community health services are put at risk. Minister, please take note of the petition presented this week.

Ripon electorate

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (15:02): (1021) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Minister, can you provide me an update on the future of the Upper Teddington Reservoir in Stuart Mill. As people across Ripon know, this reservoir is a very special place. It is a favourite camping and fishing spot for so many and holds so many memories for locals in Stuart Mill, St Arnaud, Carapooee, Kooreh, Avoca and beyond. When it was announced that the reservoir would be decommissioned, before I was the local MP, it sent shockwaves across our region. I have been contacted by hundreds of people about this issue and cannot travel anywhere across Northern Grampians shire without it coming up. For two years now I have been telling Parks Victoria that this is not what the community want and they want to be heard. I understand that Parks Victoria has recently agreed to reconsider the decision to decommission the reservoir, but locals are eager to know more details about the next steps. I look forward to providing them with the minister’s response.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the member for Ripon to rephrase her constituency question and ask a question, not for an update.

Martha HAYLETT: Minister, what is the future of Upper Teddington Reservoir in Stuart Mill?

Shepparton electorate

Kim O’KEEFFE (Shepparton) (15:03): (1022) My question is for the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer continue to provide the Victorian Queensland fruit fly program funding in the 2025–26 budget? Fruit growers from across my electorate are deeply concerned about funding lapsing for an area-wide management plan, which could lead to Queensland fruit fly numbers increasing by up to 600 per cent, critically damaging the horticultural industry, which is worth \$1.6 billion to our

economy. Ongoing funding is vital to suppressing Queensland fruit fly numbers and protecting the industry. Will the Treasurer commit to maintaining this program and protecting the fruit-growing industry, which is crucial to our state's economy?

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:04): (1023) My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, how will Sunbury Heights Primary School in my electorate benefit from funding as part of the latest round of the planned maintenance program. As the minister knows, this government has a strong and proud record of investing in education right across the state. The Deputy Premier and Minister for Education spoke at length just today about some of that investment, making sure we are working with local schools and the wider school community to invest in education. We know that since 2014 we have provided significant local funding, and as a past student of Sunbury Heights Primary School, I again ask the minister this important question.

South-West Coast electorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:05): (1024) My constituency question is to the Minister for Regional Development, and I ask why businesses who applied for grant funding in July 2024, with an outcome promised by November 2024, are still waiting for a response. Businesses were asked to be shovel ready, provide detailed costings and have permits obtained. Since then prices have gone up, and permits have finite time windows. Due to the government's delay businesses will need to redo their work. Shane Clancey from Basalt Wines applied for a grant. He drew up plans, applied for permits and put aside funds to augment the Regional Tourism Investment Fund grant. It is March, and they still have no response four months later. In typical Allan Labor government style, promises are made, people in good faith expend effort and then the government does not deliver.

Mulgrave electorate

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:05): (1025) My constituency question is to the Deputy Premier in his capacity as Minister for Education. My question is: how is the Allan Labor government supporting schools in the electorate of Mulgrave? In Mulgrave there has been significant work undertaken within our schools. At Mulgrave Primary School the Allan Labor government is building a new library, art room and STEM space. The old hall and art room have already been demolished, and a builder has been appointed. Similarly, at Springvale Park Special Developmental School a builder has been appointed to construct a new hydrotherapy pool. This pool will assist students' health and allow those with specialist needs to spend less time out of class for appointments. Additionally, the Allan Labor government has supported the upgrade of Mazenod College in Mulgrave, recently completing a refurbishment of the middle school classrooms. This includes upgrades to the general learning area, STEM spaces and administration and toilet blocks. I would like to thank the Deputy Premier for his continued hard work as Minister for Education.

Brunswick electorate

Tim READ (Brunswick) (15:06): (1026) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Last week the government announced two new activity centres along the Upfield train line, including one near Brunswick station in my electorate. I welcome inner-city developments that encourage people to use public transport rather than adding more cars to our already clogged roads, but the notoriously infrequent Upfield line was recently dubbed Melbourne's most infuriating train line in the *Age*, due to its 4 kilometres of single track, only allowing one train to run at a time, and the Metro Tunnel project has reportedly scrapped plans to build a turnback at Gowrie station that would help solve this problem. I worry that the main activity in these centres will be waiting 20 minutes for a train. How does the government plan to meet the increased demand for public transport that will result from the new activity centres along the Upfield line?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:07): (1027) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning, and my question is: what historical aerial photographs or maps does her department hold for Reservoir, Preston or the northern suburbs generally, and can members of the public access those photos or maps? As the minister will know, there is a very famous set of 1945 aerial photographs of Melbourne taken by Adastra Airways, and some kind individual has stitched them together online so we can all see what our suburbs looked like in 1945. Many of our local policy challenges do date back to previous decisions that were made in the past about where to put roads, train lines, industrial zones, reserves and so forth. When we are doorknocking, it is often great to speak to older members of the community who can provide us with context for those historical decisions, but those online photographs and maps are also a valuable resource. Anything we can have to help us better understand our local communities would be greatly appreciated.

Hawthorn electorate

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (15:08): (1028) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the accumulation of rubbish at the Toorak Road exit of the Monash Freeway in my electorate. My office has been contacted multiple times by concerned constituents worried that rubbish is becoming an eyesore and a potential hazard to our local environment, including Gardiners Creek. I drive through this precinct regularly myself and can bear witness to the level of rubbish littered by the lanes and sometimes on the lanes themselves. In response my office over recent days investigated the existence of rubbish and confirmed that the garden area around the exit is indeed covered in litter. I ask the minister to advise on whether and how this issue can be addressed, including the role VicRoads and Transurban can play to ensure the area is cleaned properly.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (15:09): (1029) My question is for the Minister for Environment. How are works for the \$11 million in upgrades to the You Yangs Regional Park and Serendip Sanctuary progressing? The You Yangs Regional Park and Serendip Sanctuary are much loved by the Lara community, with thousands of visitors annually. Just last weekend I was at the You Yangs with my dog Blue. We walked up to the top of Flinders Peak. It was a really lovely way to spend a Sunday. Sadly, Serendip Sanctuary has become run down over recent years, and these upgrades are needed so much more now than ever. The upgrades include upgrades to the picnic areas, the car-parking areas and the wildlife walk. I look forward to hearing from the minister about how these upgrades are going.

Rulings from the Chair**Constituency questions and adjournment matters**

The SPEAKER (15:10): I have reviewed yesterday's constituency question from the member for Croydon and the adjournment matter from the member for Polwarth, and I rule them both in order.

Bills**Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025*****Second reading*****Debate resumed.**

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:10): I am happy to continue on this important bill referring a very specific power to the Commonwealth. I know those opposite have done everything possible to avoid any kind of progress on this bill on their part, because clearly providing this kind of structural reform is just not their cup of tea. It is much easier just to oppose, oppose, oppose and then just hope for some kind of miracle. We are not waiting around for any miracles, we are actually taking action, and we have seen what the action of this Help to Buy scheme has already done for so many wonderful Victorians. It has already supported over 13,500 Victorians to become home owners, with

another 2300 approved to purchase under the scheme. It was also raised, ‘You can’t just use this lever in order to drive people getting into homes in this state.’ Well, fancy that. We are not just relying on one lever. Of course this is a lever for actually buying a home, but we are building homes as well. As I was saying, shared equity schemes are only one side of the housing affordability coin. We also need to build more homes to increase supply.

Let us just look at the numbers here. That is why we have embarked on the Big Housing Build – which those opposite have also opposed – which, when completed, will deliver a 10 per cent uplift in the total number of social housing stock in Victoria, delivering 12,000 social housing homes. Since the announcement of the Big Build in November 2020 – let us take stock of this – more than 10,100 homes have been completed or are underway and more than 5500 households have either moved or are getting ready to move into brand new homes. From the start of the big build to 30 June 2024 the net number of social houses in Victoria increased by more than 4390, and in that time we have added over 9100 new dwellings, through a combination of construction and acquisition in the Big Housing Build as well as other programs. That is not to mention that there is the broader investment in regional Victoria as well.

I should also say that even in my seat, at Barak Beacon they are well progressing the build on that to get ready to build 408 new homes for my area, which was greatly opposed by the Greens political party, and I think member for Southern Metropolitan David Davis came out and did his bit to try and stop the progression of the build. Of course that is what they do, because it is much easier just to block than to actually do the hard work and put in the structural reforms.

You can see here that we are making a really positive collaboration with the federal government, which will ultimately continue to benefit future Victorians who wish to invest in a home – to get that first critical bite into the market that they very much deserve. I wholeheartedly support this bill. We are not sitting on our hands waiting around for an election; we are getting on and we are getting it done, because this is what we do. We are Labor.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (15:14): I rise to speak on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. The bill will adopt the primary and residual versions of the Commonwealth Help to Buy Act 2024 and refer the necessary legislative powers of the Victorian Parliament to the Commonwealth Parliament to enable the Commonwealth’s Help to Buy scheme to operate in Victoria. Help to Buy is a shared equity scheme where the Commonwealth provides assistance to people purchasing a home. It is administered by Housing Australia. The bill provides an amendment reference to the Commonwealth Parliament to enable future changes to Help to Buy so that it can evolve over time.

Help to Buy sounds nice. I mean, who would not want a helping hand? But in reality it is just more tinkering around the edges. This is a deeply unambitious policy introduced at a critical moment in time when homelessness and rental and mortgage stress is skyrocketing. Demand-side interventions are often the preferred approach taken by governments because they are nominally cheaper than supply-side interventions like building more public housing. Plus, they allow governments to appear as though they are responding while not actually addressing the structural causes of deepening housing inequity. This scheme will not touch the sides of the crisis, but it will offer some assistance to a very small and very specific cohort. In the best-case scenario this scheme would help about 0.2 per cent of renters, leaving the other 99.8 per cent behind to face a brutal housing system. It has been framed as an answer to housing affordability, but Help to Buy does not change our perverted housing system; it just helps a select few go from one hamster wheel to another, likely drowning in mortgage stress. If the Victorian government wants to help the federal government on housing, they should ask them to address the structural issues by scrapping negative gearing and scrapping capital gains tax discounts. Help to Buy is funded by consolidated revenue and yet the federal government has flat-out refused to use consolidated revenue for far more necessary and urgent investments, such as in public housing.

The Greens will support this bill, but let us be absolutely clear: this scheme is not the solution to the housing crisis, it is a distraction. Labor needs to face up to the fact that until they scrap negative gearing and scrap capital gains tax, and until they build more public housing and regulate the private market with rent controls, this housing crisis will only get worse.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:17): It is a good thing I was alert to come back, as that was a lot shorter than what was anticipated. Clearly there is not a lot to say from those in the Greens.

I am pleased to rise today in support of the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. I thank the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs and Minister for Finance for introducing the bill, and I thank the Treasurer for her hard work and contributions to this bill as well. For years, young Australians have been living with the uncomfortable reality that home ownership is a distant aspiration or, for many, out of reach entirely. The state of housing in Australia contributes to contemporary projections that millennials and Gen Zs will be the first generations in memory to have a worse standard of living than that which their parents inherited. This unfortunate truth is felt across our great state, including in my electorate of Mulgrave. Even though the percentage of renters is lower than the state average, more than one in four of my constituents are renters. Of those, a majority state their aspiration to one day own a house of their own, but they have historically faced the obstacles of a highly competitive market and a lack of supply relative to demand. For low- and middle-income earners these factors present enormous challenges to realising the Australian dream of financial security, self-sufficiency and a home to call their own. In light of this, the calls for successive governments to do something about the issue have increasingly grown, particularly over the last decade.

Talk to any young person about housing in our cities and you will hear a mix of anxiety, resignation and frustration with the current state of affairs. That is the result of a decade of neglect from the three Liberal–National administrations at the federal level, all of which refused point-blank to step up and work with state and territory governments to address this decline. Victoria was ignored for that wasted decade. We consistently received less than our fair share of the funding pie considering our wealth, growth and population share. For too long we were an afterthought or a thorn in the side of federal governments who thought they knew better, but things have changed. The Albanese Labor government has done in two years what their predecessors could not do in 10. Housing in Australia is finally on the move again.

The Help to Buy scheme is a sophisticated solution to a vexed issue. It will provide thousands of Australians with a crucial leg up into the housing market, something which many have sorely needed for a long time now. The point of the scheme is not that governments will bankroll housing entirely nor undermine the housing market for a particular demographic's benefit. All Help to Buy seeks to do is pave the way for more people to have a secure roof over their heads, to make it just a little bit easier for Australians to be a lot more comfortable.

With this bill we are doing our part, adopting this initiative into Victorian law and bringing our housing support programs in line with the rest of the country. Implementing the Help to Buy scheme works to make housing more affordable but does not necessarily solve housing supply – although it will help stimulate supply of new housing through offering larger equity contributions for new homes. This is what the body of our work here with the Allan Labor government is already doing, which is very vital. Through this Big Housing Build, commenced in 2020, more than 10,100 homes have been completed or are at least underway, and more than 5500 households have either moved in or are getting ready to move in to brand new homes.

But we are only just getting started. I was pleased last week to join the Premier and the Minister for Planning in announcing a new round of 25 train and tram zone activity centres, in addition to the existing 25. The new activity centres include Springvale and Noble Park within my electorate, because people want to live in the Mulgrave electorate, where there is great transport, a vibrant community and of course the best food in Victoria.

Whilst targeting housing affordability, the implementation of the Help to Buy scheme will play an important part in making housing more accessible to more Victorians, creating more homes and more opportunity. The scheme is worthy in its purpose and function. The government is stepping in to help eligible lower and middle income earners to purchase a property with a smaller deposit. Specifically, this sees those eligible take out a loan with an equity contribution from the federal government – and the contributions are hardly small change either. For a 2 per cent deposit and a proportionate interest in the home, the government will grant up to 30 per cent for the price of an existing home and as much as 40 per cent for a new property. Ultimately the scheme could save Aussies up to \$380,000 on their mortgage payments, which is great news. That represents money that, rather than being spent on property, can instead be spent on groceries, school supplies and local businesses and be put away for a rainy day.

Altogether this scheme serves to give Victorian families peace of mind and a better quality of life. That is because their Labor governments have backed them in their aspiration to have a home that they can call their own. As the minister alluded to in his second-reading speech, the benefits for Victorians are broad, varied and deeply effective. For example, Victorians will benefit from a smaller deposit and lower mortgage repayments and, crucially for many, avoid the cost of lenders mortgage insurance. Those across the aisle would rather see entire generations struggle to escape the rental tenancy market than have governments do what they are meant to and aid those who are struggling to realise their dreams independently.

To establish which Victorians need Help to Buy, reasonable standards have been set to ensure only those who need the scheme can access it. This protects taxpayers money from being wasted, an activity that affirms public confidence in this scheme. For example, if someone is looking to buy a property on their own, they must have a yearly income of less than \$90,000. And if they are buying with someone else, whether it be a partner, a guardian or whoever it may be, their combined income must be less than \$120,000 per year. Crucially, applicants must not currently own any other land or property in Australia or overseas. This is strictly aimed at helping first home buyers, backing our young people and new families where previous schemes have failed to do so. Further, you have to live in the house that you are buying with the scheme's assistance – no investment properties or secondary residences, just secure homes for hardworking Victorians like many in my electorate of Mulgrave.

All in all, the public can be assured that checks and balances are in place to ensure that only those who need the scheme can access it and that anyone attempting to defraud the scheme will be prevented from doing so. To put it another way, Aussies can be confident that every grant that the government gives under this scheme will pass the pub test with flying colours.

I want to use the remainder of my time to reflect on how my electorate of Mulgrave stands to benefit from this scheme being brought to Victoria. Our average income is lower than the state average – \$693 per week as compared to \$803. We have a high proportion of non-English-speaking households, at 58.6 per cent compared to 30.2 per cent. We also have a higher median rent, at \$380 per week. I guess we can do the maths there. These facts, when considered together, tell a story. My constituents are more likely than the average Victorian to be eligible for this scheme and benefit from it, and from conversations I have had with business leaders, community leaders, young people, older people, new parents and established locals, housing remains a top priority for my community. My constituents recognise that housing is not growing on trees and as such is not something which will be easy to earn, but what they do want is help where they can get it, and it is the duty of government to make it that little bit easier.

In summary, the Help to Buy scheme is an intelligent proposal to make it just a little bit easier for Australians and Victorians to find a house that they can call home. With this scheme home ownership will get that little bit easier, and for some that can be everything. I commend this bill to the house.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (15:27): I rise to speak on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. This piece of legislation aims to adopt specific provisions of the Commonwealth's Help to

Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Act 2024 and facilitate the referral of legislative powers from the state to the Commonwealth for potential amendments. It has two primary objectives in terms of the Commonwealth Help to Buy bill, the first of which is the adoption of the Commonwealth provisions and the referral of that legislative power. The policy itself aims to provide 40,000 homes to scheme participants over four years nationally, with the aim of Victoria representing about 10,000 over that four-year share, which has been calculated on a per capita basis. Essentially this Commonwealth scheme aims to replace the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, which was established by the Andrews Labor government in 2021.

It feels like nearly on a weekly basis now we are debating legislation in this place in relation to housing in particular. We hear nearly on a daily basis from the Allan Labor government that they are focused on solving Victoria's housing crisis, but nothing could be further from the truth. Despite the fact that we seem to deal with pieces of legislation here about housing and about the need to provide more homes and more rental properties and make it easier for homebuyers and renters in this state, nothing this government has said or done has made one ounce of difference to a Victorian in terms of the housing crisis here in Victoria. We have seen over the course of the past 10 years of this Labor government the housing crisis getting worse year on year. They have stood by and watched this become a crisis in this state – a crisis that comes down to a lack of supply and Victorians now unable to find a place to call home, whether that is in terms of buying their own home or whether it is even finding a rental property in Victoria.

This bill before us today aims to confer powers from the Commonwealth to the state and put in place a Commonwealth scheme instead of the state scheme that was put in place a number of years ago, as I said. I am sure the new Treasurer is delighted that the federal government is picking up the tab here in Victoria, given the fact that this state has record debt and that record debt is soaring towards \$188 billion in the coming years.

It is completely understandable that the new Treasurer would be thrilled that the Commonwealth Treasurer is suggesting that he will pick up the tab.

It is also ironic to see this bill before us today, given it confers powers from state Labor to federal Labor and given what we have seen over recent weeks are very public disagreements between the Premier and the Prime Minister. I am sure many of us in this place read just a couple of days ago, and I quote:

Anthony Albanese is expected to distance himself from Jacinta Allan and her embattled ... Labor government ...

here in Victoria throughout the federal election campaign. The article goes on to state that while Labor plans for the Prime Minister to bask in the glow of very popular Labor premiers in South Australia and Western Australia, the federal party concedes that:

... it has no option but to adopt a minimalist strategy when it comes to the Victorian Premier.

Perhaps this bill before us today is designed to aid in the implementation of the Albanese government's deeply flawed Help to Buy scheme as an attempt by the state government here to try and claw back some favour from their federal colleagues. We know that this government is going cap in hand to the Prime Minister to get funding for their Suburban Rail Loop project, and we know that the Prime Minister has been unwilling to make sure that the federal taxpayer is contributing to that project.

Despite the fact that we are on the cusp of a federal election being called and that we are expecting the Prime Minister to go to the Governor-General's residence any day now to call the election, it is very clear that the outcome of this election is very unknown. Of course we on this side of the house are very much looking forward to a coalition win at the federal election. If that does occur, then the Commonwealth Help to Buy scheme will not be proceeding. So we are now debating legislation that is dependent on the outcome of the federal election. It is incredibly premature to be putting this legislation in place, given the fact that we do not know what the outcome of that election will be. Why

not wait a few weeks – we are only a few weeks away from election day – to see what the outcome is? If Australians decide to go ahead and risk another three years of a Labor government – God forbid, a Labor minority government – in this country, then put the legislation in place at that time. Because if we do not have a Labor victory at the federal election, the Help to Buy scheme will not be proceeding. For that reason I support the member for Brighton’s reasoned amendment:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘, noting the contrasting position of the two major federal political parties on this policy, this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the outcome of the federal election is determined.’

Regardless of the timing of this piece of legislation, the federal government’s Help to Buy scheme has drawn criticism from many quarters, both left and right. Its narrow targeting means it does very little to ease the housing and affordability crisis faced by so many Australians, particularly here in Victoria. Its price caps mean that most houses in most capital cities are precluded from being eligible. If we look to the difference in what the Help to Buy scheme offers compared to what the current Victorian government scheme offers, the federal parliamentary library found that, based on median full-time earnings, a paramedic, a registered nurse or a primary school teacher would not qualify under the Help to Buy singles threshold.

We have seen extremely low take-up, based on the state-based shared equity schemes, which have shown that Australians and Victorians are actually just not that interested in sharing their house with the government. This is a very important point: most Victorians, most Australians, do not want to have the Australian government or the Victorian government on their house title. They do not want to have to share their house with the government. What this government fails to do is to actually deliver affordable housing options for Victorians to make sure that first-time, aspirational home owners are able to get into the housing market in this state.

But as I said from the outset, all we hear from this government is announcement after announcement. We had of course at the end of the former Premier’s time as the Premier of this state the big housing statement announced. In that statement we saw a commitment to deliver 80,000 new homes each and every year under the Labor government. Now that has had to be crab walked back, because at its very peak Victoria has only been able to deliver around 50,000 homes. Yet this government committed to 80,000 homes each and every year, an 800,000 target over the decade, but no longer. That figure has been taken out of all of the material on the housing statement going forward. No longer 80,000 homes – we will just walk that back.

Is it any wonder that we can no longer deliver those homes when the only thing that this government has delivered in terms of housing in this state is higher property taxes? How on earth this government expects to build the apartments that they are talking about right across Victoria in their activity centres, in these high-rise buildings, when if you talk to any property developer in this state, they simply cannot afford to do business here. We know this government cannot afford to build them. We know this government cannot afford to build the much-needed public, social and affordable housing and they are trying to shift that onto the private sector. But as they try to shift that onto the private sector, they are also putting in place new property taxes, increasing land tax and introducing windfall gains tax. How on earth does this government expect the private sector to deliver affordable housing for Victorians if they are taxing them out of the very market? This is the problem with this government: the only answer they have to every single problem that they have created in this state is to introduce a new tax and punish Victorians instead of delivering what Victorians need.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (15:37): I rise to give my contribution on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. I might just address something the member for Kew said in regard to the Prime Minister and our Premier not getting on, or not working very well together, and the Prime Minister wanting to distance himself from the Victorian Labor Party. I was just looking at a press release and it states that the Albanese Labor government is building Victoria’s future, today announcing an investment of more than \$3.3 billion in Victoria.

Mathew Hilakari: Did you say billion?

Paul MERCURIO: Billion. But wait, there is more – new road and rail projects to boost economic growth, improve connectivity and tackle congestion on suburban roads. They will also partner with the Victorian government to fund and build the rail link to Melbourne Airport, providing more transport options for more people.

A member: How is SRL going?

Paul MERCURIO: We are building the Suburban Rail Loop, which is fantastic also. They will also invest an additional \$2 billion – another \$2 billion – toward transforming Sunshine station as part of our commitment to build the Melbourne Airport rail. On top of that, there is an existing \$5 billion to build the rail line to Tullamarine, taking the overall Commonwealth commitment to \$7 billion. Do I have to go on?

Sarah Connolly: Please do.

Paul MERCURIO: Well, I could, but I was going to stop there, actually. The fact is that the federal government is working with the Victorian government and the relationship between Albo and our Premier is healthy and robust, as it should be and must be. But we are getting things done; we are the government that gets things done.

It has been a very wideranging debate, and it is a pretty narrow sort of concept, this bill. I am a bit sad about the reasoned amendment happening, but I do note that the member for Brighton said if the reasoned amendment did not get up they would not vote against this bill, so that is good. It seems to me that the argument from the other side – the only argument that has made sense so far, and there is only one argument – is there is a federal election coming up and we should just wait and see what happens, sit on our hands, do nothing and just wait. I do not know what is going to happen at adjournment tonight, but I have turned up to work. I do not know what is going to happen tomorrow, but I am going to turn up to work. I am not going to sit in my hotel room or at home thinking I am not really sure what is going to go on so I am not going to put the effort in and just see what happens.

Tomorrow will arrive and nothing will have happened because those on that side have not done anything. That is a bit cowardly. It is a bit pointless. We have been tasked by our constituents to do stuff, not to sit around and not do stuff, so I think we should just get on and do the work and get stuff done.

This legislation comes at a very important time, as we are in the grip of a housing crisis. I might just say it is not just Victoria that is in a housing crisis, it is all the other states as well. In fact it is worldwide. So it is fantastic to see this federal government enter this space and provide real support for Australians to own their own home. I think that is incredibly exciting. I think of a lot of the youth and young people in my electorate who would be so excited. They really did not see a future, did not see themselves being able to buy a home or own a home, and this bill will change that. What this bill will do is adopt the Commonwealth Help to Buy Act 2004 and enable them to establish and operate their shared equity scheme in Victoria. It will also make amendments to the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000 and the Land Tax Act 2005, and I may get to talk about them a little bit later on.

I would just like to point out that in October 2021 we introduced the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, which has helped over 13,500 Victorians to become home owners so far, with that number expected to rise to 18,000 or more. That is 18,000 more home owners, 18,000 more people with the security of a roof over their head and a place to call their own. Announced last year, the VHF will close on 30 June 2025, with the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme planned to launch in mid-2025. I do not know why people are not excited about this. I think back to when I was just a young lad with a full head of hair.

Wayne Farnham: A couple of years ago.

Paul MERCURIO: Yes, Wayne. You remember that, don't you? I am sorry, through the Chair – my apologies. Back then, as a young ballet dancer I had no hope whatsoever of being able to buy my own home. I had no hope of having that security. In fact when I started having kids – my first child – I was still renting and my wife had to stop work because she was a ballet dancer also and you cannot really dance when you are pregnant, especially nine months pregnant. So, you know, it was pretty tough, and the idea of being able to have that security and that sense of future and wellbeing was a long way away. I guess I was lucky that that film came along –

Paul Edbrooke: What film?

Paul MERCURIO: I have never mentioned it in here, and I never will. I just want to actually clarify what luck is. Luck means working incredibly hard so that when you are in the right place at the right time you can grab that opportunity with both hands and make the most of it. That is what luck is. I worked very hard when I was a young dancer. When an opportunity came along I was lucky enough to have done the work, and I took that opportunity. I just want to clarify that that film did not make me any money. I did not get any points. I got paid 35 grand for doing it, and that was it. But what I was lucky about was the opportunity it gave me later on, which was that I did do more work in the film industry and I could buy a house. What an amazing feeling that was. My second daughter was born in a rental, but my third daughter – well, they were born in hospital – was born when we owned our own house. That gave me a massive sense of security.

Mathew Hilakari: Did your house have a ballroom?

Paul MERCURIO: No, there is no ballroom in my house, but there is a long hallway to slide up. I digress. I look at my kids now – my favourite oldest daughter and my favourite younger daughter have had assistance through partners to be able to get into home ownership, but my favourite middle daughter has no assistance. She lives alone and she struggles with health issues, which I have talked about in this place, and that costs a lot of money. She spends her money looking after her health and wellbeing so she can have a quality of life that many people have easily and she does not. I look at her and I think I would love her to have the opportunity to own her own home, and so would she. She would absolutely love to have the security of a home where she owns it and she can decorate it. She loves decorating – she loves cupboards and storage units and all that sort of stuff. You cannot do that in a rental.

She wants a future. Owning your own home gives you that sense of identity, security and future, and with that comes a sense of health and wellbeing. That is what this bill is about; it is not about sitting on our hands and maybe making a decision later on. This bill is making a decision so that my favourite middle daughter and anyone else's favourite eldest, youngest or middle will have the opportunity and get the assistance to own a home. I think that is so important, and I am so grateful that the Commonwealth government is contributing and to supporting Help to Buy.

I have kind of got to the end of this now, because I have said most of what I wanted to say. In the minute and a half I have got left I just want to say thank you to the minister and the staff and everybody else. I have got to tell you, too, my favourite middle daughter has had some issues and she would deeply love to get away from real estate agents. I should not probably say that too much, but we might have to do some work in that area coming up once this bill comes into effect.

In short, I think you know where I stand. I am a little bit tired of the cup half empty and the cup half full. Let us work together. Let us create this environment that we want. Let us do better for first home buyers, for kids, for our families. It is really important that we step up. I am a bit sad. I know we have got a few debates coming; it would be fantastic to actually hear something a little bit different from the other side other than 'Let's just wait for the federal election because you might not get in.' The pressure is on. I look forward to seeing that happen. I commend the bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:46): I will refer to the member for Hastings' contribution just then on a couple of points. Something different from the following debates is almost guaranteed. And the

fact that the member for Hastings claims he did not make any money out of that movie is outrageous. It is an absolutely outrageous claim. It is an absolute classic. I will state this on permanent record for *Hansard*: that movie made me and my family in Swan Hill take up ballroom dancing as a family. And we can still twinkle toe our way around a dance floor now, so thank you.

On another thing, the member for Hastings was talking about home ownership and how aspirational it is. I do not disagree. But when the government is on the title – obviously on this side of the house we do not agree that the government should be on the title to your property. Until last year – and maybe this is just an illustration of being a woman in the 21st century, I do not know – my husband was not even on the title to an investment property that I have, which is on the long-term rental list. It has been providing a home for a teacher to live in – in fact it is my stepdaughter’s year 10 teacher. I will pause there and say happy birthday to Scarlett; it is her 16th birthday today. It has been providing a house to a teacher who moved to the district to teach. Having the government on the title of your own home is not my definition of owning your own home.

But let us talk about some of the other facets of this bill. While it aims to address housing affordability with this shared equity scheme – which does make me a little nervous – I was doing a little bit of research on this bill, and I thought I would ask AI some questions. Now, I do not normally ever use AI, because I have seen the *Terminator* movies and it makes me very nervous. However, I thought I would put into the machine ‘the cause of the housing crisis’. It pulled up several articles referring to that. It pulled up Labor’s track record on housing:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

While the Help to Buy scheme presents itself as a solution, it is essential to reflect on the historical approach to housing from the Labor government: the demolition of public housing – which we hear about often and have earlier today – and excessive taxation.

This is something that again, as the member for Kew stated, I feel like we talk about every single day in this place. Every single week I seem to be on my feet explaining to those on the other side that you cannot tax your way out of debt and you certainly cannot expect to add taxes on top of taxes on top of taxes to the point where, when you purchase a new home in Victoria now, 40 per cent of the cost of a property is tax. That in no way is going to contribute to solving a housing crisis, not for those who want to own their own homes and certainly not to incentivise landlords and investors to buy homes to put on the long-term rental market. It simply will not happen.

Of course the other thing it spat out was ‘economic mismanagement’ and the policy settings that have led to this housing crisis. I have been listening to this debate throughout the day and contributions from members that have spoken on this bill. The member for Mordialloc said something that I jotted down. He said, ‘Those on the other side are all knockers and blockers of affordable housing.’ I just want to point something out. Actually the Minister for Health reminded me of this yesterday. When the current Minister for Health was Minister for Regional Development, that was during my time on council. We came up with what was back then an audacious plan for council to start building houses, which came about from a conversation between me and the current CEO sitting at a conference in Canberra. We just said, ‘You know what, the market has failed in the town of Robinvale,’ – a town of 3000 people, so the census would have you believe – ‘We should just start building houses.’ It was that principle of saying yes first and then figuring out how to do it. Regional Development Victoria gave us the seed funding to start building houses on a plot of land that you would not have ever thought you could build townhouses on. It was an old road reserve that we managed to get titles to. Again, in those days it was an audacious plan. It was not actually that long ago.

Eight houses might not sound like a lot, but in a town like Robinvale, which is an hour and a half from Swan Hill and an hour from Mildura, with no operating tradies – there are plumbers, but because of the huge farming district, trying to get tradies is near impossible – we finally have those eight three-

bedroom homes now not only built but purchased via a private treaty with council. Council have actually come in – they are not on the title, though; they have not assisted – built these homes and then put them on the market, not through auction but through private treaty. The Minister for Regional Development at the time, the now Minister for Health, reminded me yesterday of how a little bit of thinking outside of the box can actually help contribute. She came to turn the sod with me and mayor Bill Moar on that day. It is not that I forgot about it. I did forget to mention it. She did remind me of that yesterday. I guess it is an example of how thinking outside of the box we live in can sometimes offer a solution. Living in those homes now we have a pharmacist who has moved to the district. We have a doctor, a GP, who has bought one of those homes. We have had a family return to the district and buy a business. It has been very, very successful.

I talk about the housing crisis, what causes it and the bleedingly obvious solutions to incentivise housing growth in this state for the private sector. Let us be honest, the government is never going to build – it has been proven – 80,000 homes a year. It is a ridiculous number. It is a ridiculous notion that has already been pegged back. We know that. But the solution would be to incentivise the private sector to build homes and to put them on the long-term rental market instead of the short-stay market.

Let us face it, investors are putting their homes on the short-stay market because of how hard it has become to have homes on the long-term rental market.

I feel like in this place we are constantly talking about this and still we have a bill before us today that, as every member on this side has pointed out, when the Liberals and Nationals win the federal election will no longer go ahead. We could have been debating things like getting bail reform, getting machetes onto the prohibited weapons list – things that are much more important to Victorians now – rather than a scheme that may not exist come the end of this financial year, much less by the end of April, let us say.

The member for Brighton has put up a reasoned amendment with all of that in mind, but again, we will not be opposing the bill. It would be nice to think that we could get some support on the reasoned amendment, but that would be a waste of having sat here and debated this all day when it may not even come to fruition in the end. But again, I am more than happy to get up and talk about the housing crisis, the blatantly obvious reasons for the housing crisis and some commonsense solutions to help solve it, because we do do that every single day in this place.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (15:56): I rise to support the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. The existing Victorian Homebuyer Fund has been a nation-leading, innovative and highly successful program to help Victorians access their first home. It has literally changed lives. It has already supported over 13,500 Victorians to become home owners, with over 2300 approved to purchase under the scheme. This includes many Victorians who have found it particularly tough to get into the housing market. In the existing program half the participants are women and more than half are single people, and we know that for single people saving up for a deposit is particularly tricky. It is hard enough to rent on your own, it is hard enough to pay all the utilities on your own, but to save money for a deposit on your own is really hard too.

The Victorian Homebuyer Fund has seen the Allan Labor government invest a total of \$2.8 billion by reducing the initial outlay for Victorians looking to purchase a home. It has always been spoken of as the great Australian dream to own your own home, and I am so proud of the work Labor is doing to help Australians every day achieve their dreams that may have otherwise been out of reach. After hearing a constituent's own personal experience with the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, it made me more eager to support this bill. To quote my constituent:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

As a single person in my mid-30s, I had a solid job and good earnings, but I still found it incredibly difficult to afford a home. Despite having a deposit, the rising costs of housing coupled with mortgage insurance costs made it seem nearly impossible to buy a house. That's when I turned to the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, and

it made all the difference. The program not only made it easier for me to buy a house, but also helped me to get into a property closer to what I wanted and could afford.

And I am glad to say that he chose Glenroy as his home.

The application process was super easy to navigate through my bank, and I am not alone. This program has been a game changer for so many people. It is helping individuals and families who did not think they could ever own a property, providing them with an opportunity to finally enter the market. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund is truly making home ownership more accessible for those who need it the most.

That is from somebody who literally could not ever have owned his own home, and that is what he wanted to do. I also know a young couple in the hills who would never have been able to buy a home in the next 10 years without the assistance of the Victorian Homebuyer Fund. It has been so successful, and the federal government love the idea so much that they have come up with their own scheme – Help to Buy. Staggered allocations will ensure the Victorian Homebuyer Fund continues to support Victorian home ownership until Help to Buy is established. This means that no-one will miss out. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund will close to new applicants on 30 June this year, when the state will transition to Help to Buy. The State Revenue Office will continue to administer existing Victorian Homebuyer Fund applications. By adopting the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act 2024, this bill will enable Victorians to participate in the Commonwealth's new shared equity scheme. Help to Buy will replace the Victorian Homebuyer Fund –

The SPEAKER: The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Cost of living

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Pascoe Vale proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house notes that the Allan Labor government is helping working families with the cost of living by making much-needed investments in health, education, housing and transport.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (16:01): With some indulgence, I look forward to the member for Werribee's first speech very soon. I am delighted to rise as the first government speaker on the matter of public importance today – my first time as the member moving an MPI as well – and it is that this house states –

James Newbury interjected.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Hold your fire. We have got plenty of time, member for Brighton. It is:

That this house notes that the Allan Labor government is helping working families with the cost of living by making much-needed investments in health, education, housing and transport.

This MPI is of the utmost importance to all Victorians across the state, and of course including my community of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, because cost of living is the number one issue. But as many Victorians are acutely aware, many of these cost-of-living issues have largely been driven by a number of international, national and external factors: international geopolitical conflicts and tensions, which continue to impact demand and confidence across parts of our economy through supply chains, especially global energy markets; the ongoing effects of a one-in-100-year global pandemic, which continues to impact economies and levels of inflation and spending around the world and Australia; the 13 interest rate hikes that have been unfairly imposed on Victorian households by the Reserve Bank, and even though we have had some modest relief in recent times many will still be feeling the burden of those accumulated interest rates for some time to come; the inaction, resistance and opposition by many councils, including those of Liberal and Green and Socialist pedigrees, who have opposed time and time again proposals to build more housing supply in our local communities;

the ongoing disregard of the big supermarkets and banks, energy and insurance companies in providing families with any form of meaningful hip pocket relief; and a decade of underinvestment and Victoria not receiving its fair share from the previous Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison Liberal governments. These have all combined to create the cost-of-living crisis many Victorians are now experiencing.

We know there is no greater issue for workers, families, young people, retirees and indeed every household when it comes to the cost of living. It is only right that this house and this Parliament should focus all of its attention on this priority issue for Victorians, which is why I have moved the matter. But in stark contrast, while this Victorian Labor government has sought to best utilise this MPI time to focus on these issues that matter to Victorians, I am absolutely flabbergasted that the Victorian Liberal–National parties sought to utilise their time in the Legislative Council earlier today to talk about something that was entirely irrelevant. Did they use their time in the Legislative Council to talk about more jobs for Victorians? Did they utilise their time to talk about how they are going to improve health and wellbeing access and costs for Victorians? Did they utilise their time to talk about how they are going to build more homes and make homes more affordable for Victorians or anything to do with cost of living? Did they actually do that, colleagues? The answer is no; absolutely not. What we witnessed earlier today was a totally irrelevant motion moved by the recycled Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council Mr David Davis, which had nothing to do with any of these important issues. In fact it was all to do with changing the standing orders of the Legislative Council, and more specifically that:

... the following time limits will apply –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, as much as discussing the Legislative Council standing orders would bore all of us, I do not think it relates to the motion that the member himself has moved – on relevance.

The SPEAKER: I ask members not to raise points of order that are going to interrupt a member's time. The member was going to get to, I am sure, the matter before the house.

Anthony CIANFLONE: That is right. Thank you, Speaker; I appreciate that. The point I was simply trying to make was that while here in this chamber we are focusing, as a government, on the issues that matter to Victorians – cost of living – in the other chamber they are focusing on something totally irrelevant. That is the point I was trying to make. Standing orders do not rank anywhere near the top-tier issues of Victorians – it is cost of living all the way. The reality is that there is only one political party in this place that can form government and can take that action on cost of living, and that is the Victorian Labor government. Whether it is on education, on health, on transport or on housing, we have been continuing to take that real action that matters to make a tangible difference to people's lives, when standing orders in the other place make no tangible difference whatsoever.

The fact is that we have never seen and we never will see the Liberal–National coalition stand up and support cost-of-living relief that we as a government have put forward. Later this year yours truly will be turning 40. But do you know what another 40th birthday is for this year? The *Back to the Future* movie franchise. In the spirit of *Back to the Future*, in going to the substance of the motion, I would like to take us all on a bit of a trip back on Doc and Marty McFly's iconic DeLorean. The member for Narracan, I am sure, used to ride in one once upon a time. I have obtained a copy of *Grays Sports Almanac* from *Back to the Future*, which tells us all about what you will get again if you have a Liberal government coming back to power. You only have to look as far back as when they were last in government to judge how they will carry on if they ever – God forbid – get on the benches of government again in this state.

In the almanac, when I was flicking through it, do you know what I saw in an alternative reality – like Biff Tannen in *Back to the Future Part II*? We had someone who closed a local school and built a casino. It sounds like another party in this state once upon a time. We had the now Leader of the Opposition commit to 100 new schools, when we heard in question time today they committed to only

four before the last election, two or three of which were in his own electorate and he did not commit to. The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, who I reckon has a strong resemblance to Biff Tannen – I reckon the member for Bulleen is a bit of a Marty McFly as well, if I may say – came out to support the \$400 school bonus, which has never happened and they never committed to retaining. The Shadow Minister for Education has come out to say they are going to support the ongoing retention of free kinder, which still has not happened; they have not guaranteed the retention of it, as far as I am aware. The Shadow Minister for Education announced as well that, yes, high fee paying schools should also pay payroll tax, just like public schools have to. That has not happened either. The Shadow Minister for Public Transport, who is at the table, came out and announced that they are going to build the Metro Tunnel and the level crossing removal projects and improve the Upfield line in my community, which they actually looked at closing when they were last in government.

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bulleen!

Anthony CIANFLONE: That was before, and it never happened under a Labor watch, member for Bulleen. The Shadow Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations has come out to call for and support pay rises for nurses, paramedics and police officers – which has never happened on the watch of a Liberal–National government. The Shadow Minister for Health has announced new upgrades to the Northern Hospital. The Austin Hospital –

Danny O’Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of The Nationals!

Anthony CIANFLONE: For the benefit of the deputy leader, I am actually going through all the things that the Victorian Labor government is doing when it comes to cost of living and what the Liberals are not doing. I am specifically going to the substance of the motion to contrast what we are doing and what you will never do, deputy leader.

The SPEAKER: Member for Pascoe Vale, through the Chair.

Anthony CIANFLONE: I apologise, Speaker. The Shadow Minister for Health – remember the time that they actually called out the Morrison Liberal government’s freezes to Medicare and bulk billing? You do not, because it never ever happened. Or when the Shadow Minister for Health announced and copied our policies around paramedic practitioners, the pharmacy pilot, virtual emergency departments and free nursing and midwifery studies – it never happened. It has only happened on a Labor watch.

The Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources, whoever that is these days, announced that they are bringing back the SEC and publicly owned energy. In stark contrast, they have already said they are going to sell it off again. The Shadow Treasurer, who is here as well – the guy who got promoted – has come out to announce an even bigger build of the Metro Tunnel, West Gate Tunnel and North East Link. There are the big school builds – all the schools in my community that Labor governments have delivered. There are upgrades: the \$21 million Strathmore STEAM hub; the \$17.8 million Coburg High technology hub, which is opening next year; the \$14 million John Fawkner College hub and the \$9 million Glenroy secondary college upgrades. They never would have happened under a Liberal government – and they never will.

When it comes to energy all they are talking about is the most expensive form of energy, and that is nuclear energy, which Peter Dutton is seeking to advocate for and seeking a mandate for at the federal election. The Shadow Minister for Planning, the member for Polwarth – I am glad he is in here – has come out to announce a policy of new social community and affordable homes. We are waiting to hear about this policy. He is talking every day about housing and planning. They still have not come out with a policy to build more homes.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Anthony CIANFLONE: I am listening, member for Polwarth, and I am waiting to hear your policy.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, member for Pascoe Vale.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you, Speaker. I am waiting to hear from the opposition about their housing policy that will make housing and renting more affordable. We have put the plan out there on what we want to achieve in that regard: the \$6 billion Big Housing Build, the 12,000 new social, community and affordable homes, the housing statement and the *Plan for Victoria*. We have a vision, we are investing and we are taking action, and these guys are standing irrelevantly by the sidelines. Again, it is all in the almanac, which I am happy to provide a copy of.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Pascoe Vale is not to use props.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you, Speaker. When it comes to education –

Richard Riordan interjected.

Anthony CIANFLONE: No, it is a policy document, thank you, member for Polwarth. You do not need to look any further than education to look at the stark difference between what a Labor government does to make education more affordable and what Liberal–National governments do to make it more unaffordable and inaccessible. With childhood, like I touched on, we are rolling out Best Start, Best Life, including free kinder for three- and four-year-olds, because we know that for children it is up until the age of five that 80 per cent of their brain, wellbeing and emotional regulation develop. We know the more we invest in their early childhood years, the more and better opportunities they will have later on in life. This is saving families \$2600 per child per year for three- and four-year-olds, and the Liberals cannot guarantee that if they get into government that they would match that or retain that. To the contrary, they would cut it at the first opportunity. They are welcome to get up to the dispatch box and dismiss that and tell me otherwise, but they will not because everything is on the table.

When it comes to local kinders, they have never invested in any local kinder in my community. We are upgrading the Derby Street Children’s Centre, Pascoe Vale Community Centre, Turner Street kinder that my kids used to go to, Doris Blackburn kinder, Shirley Robertson kinder and Dunstan Reserve kinder in Brunswick West. They all are being updated by the Labor government, making kinder more accessible to more families in our community.

It is also across the state. As the Minister for Education touched on today in question time, we have invested over \$1.9 billion to upgrade state-of-the-art schools and facilities so all students can have access to the quality learning facilities they deserve. One of those in my community was the \$18 million redevelopment of Pascoe Vale Primary School, one of the oldest primary schools in our community, which we have just completed the redevelopment of and which, again, would never have happened under a Liberal–National government – never.

The school saving bonus – they are being very quiet about the school saving bonus and what their plans would be around the future of the school saving bonus. In my community it is saving significant amounts of money for local families. Across the state \$136 million has been saved. In my electorate it is \$700,000 saved by local families. There has been 260 grand for Coburg High, 132 grand for Pascoe Vale Girls College and much, much more.

We have delivered 50 million school breakfasts at over 1000 schools. We have expanded the Glasses for Kids program for all schools. We continue to deliver the free dental in schools program, Smile Squad. Will the opposition continue that program? I just recently visited a Smile Squad at my old primary school, Coburg West Primary, last week. Locally, 7000 chair visits have been administered and seen to by the Smile Squad in recent years, delivering young children oral checks, teeth cleaning,

X-rays, fluoride and varnish applications, sealants, dietary advice and free follow-up treatments. Will the Liberals discontinue that program? They are welcome to advise the house today.

But it is also so many other programs. We have heard the Shadow Cabinet Secretary Mr Joe McCracken talk about this and foreshadow many of these possible cuts:

We saw what Campbell Newman did in Queensland, he cut extremely ... but he lasted for one term.

So I guess it's a really difficult balancing act of how much do you cut, what do you cut, what services can you live without ...

and what you cannot.

... it's going to have to be, I suspect, a wholesale audit of what's going on in government, where can we make efficiencies ...

Those are the conversations I think we're having first.

They are already having those conversations. They have got a Shadow Minister for Transition to Government measuring the curtains in the Premier's office, and all the while when they were last in government for any meaningful time they sacked 8000 teachers and they closed schools, in my community in particular. Oak Park High, Hadfield High, Coburg High, Newlands High, Fawkner Technical School, Fawkner North Primary, Glenroy High School, Coburg Technical School, Coburg East Primary, Merlynston Primary and Brunswick Primary were all schools that were closed by the Kennett Liberal government in the 1990s. That got me and many others interested in politics in the first place, to be in this place, and I will do everything I can to stop you guys ever from being in government again.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Bulleen, I will remind members that interjecting across the chamber is disorderly. Members will be removed from the chamber. I remind members also to address their contributions through the Chair.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (16:16): Well, well, people reckon I talk fast. I reckon that was a cross between a horse racing call and a Sooshi Mango skit. I am not sure what it was, and it was fully written. Not bad, mate. Not bad, I tell you. Although I am really glad that the member for Pascoe Vale did talk about past governments, because I do not see that in this matter of public importance (MPI), but now he has given me the licence to do the same, so thanks for that. You have actually given me about 50 per cent more material for my skit – it is the Rasputin skit. Okay, we will give it a shot.

I am really pleased to talk about the transport element of this MPI, because I wanted to raise a number of points around transport. This government talks about delivery – 'Oh, we're all about delivery, delivery, delivery' – until of course you mention Melton rail electrification. I get the train all the time. My son gets the train. We get the trains, everybody's going to get the train, but of course you have to get a V/Line train, despite them promising it in 2014 and 2022. According to the MPI we are talking about cost of living. Well, it would be a lot easier to get an electric train out to Melton, but you cannot because of the big-on-deliveries skit deliverers. Where is Melton rail electrification? There is no electrification. You are still getting a V/Line train. Maybe you can get an electric train, because they also committed to do it to Wyndham Vale. Maybe we could get the electric train to Wyndham Vale.

Danny O'Brien: Is it done there?

Matthew GUY: Not done there either. Billions of dollars promised by the Labor government to these seats they have suddenly found – no Melton rail electrification, no Wyndham Vale electrification. But that is okay, because I figured, 'I'll go and enjoy country Victoria, because I love the regions. So, I'll go and get the fast train to Geelong.' Remember Daniel Andrews came into this chamber and talked about 250 kilometre-an-hour trains. They were almost as quick as the previous speaker. The 250 kilometre-an-hour trains were going to run from Melbourne to Geelong every 30 minutes. Geelong was going to have this great connectivity. It would get a massive boost in population. I remember the question without notice, and the member for Gippsland South probably

would too, when the then Premier came in and said you can get the fast train to the new convention centre down in Geelong – both of which lie undelivered by the current government. I could not believe it. But there seems to be a real thing about it, because I just had a meeting where we were talking about trackless trams. I thought, ‘Hang on a tick, didn’t this Labor government promise’ – wait for it – ‘a trackless tram from Caulfield to Rowville?’ That is right, they did. They even announced it.

Planning and designing the new route is a critical first step ...

It was announced in April 2018 by none other than the current Premier, Jacinta Allan, the member for Bendigo East, who said:

This is the missing transport link for the south-eastern suburbs –
not bad –

it will connect some of our most important education, employment and shopping precincts and boost the local economy.

That it may, but it remains –

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: The missing link is still missing – you got that right. So is the Knox tram – the what? The Knox tram, which according to the MPI on the cost of living would make it a lot easier to get from Knox to the city. But it was committed to by the Labor government and remains undelivered. They opposed Baxter electrification. Who would oppose electrifying to Baxter when the feds are going to pay 80 per cent of the bill? This Labor government. I can go further.

James Newbury: Do.

Matthew GUY: I just might do that, member for Brighton. The current Labor government cut two carriages off the Melbourne–Sydney XPT, so it is now a five-carriage train. But of course let us go back further to when the Cain Labor government combined the Southern Aurora and the Spirit of Progress into one train and halved patronage. When the Kennett government sped up the services and brought in the XPT at seven cars, the Andrews government cut it back to five. On the VLocity trains, while the member for Gippsland South is here, let us introduce VLocity trains on the Bairnsdale line to the member for Gippsland South’s electorate – and to the member for South-West Coast’s electorate, running through the member for Polwarth’s electorate – and reduce capacity on the trains, have no sunshades on 40-degree days, have no reclining seats and have no buffet services for most of the trip. That is apparently an increased, boastable service. They are going to do that on the north-eastern line, which is now done. They are doing it on the south-western line down to Warrnambool, which is now done. You cannot even fit six-car trains into the platforms, so they have had to cut them in half to three-car trains, but apparently this is an increase in services.

It might be an interesting fact for many people in this chamber that I know a little bit about railways, and the orders for every train you see – every single piece of rolling stock that you see, apart from the HCMTs, the high-capacity metro trains, on the Melbourne metropolitan rail network – were commenced under coalition governments. Let us go back in history, like the member for Pascoe Vale did. Let us go right the way back in history, and you might not believe this one, but I actually did. The orders for red rattler trains actually began under the Bowser and Lawson Liberal and Nationalist government back in the 1900s. The orders for the blue trains, the Harris trains, began under the Bolte government. The orders for Hitachi trains began under the Hamer government. The orders for Comeng trains began under the Hamer government. The orders for X’tropolis and Siemens were part of franchise agreements under the Kennett government, who also expanded – unlike promises to expand to Melton or to Wyndham Vale – the metro rail network down to Cranbourne.

I might add it was the Kennett government that increased country rail passenger speeds in Victoria for the first time since 1937, and it was the franchise agreements enacted under the Liberal–Nationals that

brought in 160-kilometre-an-hour trains. They would have come in a decade earlier, but it was the Cain Labor government that scrapped the new R-set carriages when they came in. They also scrapped – I am glad there are Gippsland members here – the concept of electrifying interurban trains to run down to Traralgon as part of the Comeng order. They scrapped that and left those as decrepit country trains, but that was a Liberal–National government idea. We can go through all of these.

In fact while we are at it we will go on to V/Line, because V/Line itself, Speaker – and you would know this as a regional member of Parliament – is characterised by that original tangerine colour. That was part of the new deal for country transport, the new deal for country passengers. The whole idea was to bring in, back in 1981 under a Liberal government, brand new country trains with brand new refurbished diesels across our whole network – as I said, introduced by the Liberal government – just like when VLocity trains came in as part of the franchise agreements. That was also agreed to by the Kennett Liberal government.

The orders, which were then doubled for the regional rail link because the Labor government had ordered no trains for the new regional rail link opened in 2011, had to be done by the Baillieu government. And while we are talking about the regional rail link, people might realise this is the line that runs from Sunshine down to Werribee East. When we came to government we actually found, would you believe, that not only had the Bracks and Brumby governments not ordered new trains, they also had not ordered the signals. Even my kids' Thomas the Tank Engine had signals, but not the regional rail link. Fair dinkum. And I remember it coming to cabinet. Terry Mulder scratched his head. We all looked around and said, 'You must be joking.' 'No, we're not joking.' We had to go and order new three-position signals, colour light signals, because nothing had been ordered. This rail line, I do not know if they were going to run it as one whole section – I have got no idea – but anyway, it had to be redone. It had to be reordered. But we did it. We did it because it was the right thing to do and we had to do it.

I hear the Premier and others come in here and talk about closing rail lines – in fact the previous speaker did, and I thought to myself, 'That is very interesting', because at the moment if I walk out to the front of the building I will see the tram that runs to Port Melbourne and St Kilda. Maybe the previous speaker was not born then, but do you know what – and the member for Albert Park is here – they used to be railway lines. They were not tram lines, they were train lines, and they were closed by the Labor government and turned into trams. They should not have been. They were. But Tom Roper, the transport minister, also considered doing the same thing, member for Pascoe Vale, to the Upfield line. It did not happen, but the other two lines did, didn't they? Maybe you can ask the member for Albert Park about it, because they turned them into tram lines.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Matthew GUY: While we are talking about historical rail analysis, I cannot go past a recent debate on cost of living and on this matter without talking about ticketing. I want to talk about ticketing, because I was explaining to a couple of my colleagues today what a scratch ticket was, and they looked at me and said, 'What?', and I said, 'The scratch ticket. The Labor government in the 1980s brought in this thing' – and you would not believe it, it was about a third of the size of an iPhone is all I can say – 'for those who were in the Melbourne Metro network. And what you used to do was actually scratch off.' And apparently this was an honesty system. I will leave it at that; I was always honest. You scratched off when you were on the tram, and of course 90 per cent of the population – particularly if you know the kids going from Ivanhoe Grammar to the city that I saw get on the train at Montmorency – would not scratch anything off. They were riding for free, so – you would not believe it – network patronage, according to the fare box, plunged. What a shock. It was a disaster.

But if it was not bad enough to have one disaster on scratch tickets, the Labor Party came back for seconds, because they brought in something called Myki. You would not believe it – talk about cost of living – the first time it went to be launched the then minister Lynne Kosky launched it, and as she tapped on her Myki the reader hit the ground and broke into 50 bits. It fell apart. 'Oh, well, there goes

the Myki system.’ But at the same press conference the minister then – and she was actually a lovely lady, a decent person; I will give her that – said, and I think John Brumby was there with her as the Premier, that you were going to be able to buy a hot dog with your Myki. A hot dog? At this point the Myki reader is on the ground in 50 bits. But anyway, the Myki system today – and you will not believe it; it is not actually laughable – is the same technology as it was when Lynne Kosky launched it 20 years ago.

I went to Sydney. I go there with my son. One of my sons like trains – you would not believe it. Anyway, he likes trains, and we were somewhere on the T8 line, and he said, ‘How are we going to pay?’ Well, you click your phone. Talk about a cost-of-living initiative – I just clicked my phone. I walk in, click, that is my ticket. It is done. That is in Sydney. It has been there since 2018. For seven years we have been mucking around with the same technology. Now the current minister says, ‘I give you a commitment: we’re going to have it next year.’ Well, next year there will be two Melbourne Cups, or there will be something in the way. There will be another grand final later in the year. Next year Donald Trump might have done some other crazy thing, as opposed to what he always does. Who knows what the world is going to be like next year. Next year? How about next month? No, we are getting a promise for next year. Well, that makes us feel a whole lot better, given Sydney has had it since 2018.

The Labor government, which trumpets itself as the big deliverers, cannot even get a ticketing system right. So much for Geelong fast rail. So much for the Murray Basin rail or the Gippsland rail plan, which is half done. So much for the Knox tram. So much cutting of carriages on our interstate trains. So much of putting substandard interurban trains on long-haul carriers. So much for boasting about introducing new suburban trains when virtually all of them apart from HCMTs were under coalition or Liberal governments.

They come in here with the gall to attack the Liberal Party, who built the city loop on time and on budget. Unlike the Melbourne Metro, the city loop was on time and on budget. Who built CityLink as opposed to EastLink without the tolls? It was meant to be done without tolls, said Steve Bracks.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Matthew GUY: We built the Bolte Bridge. You are quite right, member for Narracan. And there are two tunnels that you will go home through if you go west which we got from a Liberal government. There is so much I could go through it is not worth it.

At the end of the day, when it comes to cost of living, what Victorians want is a value for money, and value for money means investing in projects which they can use and which are going to help their daily life. No-one out in Cloverton in the northern suburbs, in Melton South in the north-western suburbs, out in Tarneit in the western suburbs or even down in Clyde in the south-east is going to be helped by the Suburban Rail Loop, which might be a ‘nice to have’ but is not the ‘must have’. The must have is what we must put in place in our metropolitan rail network at the ends of the lines or the expansion of the electrified network. The Labor government sacrifices all of those upgrades for the sake of one pet project dreamed up on a Qantas flight to Hong Kong by Daniel Andrews and Luke Sayers. That is not the way to build transport infrastructure.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (16:32): I rise today to contribute on the matter of public importance brought before the house by the member for Pascoe Vale:

That this house notes that the Allan Labor government is helping working families with the cost of living by making much-needed investments in health, education, housing and transport.

It is a pleasure to be speaking on this motion today, as I hear every day from constituents across the Lara electorate how much the investments that the Labor government are making are truly helping people facing challenges with the cost of living. I am proud to be a member of this government, which is committed to investing in things that Victorians really need and initiatives that drive down the cost of living.

It is so clear when you look at this government's investment into health care. We are committed to delivering the largest health infrastructure pipeline in this state's history, and the Lara electorate and in fact the wider Geelong community are benefiting from this. Just last week I had the opportunity to join the Minister for Health Infrastructure and my colleagues the member for Geelong and the member for Bellarine to kick off construction at the Barwon women's and children's hospital. This project is huge for our region, creating 1500 jobs during construction. It will enhance health services for women and children in Geelong, providing vital maternity and paediatric care so families can access top-notch health care right here in our community. With state-of-the-art, specially designed facilities, Barwon Health will be able to deliver more crucial services for more women and children. This includes the addition of new hospital beds, birthing suites, operating theatres and consultation rooms. The project will also feature a new unit dedicated to neonatal and parent care, allowing families to remain together while their infants receive medical attention, along with an upgraded special care nursery to support babies during their essential early weeks and months.

This is in addition to the public fertility care services that are now available to the Geelong community and an expanded women's and sexual reproductive health clinic delivered by Barwon Health. It is also on top of the \$20 million brand new dedicated children's emergency department at University Hospital in Geelong. In Geelong we are also home to a new mental health and wellbeing local. This is a new service providing mental health and wellbeing support in the community, which is free, does not require referral and offers support for anyone with a mental health or substance use concern.

It is not just in central Geelong where we are rolling out more health services to provide free, world-class health care for local residents. In Geelong's north we recently opened the Barwon early parenting centre – one of the many early parenting centres across Victoria funded by this Labor government and free of charge for families to access. These centres support families with children from birth to four years old with a whole range of services from support with feeding and sleeping to helping children with developmental challenges.

Another example of our investment is the kids rehab facility at the McKellar Centre, with specialist rehabilitations for children up to the age of 18 who may have experienced a concussion, an acquired brain injury, a spinal injury, a complex neurological condition or a recent surgical or medical intervention. They also have a program for children with cerebral palsy. Additionally, the McKellar Centre has introduced a mental health and wellbeing centre which features a 16-bed acute mental health unit providing much-needed capacity to support people experiencing mental health challenges.

Under this Labor government we saw Barwon Health North built. It is a \$33 million facility to deliver topnotch health services to the expanding population in Geelong's northern suburbs and complements the Norlane Aquatic Recreation Centre, which was also funded by our government, offering a wonderful state-of-the-art health and wellbeing hub in the north. In addition to its core services, which include an urgent-care clinic, X-ray and imaging services, a dialysis program and other allied health support, Barwon Health North has recently broadened its offerings to include exceptional dental services. The community dental services here cater for a range of needs, providing emergency dental care, general dentistry and denture services. Accessing these amazing health facilities and services is completely free for local residents, meaning that when you need health care or when your family is sick you do not have to worry about how much it is going to cost you, because this Labor government will look after you.

We know that preventative health programs are just as important as funding hospitals and emergency rooms. This government's Smile Squad program offers free dental services to all Victorian school students. Smile Squad visits schools to provide dental check-ups, treatments and oral health information, and I know that families across the Lara electorate are incredibly grateful for this. Our Glasses for Kids program supports families with the cost of eyecare. The Glasses for Kids program provides free vision screening and, if needed, further testing and free glasses for participating prep to year 3 students. Eye care is something I am particularly passionate about. As many in this chamber will know – they have probably heard me complain before – my eyes do not work so well. I did not

realise until I was in year 10, and sometimes I think back and think if I had had access to eye care or eye testing in school my eye condition would have been picked up much earlier and my learning would have been significantly improved.

We know that active recreation is very important when it comes to staying healthy. Our active kids voucher program has seen almost 150,000 vouchers approved across program rounds, with more than 35,000 vouchers already paid out in the most recent round, creating more opportunities for kids to get active, be healthy and have fun. In round 8 we have seen around 1500 vouchers that have been paid and reimbursed in the Geelong local government area, totalling over \$270,000 worth. That is real cost-of-living relief for families, and that number will continue to grow, with voucher redemption still open for another two months. I could go on and on and on all day about what this government is doing to ease the cost of living through our investments in health care. It is something that I am so passionate about, and I know my colleagues are too. On the Labor side of this house we understand what a difference it makes when families can rely on world-class health care for free and do not need to worry about how they are going to pay for it.

But of course this is not all we are doing to support families and students in our local communities with the cost of living. We have the school saving bonus, which provides \$400 in support for eligible school-age students for use on 2025 school costs. This program has already provided families in the Lara electorate with over \$1.3 million in support for the beginning of this school year. That is support for textbooks, uniforms, supplies, camps and excursions, and we all know how quickly these costs can add up. For a family with three children the school saving bonus can mean a saving of \$1200 per year. That is massive. That is real cost-of-living support for families.

We have also invested in breakfast clubs at government schools, which I know are at many schools across the Lara electorate, and they have gone such a long way to ensure that every kid has a full tummy before they start learning for the day. We know that makes a difference, and that is exactly why we are investing in it. And there is more investment. There is \$48 million for the affordable school uniforms program, \$9 million for period products in every school and a massive \$367 million for the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund so that no kid needs to miss out. We all know that the classroom is important, but sometimes what happens outside is just as important – those friendships that are built and those life skills that are learned – and no kid should miss out on those valuable opportunities.

In addition to these programs, the Lara electorate is also benefiting from this government's commitment to capital improvements at our local schools. We recently opened the redeveloped Northern Bay Goldsworthy campus, and it was wonderful to have the Premier visit and tour the new facilities and meet students. This is a \$17 million project that includes a performing arts centre, administration building and classrooms. The Northern Bay community had a tragic end to last year at their Hendy Street campus with the devastating fire that destroyed their main administration and classroom building. Students and staff moved to another campus, but I am pleased to report that all students are now back on campus. Thankfully, demolition of the fire-damaged building is on track, and planning for a new, modern main building is underway, with architects appointed and builders to be appointed later this year. I will take the opportunity to thank the Minister for Education and the Department of Education for their swift response in supporting the Hendy campus school community and ensuring that this school will be rebuilt as soon as possible.

Recently I toured another construction project fully funded by this government at St Francis Xavier School in Corio. Works are well underway on the \$2 million redevelopment, which will include a new reception area, staff room, offices, meeting rooms and a sick bay. Western Heights College is another school that has received funding thanks to this Labor government. Their \$7.5 million project will deliver a major competition-grade gymnasium to the school community, enhancing their incredible sports program. New classrooms and learning spaces at Nelson Park School are open. This is a \$10 million project delivering eight flexible learning spaces for students, spaces for staff, a sensory room, a STEM room and art space. These are important investments in our school communities.

When it comes to delivering for Victorians, it is the Allan Labor government and it is Labor governments that deliver. Unlike those opposite when they were in government, we are not closing hospitals and we are not cutting services. We are investing in the healthcare system that Victorians need. Unlike those opposite when they were in government, we are not closing schools or selling off the land; we are building new schools and we are redeveloping schools. We are ensuring that all Victorians can access the best education and we are supporting families with the cost of living.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (16:42): It is disappointing that the member for Lara finished as she did, because I was going to give her a bit of praise because I thought that she actually spoke a bit about the matter of public importance. It was extraordinary. The member for Pascoe Vale put forward an MPI that talked about how the Allan Labor government was helping working families with the cost of living and then spent 99 per cent of his 15 minutes talking about the Liberal and National opposition.

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Exactly, just the Liberal opposition. You did not talk about us because we never do anything wrong, member for Pascoe Vale; that is right. It was quite extraordinary that here was 15 minutes for a member of the government to get up and talk about how they are helping Victorians with the cost of living, and what do they talk about? They talk about the opposition. They talk about what the opposition is doing. It is extraordinary that this government cannot actually talk about how it is addressing the cost of living –

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Because it is not – that is right, member for Evelyn. It is not addressing the cost of living. I would like to go through a couple of the things that they have talked about, because I have been around politics long enough to know that when you see a matter like this, you can pretty much read it straight out of the research, can't you? They have they have used the words 'cost of living', and they have used the words 'health', 'education', 'housing' and 'transport'. This is exactly what the government's – well, perhaps the federal government's – research is telling them. Maybe they just saved a bit on the most recent one given there is a federal election. 'Hey, Albo, what are the issues we need to talk about?' 'Give us a bit of cost of living.' 'Righto, we'll do that. Actually, we won't do that, we'll just talk about the opposition for the first 15 minutes.' Anyway, when you have got nothing to say on cost of living because you have made it worse, that is probably what the member for Pascoe Vale would do.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair. Use of the word 'you' is a reflection on the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN: Speaker, it was the colloquial use of the word 'you'.

The SPEAKER: My ruling is my ruling.

Danny O'BRIEN: And I accept that wholeheartedly. I will go through a couple of the things that the government talks about in this matter of public importance, starting with health. Apparently that is going really well.

A member: Except in Albury.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, Albury. The people from Albury–Wodonga this afternoon would like to talk to how well the investments in health are going. But I can talk about my own electorate, where for a number of years now we have had the government talking about mergers, then talking about health service network plans, and then ruling out mergers. Indeed the Premier said only six months ago that she did not support mergers of our health system and our hospitals because that would be inconsistent with good patient care. So I was surprised to learn last week that the government was in fact backing a merger – not just of a few regional hospitals but of the Alfred hospital with Peninsula Health and, lo and behold, Bass Coast Health and Gippsland Southern.

How is that going to go – Gippsland Southern, little old Leongatha and Korumburra, up against the might of the Alfred? Do you reckon that is going to result in better services for the people of Leongatha and Korumburra? I do not think so. That is one area. The issues of ambulance ramping have been rampant, I might say, over the last couple of years. People could not get an ambulance when they called for one repeatedly over the last couple of years, and the performance measures, the actual response times for ambulances, have been appalling. On elective surgery, does anyone remember the Minister for Health saying, ‘We are setting a target of 240,000 elective surgeries next year. I won’t accept anything less?’ Before they even had the opportunity to try and deliver it, they cut that and dropped their target back to 207,000. They clearly could not do it.

On education, the Minister for Education today talked about the massive amount of funding that they committed for new and upgraded schools at the last election. That included Leongatha Secondary College getting \$11 million that no-one asked for. The school did not know what it was for. It had no plans for it. Lo and behold, here we are 2½ years into the term and it has not got any of that money or any upgrade. Sale College likewise are still waiting for funding on that. But more particularly on the cost-of-living issue, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority only a week ago listed the cost of public education across the nation, and was Victoria last? No, Victoria was not last. It did not have the highest. It had the second-highest. Victoria has the second-most expensive public education in the nation. The member for Pascoe Vale talked about cost of living and education – he did not, but he put it in his MPI – Victoria has the second-highest cost of government education in the nation.

They talk about transport. Let us have a look at the state of our roads. You want to talk about cost of living? How is it when you have got to go out and get new tyres all the time, get the shockers fixed? Two years ago there were more than 2000 claims from Victorians for damage caused by the roads. It was a 414 per cent increase over three years.

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Danny O’BRIEN: It does cost them money, member for Evelyn. But the problem is that they do not actually get any money. They put in a claim. I think, of those 2000, one person successfully got a claim. That is transport. That is how they are going.

Housing is the one that I think is most critical, and it is actually a very important one for this place to talk about. There is nowhere better that demonstrates the differences in philosophy between the government and those on this side of the chamber, because we know that supply is critical. We know that when you add a tax as a cost to a particular economic function, that tax will be passed on, and the government does not seem to understand that. We had the former Treasurer two years ago say it is economics 101. I do not think he had actually ever done economics 101, because he certainly did not understand taxes, and we have had 60 new or increased taxes under this government since they came to office. Of those, 30 are on property, and let us go through a few of them: increased fire services property levy; introduction of foreign stamp duty; increased absentee landowner surcharge for foreign property; increased absentee landowner surcharge for foreign property again – a number of these are over and over in the budget; a new so-called vacant home tax; and a new stamp duty on off-the-plan purchases. Remember that one? That one was brought in in 2017, and then the government came out and made a big virtue of it a few months ago to say, ‘We’re going to bring it back – for nine months. We’re going to bring back the off-the-plan stamp duty exemption that we took away in the first place’ – and apparently Victorians are going to be grateful for that because it is going to stimulate housing. Unbelievable.

There is the new windfall gains tax on rezoned land; another increase in the fire services property levy; expanded land tax on unimproved residential land; the 43 per cent increase to domestic building insurance charges; increased land tax on land holdings above \$300,000; introduction of land tax on land holdings between \$50,000 and \$300,000 as part of the so-called COVID debt recovery plan, which is not even going to deal with the COVID debt; a 53 per cent increase, again, to domestic

building insurance charges; and, most recently and coming into Parliament tomorrow in the second-reading speech of the bill, the creation of the expanded Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund tax.

This is one of the most egregious tax increases on this list of taxes, because the government are now trying to make a virtue of the fact that they are going to cover the SES with this new expanded volunteers fund. What they are also doing is throwing in Emergency Management Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Emergency Recovery Victoria and Triple Zero Victoria, all of which are core government services that have always been funded out of consolidated revenue. Now the government is going to try and save some money – because it cannot manage money and it has messed up the budget – and as a result it is going to tax Victorians further, particularly those Victorians with property. So for residential the rate will go from 8.7 cents to 17.3 cents per \$1000 of capital improved value, a 100 per cent increase. For non-principal private residences there is also a 100 per cent increase. Non-principal private residences – who is that? That is landlords. That is rental providers. Do you think that they are not going to pass that on to renters? Commercial is going up 100 per cent. Industrial is going up 64 per cent.

Most egregiously, for primary producers it is going up 189 per cent. These are the people, in the main, that are already CFA volunteers and are already putting out the fires, doing it in their own time and supporting their community, and they are going to cop a 189 per cent increase in their fire levy under this government because Labor cannot manage money. That is a disgrace. That is where the distinction is with those of us on this side; we understand that increased taxes like these only get passed back into the community. The government does not seem to understand that. They do not understand that that is where the cost of living comes from.

I have not even got to energy because I have run out of time, and I note that the government did not mention energy. This is a government that does not understand the cost of living – (*Time expired*)

The SPEAKER: To those members who are not in their place, I would advise you to cease interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (16:52): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a contribution on this matter of public importance brought forward by the member for Pascoe Vale. I am so glad that he did, because it gives me 10 long minutes to speak about how the Allan Labor government is supporting people in my electorate in Tarneit and in Hoppers Crossing. Let me run through the really practical measures that this government has brought forward to support working families. There was the \$250 power saving bonus – I think we did three or four rounds of that – which was incredible for people and their bills amidst some tricky times in terms of cost of living. There is the \$400 school saving bonus. I see kids walking around Tarneit pimped out in their brand new school uniforms that they most certainly would not have had access to had it not been for Labor's \$400 school saving bonus. Indeed who could forget about free kinder? I had the pleasure to be with Minister Blandthorn on Monday to open another brand new kinder in Tarneit, Barayip, which is co-located with our brand new primary school, Barayip Primary School. These are world-class educational facilities for our kids in the west, because they deserve nothing less, and they get access to those 15 hours per week for free. That is how you support families in places like Tarneit, and that is how you make sure that kids get the best start to their life.

Before the member for Bulleen leaves, I would like to thank him. I was in here for the journey that he took us on before, the old king of housing approvals himself. It was a long journey and it was a great journey, and I take him at his word that he is a real transport enthusiast. But I would like to just jog the king of housing approvals' memory for one moment. He is a switched-on guy, so he will remember pretty quickly. Tarneit North is essentially a suburb in my electorate north of the regional rail link – which, by the way, member for Bulleen, does not finish in Werribee east; it runs through Wyndham Vale to the Geelong line there. If you would like to come out to the west and lie to people and tell them that you care about them –

The SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, through the Chair.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen, off you go.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Dylan WIGHT: If the member for Bulleen or indeed the opposition would like to lie to people in the west and pretend that they care about them – maybe figure out where it is. The really funny and interesting part –

Richard Riordan: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the member for Tarneit wanted the opposition to come and visit to understand the west.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

Richard Riordan: The member for Tarneit might like to tell us how many of the members for the west actually live in the west.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Dylan WIGHT: It is hard to make a contribution while the member for Polwarth is over there shouting at clouds, Speaker. Tarneit North is a precinct structure plan with a collection of estates just north of the regional rail link there. It was a PSP signed off by the member for Bulleen when he was planning minister in I believe about 2010–12. That is a PSP and a part of Tarneit that has been planned so poorly that we cannot run a bus route through it. We cannot run a bus route through the PSP in Tarneit North because the member for Bulleen planned it so poorly and the streets are so narrow so that one of his mates could fit a few extra lots in there. The people of Tarneit North cannot at the moment access a bus. We are working in overdrive to try and retrofit solutions for it. If you are such a transport enthusiast, perhaps plan an estate where the people in it can get access to it. It is an absolute disgrace.

Richard Riordan interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: The member for Polwarth continues to shout at clouds. It is an absolute disgrace, and I will continue to work with the people of Tarneit North to get a solution.

They are a dangerous show, this mob over here – a slothful, lazy opposition that sit on the fringe of every issue. There is no policy; it is just political positioning. That is all – lazy, slothful, no policies. The people of Victoria know and have always known that when the Liberal Party in Victoria get into government it is about cuts and burning the place down.

I spoke about the power saving bonus, I spoke about the school saving bonus and I spoke about free kinder. They are the things that Victorians miss out on when there is a Liberal government in this state. They are the things that Victorians miss out on. There are the breakfast clubs in our schools. Every school in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing runs a breakfast club. Do you know why? Because without them children would go to school without breakfast. They would go hungry, which affects their learning but it also affects their health. Every single school in my electorate runs that program, and you can bet your bottom dollar that if this mob gets in, it is gone – it is gone – because that is what they do when they govern. They cut, they close and they burn the show down. That is what is on the line in the next two years. They have gone pretty quiet now, because they know it is what they have always done and it is what they will always do.

I spoke about the practical supports that this government has put forward and has offered Victorians – the power saving bonus, school saving bonus and free kinder – but there are also the services and the infrastructure improvements that go with that. Let us start with health. The Werribee Mercy Hospital, which had a \$125 million upgrade in 2018, is now undertaking an upgrade of its emergency department. That means that an extra 25,000 people in my community can go through that emergency

department each year. The federal Labor government made an amazing announcement last week of \$8.5 billion to make sure that people could access a GP more easily. Universal and free health care is the fundamental pillar of Australia's healthcare system, and we are making sure that people in my community – an extra 25,000 a year – can have better access to that. That is how you support people in communities, and that is what the Allan Labor government is doing at the Werribee Mercy Hospital and out in the west.

There is education as well. Every Victorian kid, Victorian child, deserves a world-class education, and kids in the west are no different. I have been lucky enough to open five brand new schools just since I have been the member – five; amazing – all world class.

All of them, apart from the high school, are co-located with kindergartens, but the high school is next to a primary school with a co-located kindergarten. There are world-class educational opportunities for kids in the west – for kids in Tarneit and for kids in Hoppers Crossing. They go from free kinder in a co-located kindergarten straight to their primary school and then, luckily enough in my electorate, to their high school as well. It makes that transition through your educational years really easy, really good and really streamlined – absolutely fantastic.

There are also the infrastructure improvements. I think even those opposite will accept this and will agree with this: with improved infrastructure you get improved productivity. And what do you get when you improve productivity, Member for Polwarth? You get higher wages; that is what you get. We can talk about the West Gate Tunnel. Everybody knows about the West Gate Tunnel, but what about the Tarneit West train station? It will be completed by 2026, with about a \$150 million investment from this government – a new station on the regional rail link to make sure that people in Tarneit can get access to the public transport they need to be able to start their day, get to the city or get to work quicker so they can have more time with their families. Luckily enough for those people in Tarneit North that I spoke of earlier, where the member for Bulleen made that estate incredibly difficult, that train station is in very close proximity, and we will work with that community to make sure that bus routes are running from that estate to that brand new train station so they can access it. This Allan Labor government is supporting people in my electorate in Tarneit, and I commend this.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (17:02): This afternoon we are talking about the horrendous costs to families right throughout Victoria, where their hip-pocket nerves – the costs to families, the costs to small businesses, the costs to everyone to do business in Victoria – are out of control. It is out of control in health, education, housing and particularly transport in the state of Victoria. Victorians are rapidly tiring of the rhetoric of the 10-odd years now of the Andrews, now Allan, Labor government, which has skewed government spending and skewed government resources into vanity projects that after 10 years we have barely seen, apart from some level crossing removals completed. Tunnels and projects all over Melbourne have not been completed. The only thing they successfully completed was on day one when they stopped a tunnel and road project that the Liberal government in 2014 had commenced. Their only real achievement in getting anything done in roads was to stop a really sensible road project.

More important are the costs that are mounting. It was disturbing not only to myself but certainly to the vast majority of my electorate when we learned late last year that 95 per cent of the regional road funding maintenance budget had not been spent. The government in response to that came out and said, 'Trust us; we're now going to spend a record amount in this current financial year' – the one that we are in now, which finishes in about four months time. In the financial year to Christmas – to halfway through, to the six-month mark – not one tender had been let to repair rural and regional roads. Why is this important? It will come as a surprise to many government members opposite who live in their bubbles and cocoons that in terms of the food that gets delivered to Melbourne and the food that goes to our regional cities – the food that is produced that we all rely on every day of the week, as every family, every household, relies on their milk and relies on their meat products, spuds, potatoes, vegetables and horticulture – all that produce by and large comes into our cities and our distribution centres from regional Victoria. Transport operator after transport operator talks about the fact that we

have our 100-kilometre-an-hour roads. In the case of the road through Polwarth it is dual lane most of the way – the Princes Highway – and that road in many parts is permanently down to 80 kilometres an hour when it should be 100 kilometres an hour. That slows transport into our CBD, into our distribution centres and into our supermarkets.

Right across other regional areas, we have now got 100-kilometre-an-hour roads that are down to 60 kilometres an hour and 40 kilometres an hour right through south-western Victoria, the home of the bottled milk product for most of our supermarkets. That milk every day is carted through to Melbourne. That milk every day is arriving in Melbourne more slowly and more shaken. I mean, most of us now probably do not realise or have probably forgotten what still milk tastes like because most of the time by the time it gets to Melbourne it has probably half turned into a thickshake because of the condition of our roads. That is something where one day when we have a Liberal government back in charge and our roads back to square people will go, ‘The milk tastes different. It’s no longer as thick and buttery as it seems to have been for the last 10 years of Labor.’ But nonetheless that is a massive impost. The transport operators, and most of them are good Victorian-owned businesses and enterprises, are saying the cost for their tyres and the cost of keeping their trucks and transports up to spec is a cost that is being passed on to consumers here in Victoria. That is unreasonable.

In my own portfolio area of housing this government have absolutely failed to understand that their massive increases in land tax, in vacancy tax, in windfall gains tax and in fire services levy tax, which comes through people’s rates – those four taxes in particular – have a huge impact. If it is an investment property, it is a property somebody rents – somebody who cannot afford a home – and they will now have these costs and charges passed on to them. These are costs and expenses that this government is taking from some of the poorest in the state to help prop up its budget. The government is under a misguided delusion that somehow if you put a tax on something, that will not get passed through, and we know that is not true.

More disturbingly – we talked about the added freight and transport costs of getting our food to market – we have also just seen the government reveal the fact that they are putting extra on the fire services levy. These are some 200 per cent increases for our farmers, our primary producers and our food producers. These are huge cost imposts at a time when we need to maintain as much competitiveness in our food production as possible. For example, just in dairy alone, if we are not competitive, if we are not bringing to market the best and most competitive prices, other nearby markets such as those in New Zealand cause untold heartache and pressure on the market here. It is wrong for our own government to overtax our farmers and primary producers, giving a competitive advantage particularly to the Kiwis to bring their dairy products, their cheeses and their butters, into our markets. That is unfair, and that is a cost burden put on Victorian households and homes that should not be there.

Also in the home market, the government has talked a lot in recent weeks about getting more homes and having more homes available for young people in particular. It is easy to talk, but you have got to put the mechanisms in place. You have got to talk to the industry and have got to listen to those people that know how to build homes and are bringing homes to market, and they are all saying it is too expensive in Victoria. Why is it so much more expensive to bring a house to market in Victoria? It is because of this government’s reckless budget and reckless overspending on its signature projects here in Victoria. The yet-to-be-completed signature projects here in Victoria have come at huge cost to the taxpayer. We heard in recent weeks that its key projects are overblown by \$11 billion, just this year. When you have that much extra money going into the economy, it forces prices up, it brings labour costs up, it brings the cost of materials up and it distorts the market. While this government continues to distort the natural market forces in the Victorian economy that will see homes brought to market at an affordable and fair price for average Victorians and while the government continues to allow that to happen, we will not have the affordable housing that we need in the state of Victoria.

On health costs, the government talks about what it is doing for health and about hospitals that it has proposed and announced but that it has not continued. We saw farcical scenes in question time today

when the government was challenged by the community on its inability to deliver on localised health care. But in my own electorate this government and its predecessor, the Andrews government, promised in 2018 a hospital in Torquay. They repromised in the 2022 election a hospital in Torquay. But guess what, they ran out of money, didn't they? They ran out of money, and in 2023 they cancelled it. The irony of all of this is that someone in state Labor forgot to tell federal Labor that they had already put the kibosh on a publicly funded health service in Torquay, and what have they done? They have gone and had Libby Coker, the federal member for Corangamite, come out last week – in a very, very fashionable sandwich board, mind you – and stand on the side of the road. The dignity levels have somewhat declined in Labor now as they get desperate to maintain a government at both state and federal levels. But the federal member for Corangamite, standing out on the side of the road in a sandwich board, declared 'Torquay needs urgent care health services'. Well, yes, the community has been telling this government for quite some time, and in fact this government had been promising that until last year when they cancelled it. But the point is this government are all talk about providing health services at a fair and accessible price for Victorians, but very, very quickly turn their back on them. It will be interesting to see at the upcoming federal election whether the voters of Torquay will for a third time swallow a Labor promise on accessible and affordable health care in the Torquay–Surf Coast community. We have got to remember also that same community is still having to drive a good 40 minutes to get to the nearest hospital.

But at the same time that they cancelled a local community health service, they also oversaw the closing of over 30 per cent of the maternity services in the Geelong region. So just in this term of government –

Members interjecting.

Richard RIORDAN: Because the Geelong community have been waiting a long time to see your child and maternity health services.

Geelong today, in this current term under an Allan government, has over 30 per cent fewer maternity services than what it had three years ago, and that is an indictment of this government. It proves its lack of care for community health and cost of living.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (17:12): I am honoured to contribute to this matter of public importance, which asks that the house notes that the Allan Labor government is helping working families with the cost of living. Right now we know many people are feeling the pressure of rising costs. Whether it is paying the bills, getting the kids through school, meeting rent and mortgage payments or keeping up with the weekly shop, the rising cost of living is a challenge, and the very real stress and anxiety of this situation is being felt by families in Australia but also across the world. Our government recognises this, and it is why we are stepping up, delivering real, practical support where it is needed most. We are making big investments that make a real difference in people's lives, particularly for working families, who we know bear the brunt of rising living cost challenges.

I want to begin with education, because as a Labor government we hold dear and fiercely protect the right of every child to access a great public education and the right to attend kinder and school and have that support and that launching pad into a life of learning and purpose. It is this Labor government that has introduced the generational and life-changing reform of free three- and four-year-old kinder and our aspiration for a full year of pre-prep, giving four-year-olds access to 30 hours of play-based learning, saving families up to \$2500 per child per year, but critically also allowing more parents to be able to make the choice to go back to work after having a child.

Just last month the Premier and I had the opportunity to visit a brand new local kinder that is now co-located at Thornbury High. It is called Darebin Creek kinder, and it is allowing for 99 new kinder spots in the heart of my community. It is a spectacular new service for local families. Last week I also joined our Darebin mayor Kristine Olaris, a Labor mayor, and centre director Helen Evdokimou-Mina at

Merri community kinder, where we celebrated an expansion of the three-year-old room. We gave kids a little sneak peek of their free kinder kits, filled with books and crafts to take home.

These are real-life investments in my own community that our Labor government is supporting. Families in my community have also directly saved now over \$1.1 million since the start of the school term through the \$400 school saving bonus. It is probably more now since that calculation was made. But that is kids going home with new school uniforms, with schoolbags, with textbooks. It is kids being able to participate in excursions and school activities like swimming and sport, and it is families with an extra bit of buffer to spend on their other priorities. We know that schools are these special settings that allow us to have meaningful interventions and supports for children and for families – supports that reflect our Labor government's commitment to social equality. That is why our government has expanded free school breakfast clubs to every government school for the first time. It is why we deliver the Smile Squad free dental care, the free Glasses for Kids program, the Get Active Kids \$200 sports vouchers and free period products in schools and in public places. I spent some time with students at the Northern College of the Arts and Technology last November talking about that fantastic initiative and how important it was to those students to have access to free pads and tampons – items that are a necessity, not a luxury. The truth is that the Liberal Party would never in a million years prioritise these sorts of investments. It is just not in their wheelhouse. They have not committed to retaining these initiatives. They have not said they will keep free kinder, not once – a transformational economic reform, and they have not said that they will keep it. But as families in my community know, these are initiatives that materially assist people in meeting living costs.

So too are the many, many things our Labor government is doing in the health space. As Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health I have spoken to countless women and girls about the cost barrier to accessing health care. That is why our \$153 million women's health package is delivering a public health system that will be unmatched in Australia: 20 dedicated women's health clinics, 20 sexual and reproductive health hubs, a virtual women's health clinic, a mobile women's health clinic and an Aboriginal women's health clinic. These are life-changing investments and reforms designed to deliver free specialist care for Victorian women and girls, which has been needed for far too long, for conditions like endometriosis, PCOS, menopause and incontinence – conditions that can be very costly, I might add, to treat. It complements our investments into urgent care clinics, into public IVF, into the pharmacies pilot and into the virtual emergency department. What a fantastic initiative that is. What will the Liberal–National coalition do if we ever have the horror of witnessing them take the reins of government again? If the past is any indicator of the future, it will be cuts and closures and families left without services and supports. We have absolutely no guarantees that the Liberal–National coalition will continue any of the initiatives that our Labor government has put in place to help Victorians.

Last week I joined the Minister for Finance at the new social housing our Labor government has built in my community on Oakover Road in Preston. We were welcomed into the home of Tom, an 80-year-old resident who has been living there since May. Tom told us about his early life on sheep stations and showed us pictures of his late wife and the family. He told us about what it meant to him to have his apartment – an affordable, modern, secure home. It is cosy, clean and filled with his things – a place of comfort where he can listen to his radio, wander down to the Woolies, do his weekly shop and pop into the art gallery that we built as part of that development on the lower level. Tom's apartment is one of 99 in the building and one of 12,000 social homes we are building as part of the Big Housing Build – homes that the Greens political party still oppose as recently as today, railing in this chamber against building more social homes. At a time when the cost of housing is one of the biggest issues facing Victorians, the Greens want to put the brakes on and keep people living in housing stress because that makes for a better slogan.

We know that demand is driving up the cost of housing, and that is why we are getting on with approving and building more homes than any other state and we are slashing off-the-plan stamp duty. Our government is making renting fairer too, something I am working on as the Parliamentary

Secretary for Renters. It means banning no-fault evictions and all types of rental bidding and making sure that rentals meet the minimum standards before they are being advertised. It means a portable bond scheme to help alleviate the stress of outlaying two bonds at once. It is establishing Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, a fast and free way to resolve rental disputes that will speed up processes and get things settled more quickly.

Recently I had the pleasure of meeting with Financial Counselling Victoria at Banyule Community Health to discuss what an impact free financial counselling can have when someone is feeling overwhelmed by their financial situation. I spoke to Cathy, who is a financial counsellor who speaks with people every day who are concerned about their bills, who might be falling behind and need that little bit of advocacy and advice to turn things around. That is why our government is also investing another \$15 million over the next three years to expand financial counselling services.

In energy, Solar Homes and the Victorian energy upgrades program, what a difference they are making to my community and so many communities across Victoria for families that for the first time have the chance to upgrade their heating or hot water, have the chance to reduce the costs of their energy bills, to put solar on their roofs, to install a battery and to contribute to the climate action we need to leave a sustainable state to our kids. Those are real up-front rebates available to Victorians right now. It is our government doing it, driving down the cost of bills at scale, helping families to manage their household budgets.

There is the container deposit scheme. I could go on. We have not talked about that yet, but I do commend the member for Pascoe Vale on putting forward this important matter of public importance. I just finish on this: it is Labor governments that will help Victorians, the Liberals will not.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:22): I am pleased to rise on the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Pascoe Vale. Do not get too excited, though, member for Mordialloc. I think I might take a little bit of a different direction to the talking points we have heard today from the Premier's office. There are not too many different speeches from those opposite. The talking points were clearly distributed widely.

We have heard a lot from those opposite today about the fact that Victoria claims to be the Education State, but the claim that those opposite make is laughable. On most meaningful measures, under the Minister for Education's watch Victoria is in freefall when it comes to education. Despite overseeing – and sometimes it seems being blindsided by – crisis after crisis in his own portfolio, rumours continue to abound in this place that the Deputy Premier is counting numbers in the Labor caucus to replace the Premier. Whether or not the minister is successful in that pursuit, Victorian families would be forgiven for wondering why the minister in charge of education in this state has not made improving our education system his priority.

Where to begin on the Education State under Minister Carroll and the Allan Labor government? The VCE debacle, the teacher shortage crisis, indeed high-risk youth offenders in Victorian classrooms and overcrowded crumbling schools. Let us just look at a snapshot before diving into some of that detail. Our teachers are the lowest paid in Australia. Our state government funding per student is the second lowest in the Commonwealth. The cost to send a child to a government school in Victoria has increased year on year, with Victorian families paying the highest fees, charges and parent contributions in the nation at a primary school level. Almost 30 per cent of Victorian students are failing to meet basic standards in English and maths. Victoria was the last state to adopt phonics in the teaching of reading, despite the weight of scientific evidence behind structured literacy being clearly best practice.

Victoria is the only state or territory where student attendance was lower in 2024 than two years ago and where over half of high school students, years 7 to 10, attend school less than 90 per cent of the time. These are just some of the metrics where Victoria is far from best in class under the education minister's watch. But let us dig a little deeper on some of those issues. Let us start with learning

outcomes. As I said, almost 30 per cent of Victorian students are failing to meet basic standards in English and mathematics under this government. The 2024 NAPLAN data has confirmed that for Victorian students spelling, grammar, punctuation and numeracy outcomes fell for year 9 students compared to the previous year. Overall, outcomes are ranked first or second in 11 out of 20 categories, down from 16 the previous year. Nearly two-thirds of year 3 Indigenous students are failing to meet standards in grammar and punctuation, and almost seven in 10 year 9 students whose parents did not finish year 12 are underperforming in punctuation and grammar. Those opposite like to cry about the wonderful NAPLAN results in this state, yet under the Allan Labor government those metrics, and the fact that nearly one-third of students in this state are not meeting basic standards when it comes to literacy and numeracy, are an absolute disgrace.

And it is not just the NAPLAN data we need to look at. Let us look at the program for international student assessment data, which has highlighted that education outcomes in Victoria for 15-year-old students are the worst reading literacy results on record, with one in five students classified as low performers. They are the worst mathematical literacy results on record, with more than one in four students classified as low performers, and they show a stagnant result for scientific literacy, which was virtually equal to 2018, the poorest result on record. The PISA report states that low performer students have:

... not acquired the skills and knowledge to allow them to adequately participate in the 21st century workforce and contribute as productive citizens.

Concerningly, half of all Victorian students are now not achieving a proficient standard in mathematics, a foundational skill that is going to be absolutely essential to employability in a modern, technologically advanced economy. So it is not just the NAPLAN data, it is the international data that shows that under the Allan Labor government learning outcomes are at record lows in this state, and it is Victorian students that continue to pay the price.

Now, those opposite will say, 'We've put programs in place. We've put programs in place to address these outcomes which are in freefall.' The Tutor Learning Initiative is just one of those programs: a \$1.2 billion initiative by the Allan Labor government. Yet, let us look at what the Victorian Auditor-General had to say about the Tutor Learning Initiative just last year:

... the initiative did not significantly improve students' learning compared to similar non tutored students.

In fact the Auditor-General said – wait for it:

... we found that students who received tutoring learnt less than those who did not receive tutoring.

That is the standard of tutoring and programs aimed at addressing our learning outcomes in freefall in this state.

If I turn to the state of our schools, we know that they are overcrowded and in desperate need of capital upgrades. We know, my colleagues know from speaking to their local communities, that there is toxic mould, there are walls that are falling down and students are being forced to learn in unconditioned classrooms every single day. Yet what we see from this government is another inability to deliver on their commitments. In last year's budget 29 promised school upgrades were not fully funded. They have been given a share of \$24 million of 'planning', with no detail as to when those promised upgrades will be delivered. Of course the promised upgrades for those schools were promised on the eve of the 2022 election – election commitments that we have seen time and time again not delivered by this government.

Looking at some of the commitments that were made that have not been delivered, let us look at Manorvale Primary School in the electorate of Werribee, which has not had its capital upgrade delivered, and Mordialloc College in the electorate of Mordialloc and of course San Remo Primary School in the electorate of Bass. We know this because the member for Bass has indeed sponsored a petition to her own government, to her own minister, to get that upgrade delivered. That is the state of

the books and the fact that the rising debt in this state means that these school upgrades are not going to be delivered under this government.

Today there are over 1000 vacancies for teachers in this state. The teacher shortage crisis is one that continues to worsen by the day. We know by looking at the department's teacher supply and demand report that there has been a 48 per cent increase in the rate of both primary and secondary school teachers leaving the profession.

Once again the government will say, 'We've put in place programs, policy, initiatives to tackle this problem.' Indeed \$1.6 billion the minister likes to talk about. \$1.6 billion to deliver what – 1000 vacancies today for teachers in our classrooms. And what does that mean? That means that students do not have permanent teachers in the classroom. It means they are forced to learn in doubled-up classrooms, and VCE students at schools across this state are being sent home at lunchtime because they do not have a teacher to take their VCE class.

While we are on the topic of VCE, let us just turn our mind to the VCE exam debacle, and where do we even begin? This is the third consecutive year that this government has absolutely done their VCE students a disservice by stuffing up the VCE exams. Over 65 exams were compromised this year, putting students' hard work at risk, jeopardising their results to get into the course at university or the pathway they want next. It is unacceptable, and the minister knew about it from the beginning and was complicit in the cover-up.

This just scratches the surface, but even if we turn to the bureaucracy, take the Victorian Institute of Teaching overseeing the teacher registration program and the backlog there; the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, as I said, overseeing when it comes to the VCE crisis year on year; and of course the Victorian School Building Authority, which is bogging principals down in red tape and making it harder and harder to deliver. Under this government, under the minister, this state is anything but the Education State. Whether it is on learning outcomes, whether it is on our teacher shortage crisis, whether it is on our crumbling schools, this government cannot manage money, and the students are paying the price.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:32): I am very proud to stand and to speak to the many ways that the Allan Labor government is focused on and actually saving money for families in Victoria, for households in Victoria, for everyone across the board, I should say. This is on health, education, housing, transport and more. But today I think I am inspired to talk about education to follow some of the stuff I just heard, which nearly made my ears burn. My ears were burning, let me tell you. They were burning, because I was like, 'What are you talking about? You dare go us?' The opposition dare go us on investment in infrastructure in schools. We are on track for 100 new schools by 2026. What the heck are you talking about? They dare go us when last time they were in government they closed 350 schools and ripped a billion dollars from the education budget. Take them apples. I mean, goodness me, when people are in glass houses, be careful when you are throwing those stones, because we are going to bark back, I will tell you what, just with the facts – just facts, so do not worry. It is nothing to worry about. Or maybe do worry, because we are not going to fudge it. We are going to tell you the truth, as we always do.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Nina TAYLOR: Now, over \$136 million –

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: Are you denying this? Are you denying that \$136 million has been saved?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Albert Park. Without assistance, member for Evelyn.

Nina TAYLOR: Over \$136 million has been allocated to families through the school saving bonus, delivering cost-of-living relief for families in 2025 – \$136 million. That means in their pockets, and that means anything from uniforms and textbooks to swimming lessons, camps and excursions. These are the real costs that people have to deal with day in, day out. Maybe the opposition does not think that is helpful, that people do not need these kinds of real-life supports, but on this side of the house we know that they are meaningful supports for people who are dealing with everyday costs in their lives to keep their households running. In fact I was actually really lucky to be able to attend with the member for Hastings a nice roundtable with some local parents, and guess what they were telling us – exactly how they were allocating the funds they have been using to save themselves money or to reallocate money in different ways because they saved on some of those school costs and were therefore able to spend in other ways for their families, which was really, really wonderful to hear. We could see how incredibly strategic and careful they were able to be because these cost-of-living savings have been put in place, have been rolled out, have been implemented.

I should say we have invested extensively in over 50 million – I had trouble, almost, reading it, because when you look at the numbers you are like, ‘50 million!’ – free breakfasts at over 1000 government schools in the state, and we will have a school breakfast club program in every school across Victoria by July 2026 for schools that want to opt in. On the one hand it is making sure that all kids have an equitable start to the day and that they can actually focus because they are getting a nutritious breakfast – and they do not have to feel left out, either. I know that for me if I do not have those oats in the morning, nothing is happening. It is only fair. I am not basing it on me, but I understand the value of keeping the blood sugar load that you need to get you through the morning. It is simply unfair when you think that there are those kids that but for this program would not be able to eat. But we are making sure that they can with free nutritious breakfasts and lunches, snacks and take-home food packs also being provided for those in need. Over 1000 primary, secondary and specialist schools across Victoria participate in the program. One hundred participating schools also provide healthy food packs and practical cooking classes for families through school holidays – there is more – making sure students have healthy, affordable and tasty meals at home as well as at school.

Feedback from schools has shown the program has had benefits beyond making students happier and healthier. It has led to greater social outcomes for students and the school community, improved student engagement and concentration, stronger staff-student relationships, enhanced social skills and better academic performance. If you listened to those opposite, you would say the whole education system was dying and everything was moribund, but the opposite is in fact the case.

It was part of a \$69.5 million investment in the Victorian budget 2023–24, and the program will only grow, helping more students than ever to get the most from their education by providing healthy, nutritious meals. In 2023 the Labor government provided \$2 million in grants to participating schools to purchase kitchen appliances such as fridges, freezers, microwaves, toasters, sandwich presses, blenders and rice cookers – because of course if you are going to teach kids those necessary skills of how to cook for themselves, you need the appliances there as well. That has all been thought through. I should say that the school breakfast club program, delivered in partnership with Foodbank, is just one of a suite of initiatives the Labor government is providing to support busy and hardworking families with the costs of living and learning. You can see infrastructure investments but also the practical delivery of healthy food. I wonder what those opposite would do about that. I would be a bit concerned, because they certainly cut out the –

A member: Fresh Fruit Friday.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, they cut it; that is exactly right. They certainly cut the – what was it – free fruit Fridays or something? They got slashed. That was just fruit. I mean, fruit is a good thing, do not get me wrong, but that is not a full breakfast, so I do not know; I would be worried.

Glasses for Kids – I should say I have had glasses not only in the last year or two; I have had glasses since grade 3. I have an astigmatism.

Members interjecting.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes, longstanding. I must say that I honestly cannot focus properly without the glasses. If I had not had them at that point in time, I hate to think. My parents worked really hard. They were able to go and get me that test, but I hate to think of the kids that do not have that opportunity. What an inequitable way to get through school. That is simply unfair. But the Labor government, true to our values, have expanded the Glasses for Kids program with a further \$6.8 million investment, making them available for thousands more students across the state. An extra 70,000 Victorian students will benefit from vision screening and free glasses as part of the program. If you are not able to see clearly what you are reading, I reckon that could also have significant behavioural impacts or confidence impacts. There would be so many ways in which it can impact a human being.

Because we know of the challenges that Victorian families – not only Victorian but Australian families, but we are focused on our state – are going through, we do not want any student to be left behind. This is of course why we are making these kinds of really practical and tangible investments, not fluffy or airy-fairy ones. Having good vision, or the best possible vision that you can, is really, really important, and we recognise this. Certainly this is an important part of ensuring that families get that extra support so they can actually get by and hopefully get ahead and do some fun activities and other things with their kids as well. I did think it was a bit rich, having a go.

There was another thing I wanted to say when it comes to a point made about our investments in literacy et cetera in our state. I should say there was an announcement back in December 2024 that we are:

... making best practice common practice in the Education State with new resources to support student literacy with systematic synthetic phonics in every classroom

The Deputy Premier and Minister for Education, Ben Carroll, announced \$5 million in funding for primary schools to fast-track the transition to the mandated Victorian reading approach a year earlier. So you can see absolute conviction in the approach to accelerating this really important literacy method in schools. Speeding up the transition of the phonics rollout from three years to two, with the funding enabling primary schools to purchase resources such as mini whiteboards, letter tiles and decodable texts, which are key to setting up a successful literacy program. I can assure you this program absolutely works. In South Melbourne Primary in my electorate they are gunning along with this. They are absolutely nailing it and are really a beacon. Not exclusively, but I am just saying – and they were on the telly as well because they were doing so well with this more modern education method, which is proven. It is also enjoyable for the kids as well. I know I have even had parents feed back to me just how rewarding it is to see the kids and how well they do under this method.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:42): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the matter of public importance (MPI) on the cost-of-living crisis by the member for Pascoe Vale. There is no doubt that the cost-of-living crisis lays firmly at the feet of the Allan Labor government. That is where we differ on this side of the house to the other side of the house. Those in government agree there is a cost-of-living crisis, as we believe so, but at the same time they will not admit where that cost-of-living crisis is coming from. It is part of many of the policies that they are creating and have made, and the taxes, which has created that cost-of-living crisis. It has been an own goal in that respect, but certainly one with some assistance from the Prime Minister of Australia. There is no doubt about that. He gets a goal assist for his efforts in this space as well for the cost-of-living crisis.

We are spiralling down. We are going downhill, down the garden path, and we know how we got here. The guy who was in charge for awhile, who is no longer with us – and I cannot wait until that bronze statue comes along one day, as long as it has got a mask on it so that pigeons can rest on it, and we can tell our grandkids how we got into the mess that we are in here. It will remind us –

A member interjected.

Tim McCURDY: I am not after a statue. It is about making sure we have got a mask on that statue so that we can remind our grandkids who got us into this mess. Hasn't he passed the baton on well? He has passed the baton on well to the current Premier. My word, what a star pupil she is turning out to be. The same narrative, the same tired ideas and defence of the union mates – 'We'll lock in the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) and get a pipeline of jobs for the next 10 years.' She is looking after her mates there, but it is a shame she was not looking after her mates on the backbench. Her mates on the backbench need a bit of looking after because they are the people who put her there and supported her and who stand behind her, and they are the people that say the opposition is negative and the opposition is dreadful. Fear not: many of you will not get to see opposition, so you will not have to worry about having the frustration that we have sitting on this side, watching those making fools across the aisle, because you will not be in opposition. Many of you will be gone. You will be rewriting your CVs, dusting off your resumes, talking to former employers, saying, 'Could I have my job back, please, because I am no longer wanted at Spring Street.' Anyway, we will see how that goes.

But you can change that if you have got the guts to stand up to your Premier. Be like Ben.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Ovens Valley.

Tim McCURDY: Sorry. The Deputy Premier – be like him. He is prepared to stand up and not throw you under a bus. He wants to get rid of the SRL, but your Premier wants to throw you under a bus. It is bad enough when it is someone who despises you, but when it is your own leader it must be so humiliating to get thrown under that bus. The definition of getting thrown under a bus is to blame or abandon a person for selfish reasons. That sounds like the Premier. The other definition of getting thrown under a bus is to cause someone else to suffer in order to save oneself. Well, do not look now, backbenchers, but I think it is happening to you right here, right now, every day. At your margins you must walk out of here wondering, 'Will I be here next term or not if we continue on with these policies? This Premier is throwing us under a bus.'

The cost-of-living crisis – we know our power prices are absolutely killing us in regional Victoria and I expect it is the same in metropolitan Melbourne as well. Power prices that used to be \$600 to \$700 are now \$1300-plus in terms of an annual price, and I see today energy prices are due to double in the next five years. That is going to be very difficult. We have got a cost-of-living crisis now and I cannot see us getting out of it if our electricity prices are going to double in the next five years. That is because of this Allan Labor government, and certainly the federal government, and their bloody-minded attitude to have renewables at any cost. Wind turbines, solar and the battery energy storage system are free, they say. It is free energy, member for Mordialloc. It is free. I can give you the tip: it is not free. It is costing us a fortune, all of us. The Allan Labor government's infatuation with renewables certainly has turned our power bills from being affordable, viable and sustainable to excessive, unrealistic and unaffordable. But we are saving the world because we are going to put all of these renewables in. I will tell you what, if you ask the people in Dederang, who turned up in their hundreds the other night – and I really thank the five courageous councillors who voted to vote this BESS project down, because it really is not the right project in the right place. I understand we have had 795 submissions. From a town that has a pub and a corner store, there were 795 submissions to say that they do not want the BESS where it has been located. And if you need any further encouragement about that, get onto YouTube and look at Moss Landing and see what has happened in California where that BESS plant caught on fire and the damage that has done.

As I say, governments, both state and federal, are determined to get rid of coal. Let us look at coal plants around the world. In the EU itself there are 468 plants and it is building 27 more. Turkey has 56 plants and is building 93 more. South Africa have 79 plants and they are building 24 more plants. India – 589 coal plants, and they are building 446 more. China – bless their cotton socks – has 2363 coal-fired plants and is building another 1100. So that gives us a total of 3834 just in China alone, and in Australia we are going to shut down all six remaining plants to save the world. That is what will do it: we are going to save the world by shutting down our six plants.

Our energy costs have gone through the roof. Nobody is against moving to renewables, but we have to do it at a speed and a rate that is reliable so that we actually have a system where the lights are not going to go out. It is really important that we move towards renewable energy, but at the same time I would like to see the Prime Minister come good on his offer that we were going to have power prices that were \$275 cheaper. I believe he said that at the last election, and we are nearly at the next one. We do not know when it is, but I know it is just around the corner, and I can assure you that we do not have \$275 cheaper energy prices at the moment.

In the interests of being current, I have letters to the editor. There were two today in the *Wangaratta Chronicle*. One of them talks about renewable energy, and this is from Bob Simson from Oxley:

These projects are increasing the cost of electricity with the result seeing a panicked government allocating even more of your taxes to off set the higher power prices. It's ludicrous.

And he goes on to say:

The rush to renewables is putting pressure on your cost of living and also costing the nation dearly. Remember it is your tax dollar that is enabling this folly.

That is the coal.

I am running out of time. If you would like to give me an extension of time, Deputy Speaker, I would be more than happy to go on. I do not want to go into the member for Werribee's maiden speech, but I would be happy to take an extension of time. Member for Lara, if you would assist? There is silence. No, it does not sound like it is coming, so I will just keep moving.

The fire services levy is a real slap in the face to our rural communities. Farming communities pay the levy like everybody else, and it is about to be doubled, but they are also the ones who put out the fires. They are also the ones in substandard equipment as they go around to these fires, and their tax is being doubled. On top of council rates, which have gone through the roof, their fire services levy is going to get doubled. There is another article in today's paper, in the *Wangaratta Chronicle*, which I am very briefly going to touch on if I can find it. Here it is: 'Levies hike unfair on primary producers'. This is from Lachlan Heywood of Markwood. He said:

AS a farmer in the North East, I find it extremely disheartening the new proposed variable rates for the primary production fire/emergency service levy, effective July 1 ...

He went on just to say:

Local councils can't even manage their own roadside fire risks, which means farmers are essentially paying for their own service, volunteering to protect themselves and neighbours.

These are not my words. This is the community speaking. In every community I go to, people talk about the cost-of-living crisis. They talk about their energy prices, and they talk about our fire services levy. As I say, those on the government benches talk about the cost-of-living crisis as well, so we all agree there is a cost-of-living crisis. But at the end of the day we have to look at who created that cost-of-living crisis. There is no doubt: we say it lies firmly at the feet of the Allan Labor government and the policies that they have put in place to get us where we are today.

Land tax – I could talk for an hour on that. I will not. It is a tax on people who strive to do better. It is a tax on mums and dads who want to make a better life for themselves and on families and a tax on hardworking Victorians.

We can look at rental providers. Although the government benches call them landlords, they are rental providers; 71 per cent of rental providers in Victoria only have one property, and the highest number of rental providers by occupation is schoolteachers. Not very far below that are nurses. I mean, Labor is now coming after their own and taxing their own.

I will take this opportunity to wind up very quickly and to also wish the member for Werribee a good maiden speech this evening.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:52): What a way to warm up the member for Werribee's first speech coming up, just to bring up the last stocks of the matter of public importance (MPI) and to follow on from the member for Ovens Valley, who had an extraordinary contribution. He read out a stack of listed countries that have coal-fired power stations but failed to then say what on earth the coalition would do with such a thing. It reminds me of the great Liberal candidate for Frankston in 2018 who said, 'Well, we're not opposed to coal-fired power stations.' When asked by David Speers at the time who would build them, on six or seven occasions they went through 'would it be market led' or 'would it be funded by the state', and after panicking they said it would be market led. Well, guess what, those opposite – no-one is building new coal-fired power stations. When you talk about coal and renewable energy and talk that down, you have to open up about what your plans would be, and the absence from the member for Ovens Valley was astonishing – that word 'nuclear'. What is it going to be? What is the cost going to be? The impact on our state is conveniently excluded. We know that the transition to renewables is so important for cost of living in our state and for a cleaner and more inclusive energy mix in the future. So to say that that is to blame was just absolutely astonishing.

This is a group that consistently offers opposition and opposition after that – the blockers and the knockers – and no alternative policy whatsoever, and we see this across key areas. I talked about this before on the bill on housing, and you see it consistently. A generation of young Victorians are priced out of the housing market. It is nine times more expensive now to get a home. A couple of decades ago it was three times your median wage; now it is nine times. We are building more in growth corridors, but that cannot be the only answer, so 70 per cent of the growth will be in existing suburbs. This is one of the most important cost-of-living measures, and what do we get from those opposite? Block, oppose, oppose our rental reforms – never an alternative policy. They are the knockers and the blockers of policy over and over again, and do you know what it is time and time again? When you have got muscle memory of opposition, that is all you ever know. All you ever know is to oppose and not come up with any vision or any values for the future.

In this cost-of-living frame I wanted to cover off a really important topic that the Andrews and Allan governments secured in this state: free TAFE. This is a game changer for people in our community. When you think of the skills shortages that we are experiencing in Australia and Victoria at the moment, where would we be as a state and nation without the free TAFE policies targeting skilled industries with the jobs that we need so critically in our state? These are policies that support women into work and transition people back into work in the future.

Again, that free TAFE measure was opposed by those opposite and talked down. They left TAFEs on their knees for their ideological lens of absolutely smashing public vocational education. To think that people today have the opportunity to front up and get a skill and training and support now to go on to the job and career that they want, and we know that is so important to mental health and wellbeing – the skills they need and for them to be able to support their families. That is Labor values writ large. When those opposite criticise policies like that it goes to the heart of what they care about and what they prioritise in our state. When they smashed TAFE and literally put the padlocks on TAFE institutions across our state, it took a Labor government to save that and it took a Labor government to put those policies in place.

Then you come to early childhood education. Isn't it extraordinary, free kinder? It is one of the best things in our state. I was Parliamentary Secretary for Education, and one of the biggest things you can do is provide free kinder and support for our youngest Victorians. It should be a right of every single Victorian child in our area to get access to free kinder. Those opposite chastise, belittle and oppose our investment in early childhood education.

You get a consistent pattern here. We have policies that offer vision and value and create hope and aspiration for the next generation, and we see in this MPI no other visionary policies, no alternatives of what the coalition would do instead.

Bridget Vallance: It's your MPI.

Tim RICHARDSON: Instead we just see opposition and opposing consistently time and time again. The Manager of Opposition Business, who has got a hit rate on points of order of about 10 per cent at the moment, interjects ‘It’s your MPI’. That is right. You have heard vision and values from our side time and time again. You have heard the member for Pascoe Vale lead an MPI about what we are doing with cost of living. What have we heard from those opposite?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Evelyn! Member for Polwarth!

Tim RICHARDSON: Come in spinner, member for Nepean. Come in. We have got some form for you, my friend. What have we heard? We have not heard any alternative policies at all. We have not heard what those opposite would do differently.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Evelyn, this is your last warning.

Tim RICHARDSON: We have only heard them oppose, and the very simplistic, very juvenile comments of the member for Ovens Valley, who says that the cost-of-living crisis that is facing our nation is a construction of the Labor government in Victoria. Are you kidding me? The rate rises that went up in our nation, if you were to be so partisan, happened under a coalition leadership back to 2022. It has taken a Labor government that came in with inflation near 7 per cent to drive that down into the high 2 per cent range.

It has been that grind and that toil, and the political impact that that has had has been writ large. But you have to do the right things, like Labor did federally during the global financial crisis, to save jobs and to support the economy. We have done what is necessary and tried with tax relief federally and support for vulnerable people to get them through.

Sam Groth interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: What does the member for Nepean think about that? Well, he will let you know. He cannot get a question over that side. I mean, when the member for Benambra gets a question before the member for Nepean you know how far out of the stocks the member for Nepean is. When the member for Nepean has to do policy via South Australia you know how much of a heavy hitter the member for Nepean is in the Victorian shadow cabinet. We get to see this. I wish this was just a bit of a snippet on the TV cameras. When the member for Nepean brings in a point of order, you just see the look from the Leader of the Opposition: ‘Oh, here we go again. What’s he getting up for now? What’s he doing?’ It is not about you, legend. Give someone else a go, because that is what it is really about – what we saw during the Christmas and new year period when the member for Hawthorn was traded with such disdain and contempt on the edge of Christmas and new year, where they just rolled the show through. It was not about what was going differently. And the member for Sandringham was discarded – the doppelgänger for Mordialloc; we get mixed up a bit.

What was the absence in that discussion? To the credit of the member for Hawthorn, it was not a policy deficit. It was never a policy deficit for any of those on that side who got rolled. It was about power. It was about control for control’s sake and who had their name on the door in the Comcar going out. That is what it was really about. It was about power and control and not about policies. That is the form of those opposite: muscle memory in opposition, and those that are more comfortable about being on the opposition benches than being in government and doing the hard work of leadership.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, we know the member on his feet is auditioning, but he has gone nowhere near the MPI motion.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: I am a bit of a stats person. I think the 10 per cent hit rate has just gone down to 8.5 per cent. This MPI and the depth of contributions, led by the member for Pascoe Vale and those who have followed, shows our care and compassion for Victorians. We do what is necessary, we front up in a challenging environment that we see has federal factors and we know that an Allan Labor government has always got the back of Victorians each and every day. They trust us with our policies, they have endorsed our policies and we will get on and keep delivering for Victorians.

Now I hand over to the magnificent member for Werribee, John Lister.

Bronwyn Halfpenny interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Thomastown knows that you are not allowed to applaud in the chamber.

Members

Member for Werribee

Inaugural speech

The SPEAKER (18:01): The time has come for me to interrupt business for the member for Werribee to make his inaugural speech. I remind members to observe the courtesies of inaugural speeches, and I remind visitors in the galleries that no photography or filming is allowed.

John LISTER (Werribee) (18:02): ‘Werribee’ is an anglicisation of the Wadawurrung word for ‘spine’, the river running like a backbone between the three traditional owner groups of the Kulin nation. I begin tonight by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament meets, the Wurundjeri, and I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land I represent in this place, the Bunurong and Wadawurrung people. I pay my respects to their elders past and present. I would like to acknowledge Wadawurrung elder Judith Dalton-Walsh, a tireless advocate for young Aboriginal people in our community. Her words echoed in my ear whenever I had to make a big decision at school, and I guess they will ring in my ear now in this place: ‘Make sure you look after my kids.’ I recognise the Allan Labor government’s commitment to treaty and truth telling. Not only is it important for our community now but most importantly it is for those kids Aunty Judy works with every day.

Twenty-seven years ago my mum and dad were looking for a place to raise my brother and me. It was Werribee’s good schools and vibrant and diverse community that attracted them out west. They found a growing town for their growing family. I was a scholarship kid at MacKillop. I rocked a second-hand blazer until my last year at school. My grandparents bought me a new blazer when I became school captain so I could look the part. I bought a new suit for the occasion today. So many people told me, ‘Keep your options open. Apply for as many options as you can.’ However, I had my mind set on going to the University of Melbourne. The chip on my shoulder wanted to stick it to those posh kids with new blazers adorned with badges. I worked hard, got the ATAR and took the train and bus to Parkville every day.

Eventually, like so many kids I grew up with, I left Werribee. I worked in government for the former Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Water, Lisa Neville. As an adviser I worked with MPs, many of whom are now my Labor caucus colleagues. I learned the importance of being responsive and engaging with communities on what were quite difficult issues, like community safety. I finished my very extended masters of teaching degree and went and taught in Dimboola. Moving to a town 4 hours away and at the edge of the desert taught me how important a strong community is.

I have joked before that in a country town you either play football or join the fire brigade. I am rubbish at kicking a footy, so I decided on the latter. Joining the Country Fire Authority at Dimboola and later turning out at Werribee taught me the importance of being diligent and compassionate. Teachers,

tradies, the guy who owns the pub, paramedics – we all come together when the pager goes off. With the CFA not only do you get the lights and sirens but you also get a cross-section of your community there at your time of need. Thank you to the members from Werribee fire brigade who have joined us here tonight.

After some time on the edge of the desert in Dimboola I began to feel homesick. I had fallen in love with my beautiful and fiercely intelligent partner Mary, and my mind turned to building a life together somewhere. Just like Mum and Dad all those years ago, my heart was drawn to Werribee. Just like so many of my friends who had moved out, there was something that drew me back home, because that is what Werribee is – it is home. There was something so amazing about the vibrant and diverse community I had grown up in. I wanted to take my skills as a teacher and experience I had gained back to my community to help young people have the same amazing opportunities I had. Community service and social justice have always been at the heart of my upbringing.

It is at this point I would like to acknowledge someone who is not sitting in the public gallery like I wish they could be, my dad Ken. While he died over a decade ago, his spirit of serving the community lives on through my brother Tom and me. My first foray into Labor politics was in a battle on our front nature strip. To provide some context, my dad was a Liberal Party member. Yes, this was a point of contention at the dinner table. You see, I had just joined the Labor Party, so Mum had to put up with having a Julia Gillard sign on the front nature strip and some random Liberal on a sign on the opposite side. It was therefore quite a novelty last month to see my face on that sign on the front nature strip. Dad, despite our political malalignment, would have been very proud. I miss him every day, and I would give everything to have him back arguing with me over the 7 o'clock news.

You see, despite my name and face being on signs on nature strips and everything else, it was a whole army of people who helped me get to where I stand today. To my campaign team, especially Jack, Georgie and Cat, if it were not for your professionalism and excellent management, we would not have been able to run the biggest ground campaign in the history of the electorate. To the Werribee Labor branchies, volunteers and supporters, you showed that the greatest force in politics truly is people. Thank you to the union members who turned out in droves to support our campaign and demonstrate to our working families that we truly have their back. To my neighbours the members for Tarnet, Point Cook, Lara and Laverton, thank you for your guidance and support. I know we are going to keep doing big things for the west. To all of Labor caucus, for your check-ins and keeping me going when I wanted to melt in the summer heat, thank you.

To the federal member for Lalor Joanne Ryan, whether it has been advice about teaching VCE English or how to secure infrastructure funding for our town, thank you for mentoring me over the years. Teachers in Parliament truly get the job done. My thanks to all the ministers who came out to meet with people across the electorate and show that Labor listens and acts on their concerns. I would like to give a shout-out to my former employer the Minister for Education and thank him for his support. I am a proud state school teacher, and I look forward to working in a government making sure our local state schools are the best schools in Wyndham. To the Premier, I am forever grateful to you for your support and trust in me and the team. Whether it was the check-ins or getting out on the doors with me, having you there kept me going. It is truly an honour to now be a part of a government team that puts working people first. Thanks, boss.

Turning to some of the local level heads of my campaign – Jesse, Amy and Oscar Damjanovski – your friendship is something I will never take for granted, and thank you for keeping me grounded in a wild few months. To my principal Leanne Gagatsis and the staff at Wyndham Central College, thank you for your support for me personally and for all your hard work fostering good humans in our community.

Thank you to my extended family and friends, in particular the doorknocking power couple – my aunty and uncle – Judy and Michael Cain. Thank you to my brother Tom for reminding me through the campaign of why I was doing this: for working-class young people like him and his friends. I love

you, bro. I could never have achieved what I have without the unwavering support of my mum Meg. Your passion for social justice and commitment to equality for everyone in our community is something I try to emulate in what I have done. A huge thanks to my partner Mary. I know this turned our lives inside out. I owe you that holiday we had planned over summer. I love you immensely and look forward to continuing this wild journey together and continuing to build our life in Werribee.

Finally, my thanks to the people of Werribee. Every day I am in this place, I promise to be here for you – not to be an ear, but to be a voice. We have heard you loud and clear. We have done a lot, but more needs to be done, whether that is on community safety, infrastructure or helping working families facing cost-of-living pressure.

With all these thank-yous it sounds like I am done and we can go and seek refreshments and adjourn this house. However, at some stage in these speeches we outline what we hope to achieve as a member of Parliament. Throughout my career as a teacher I have sought to amplify the voices of the young people I work with. That is why, in a break from tradition, this last part of my inaugural speech is not written by me. Rather, it is written by Brodie, Jamie, Milla, Evalyn, Indi, Raquel, Manning and Ella – all students that I have taught at Wyndham Central College. The best thing I can be as a member of Parliament is their voice, and this is what they have to say:

Our community is a highly supportive place with a diverse range of cultures.

Despite what people think it is quite close to the city, with markets and festivals nearly every weekend. There are so many sports and recreational things to do.

There are a wide range of small businesses which represent everything you could want from all around the world.

Whether it's the river, coast or grassland plains – it has a natural landscape that is special.

Despite the hardships our community faces, we still prosper.

We want the people in Parliament to help us achieve our hopes and aspirations.

We want a stronger approach towards having more resources to those young people who aren't in well-off families. We want more resources for people who are struggling.

We want to keep building a safer community for people to thrive in, and where communities come together to help others in need for the better of all.

We hope that there will be more job opportunities in the area for young people.

We hope to see more support for underprivileged people in our community.

We hope that people can be comfortable to be their own person.

While it is important to grow our community, we hope to see our natural environment protected.

One day we don't want to have to tick a box on our University applications to say we are 'under-represented'.

We are proud of our home and want Parliament to do everything in their power to help us achieve these hopes and aspirations.

I am here to do this for them. I intend to seize the opportunity of amplifying their voices, ensuring the same opportunities afforded to me are not an exception to the norm but rather a path they may seek to walk.

Members applauded.

Bills

Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (18:18): The Victorian Homebuyer Fund has been so successful and the federal government have loved the idea so much that they have come up with their own scheme: Help to Buy. Staggered allocations will ensure that the Victorian Homebuyer

Fund continues to support Victorian home ownership until Help to Buy is established. This means no-one will miss out. The Victorian Homebuyer Fund will close to new applicants on 30 June 2025, when the state will transition to Help to Buy. The State Revenue Office will continue to administer existing Victorian Homebuyer Fund participants.

By adopting the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act 2024 the bill will enable Victorians to participate in the Commonwealth's new shared equity scheme. Help to Buy will replace the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, and it is expected to support 10,000 low-to-middle-income Victorians to purchase a new home over the next four years. The Victorian Homebuyers Fund paved the way for Help to Buy, which will provide even more opportunity for Victorians to buy their own home.

The Commonwealth will provide up to 40 per cent of the purchase price as an equity contribution under Help to Buy, a higher proportion than the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, in which the government has provided 25 per cent of the purchase price, or up to 35 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians. The equity contribution under Help to Buy will, in turn, reduce the overall mortgage repayments for home owners due to the shared equity scheme resulting in a lower loan amount. This will have a significant impact on the cost of living. Help to Buy also has a lower minimum deposit of 2 per cent, compared to the 5 per cent of the homebuyer fund, or 3.5 per cent for Indigenous Australian homebuyer fund applicants.

Saving a deposit is one of the biggest obstacles to getting into the property market for many Victorians. Many low and middle income earners find it difficult to save in addition to their regular living expenses, and I think that is even harder for single Victorians paying rent and utilities on their own with the cost of living going up. The lower minimum deposit will particularly help them and will help everyone with Help to Buy, and help those utilising the scheme to be able to enter a home sooner, with the typical years of putting money aside greatly reduced.

In a further expansion, the Commonwealth Help to Buy scheme includes provisions for off-the-plan and other types of new homes, which will help more Victorians into their homes but also stimulate housing in this state. It will also avoid the need for lenders mortgage insurance, an additional expense at the purchase time that many home owners do not have the savings to cover. In order to avoid mortgage insurance a 20 per cent deposit would normally be required from the borrower, which is a far cry from the 2 per cent required under the Help to Buy scheme, with no insurance premium on top. Applicants purchasing in Melbourne and Geelong are expected to be able to purchase a property for up to \$850,000 and in regional Victoria up to \$650,000.

Under the Commonwealth constitution Help to Buy cannot operate in the states unless it either refers the relevant state powers or adopts the Commonwealth legislation, and what we are doing today through this bill is adopting the Commonwealth Help to Buy Act 2024. It will mean that Help to Buy will be able to operate in Victoria and assist more hardworking Victorians into the housing market. That is why the bill is before us today, and the Allan Labor government is committed to addressing housing needs right across Victoria.

Shared equity schemes are only one part of the puzzle. We also need to build more homes to increase supply, and we have embarked on that Big Housing Build, which when completed will deliver a 10 per cent uplift in the total amount of social housing stock in Victoria. I am so proud of this investment in social and affordable housing in particular. With the help of the fabulous Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board and the advocacy of the Banksia Gardens community centre, I have been able to secure a huge \$80 million investment for 120 new homes in Banksia Gardens, the biggest investment in Broadmeadows in history. The new homes will be modern, comfortable and environmentally sustainable, and include fully accessible units for people with disabilities right in the heart of Broadmeadows, close to shops, transport services and education facilities. Construction is already underway, and it is a pleasure to watch the project take form.

Only Labor is taking real action on housing, and this social housing project is funded 50–50 between the federal and state Labor governments. With record investments in our Big Housing Build and the social housing accelerator, Labor governments are working together and delivering projects to ensure more people have a safe place to call home. Under the current Victorian homebuyer scheme you can borrow through Bank Australia, Commonwealth, Bendigo, Unity Bank and Indigenous Business Australia. I was really happy to see that there was a broad range in there, but I have the biggest Islamic population in the state, and there are different requirements for Islamic finance. I was really proud to bring in Kingsley David from MCCA Islamic Finance and Investments and my good friend Ekrem Fuldagli to talk to the Treasurer and their office about expanding the range of lenders on there. Given that this scheme is transitioning into the Commonwealth scheme, I know that they have been put in touch with the Commonwealth government to make sure there are options for everyone that are suitable for their faith and their circumstances, so I am really proud that there will be options for everyone to own their home through the shared equity scheme. In fact the shared equity scheme is very similar to the Islamic borrowing schemes, where money is only used as a medium of exchange for the purchase of assets. Shared equity is a merit of the Help to Buy scheme. There are many opportunities to engage the Commonwealth government in these discussions to ensure the Islamic finance sector is given the opportunity for its members to be able to participate in the Help to Buy funding allocations and to make sure they are not limited to non-Islamic finance.

The Allan Labor government has long recognised the issue of housing affordability in Victoria and also across Australia. It is the reason this government created the Victorian Homebuyer Fund in 2021 and announced the bold vision to deliver 800,000 new dwellings over 10 years in Victoria's housing statement in 2023. We more recently announced a number of measures to assist more people into housing, from freeing up government land to build on, to activity centres around transport hubs. The Help to Buy scheme will benefit from those measures through making affordable housing more available and closer to transport and employment centres. I commend the bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (18:25): I am pleased to rise today to contribute on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025, although I do feel as though the cart is a bit before the horse on this one. I would have thought this would be a bill, as per the reasoned amendment that the member of Brighton put forward, that we would actually discuss after the federal election. I mean, I am not Nostradamus – I do not know what is going to happen in the federal election and whether there will be a change of government or not – but to me it would have made common sense if this bill was debated at a point in time when we knew whether it was going to be a new Labor government or whether it was going to be a coalition or whether it was going to be a hung Parliament, for that matter. We just do not know, so I do feel as though we have jumped the gun here a little bit. But we are here to talk about this. As the member for Brighton stated earlier, we will obviously be voting on the reasoned amendment but we will not oppose the bill if we lose that vote. I can just imagine how that vote is going to go on Thursday. But the debate has been very wideranging today and has not just stuck to this bill. There has been a lot of discussion today about housing affordability and why housing is so much less affordable now, hence probably why these schemes come into play.

It was pointed out earlier by the member for Gippsland South that it could be contributing to the affordability of housing that we have 60 new taxes that this government has brought in and 30 of those relate to property. I said in my inaugural speech – and just on that, congratulations to the member for Werribee on his inaugural speech and getting that out of the way today – that every time you introduce another tax or charge to developers it gets passed down the line. It is very, very simple. And listen, I know there is some legislation coming forward, probably next sitting week – building legislation – and I will address that then. I know there are charges associated there on bonds, but they will get passed down the line, make no mistake about it. Every time there is another tax or charge, it gets passed down the line. We have had the Housing Industry Association say that 40 per cent of the construction cost of homes is tax related.

I listened very carefully to the member of Mordialloc today. I mean, he sort of regurgitated partly, in the matter of public importance, what he said earlier. He has obviously got very good muscle memory. He said the same thing. He said affordability now is 9 to 1. I will tell you what it was in 2014 – 4 to 1. That is a big difference. So under this government affordability of housing has blown right out, and a lot of that has to do with the taxes associated with construction and land. It is just typical of this government, which literally cannot manage money and is now taxing everybody to the hilt. This is why housing is unaffordable. This is why schemes like this probably have to exist. It is really that simple, and I do not know why the government does not understand this: if you want to get an economy moving again, you cannot tax it out of existence.

We are losing investors out of this state at a rapid rate. They are leaving in droves. They are getting out of Victoria because of the taxes and charges, and that means less housing supply. If you do not have people investing in the state in housing and in investment properties, you are going to have rental problems. You are going to have rental demand, which will drive the price up as well, because if there are no places to rent, that pushes the price up – supply and demand. We have heard it many a time in this chamber.

We have seen the government come out on its 60 precincts. This is going to go to solve the housing problem – the 60 precincts. I think it is going to house – the figure I have been hearing – 360,000 people, but then we have got the development community coming out and saying it is not viable. It is okay to come out and put something on a bit of paper and say it is what you are going to do, but if you are listening to the industry and they are saying it is not viable, you will not achieve that goal. It is really plain and simple. We have got the development community saying, ‘Well, you can create all the precincts you want; we’re not going to build them.’ Is the government going to build them? I doubt it. They do not have the money to start with. They do not have the money to do that type of development, so you have got to rely on the private sector, but the private sector is saying it is not viable.

You can announce all the precincts you want, but unless you get the development community on board it will never happen and you cannot get the development community on board when you continually tax them. To be honest, my opinion of the 60 precincts is: it is not a housing policy, it is a tax policy. People go, ‘Why is that? Why is it a tax policy?’ Because you have to rezone land. What happens when you rezone land in this state? You get hit with windfall gains tax, another tax. Where do you think that tax is going to go? It is going to go onto the price of the apartment, the unit or whatever gets built on that site. It is not a housing policy. It is a tax policy. This is why development is getting driven out of this state.

We have already heard this government say, ‘Our target is 800,000 homes over 10 years,’ but at the start it was 80,000 homes a year. Then they realised they are not going to make that, so they just changed the narrative and called it 800,000 over 10 years. Divided by 10, it is still 80,000 homes a year. In the first year you delivered just a titch over 50,000 homes. Remember this came out in September 2023, so to September 2024 you are about 26,000 homes shy of that target. I know that the next year is not going to be any better. I would guess by September 2025 that the government is going to be somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000 homes short on supply of their target. Again, it is not a target set in stone. It is someone who has come up with an idea and said, ‘80,000 sounds great. We’ll just say 80,000.’ If they actually did their research on how housing has been constructed over this state from 1990 through to today, they would know on average we only built 46,000 homes a year. They would know that the best year we ever had was in 2017, and that was 75,000 homes – before the Big Build ramped up, before they sucked all the labour out of the domestic construction industry and put it into infrastructure. They would know that affordability back then was a lot better because, when they put everything on the line at once, all the prices went up. Again, supply and demand – it is a pretty easy rule to follow.

In saying that, how are we going to achieve any targets when today, as opposed to 18 months ago, I think we have nearly 800 less builders in this state. They have gone into liquidation. They are gone,

simple as that. They have left the industry or they have gone into liquidation – nearly 800 less builders. Australia-wide, 28 per cent of liquidations are builders, and Victoria is the highest contributor to that. Not only that, today as opposed to 12 months ago, we have over 21,000 less tradies. The government can get up here and spruik to me all they want about what they are going to do – ‘We’re going to set this figure here and that figure there’ – but it is all a load of rubbish. It cannot be achieved. Quite frankly, the government might not even be aware of this, so I am going to educate the government on what is happening at the moment on the Big Build projects, the ones that are finished up. The people who come off those Big Build projects, the big infrastructure projects, are not staying in Victoria; they are going north. They are chasing the money. They are going to Queensland because Queensland is gearing up for the Olympic Games. They are doing the big infrastructure projects.

This is the problem this government has created in this state. You have got a paddle-pop person earning \$200,000 a year. He could have been an ex-tradie. Do you think he is going to go back and build a house, build a frame, do a fix-out, do a rough-in, do eaves or whatever for 1500 bucks a week? No; he will chase the money. Good on him. I would do the same if I still had the nail bag on. Why wouldn’t I? But this is the problem the government has created. The problem is we have a massive housing shortage; we do not have the tradies to fix it and we do not have the builders to fix it. The member for Mordialloc can get up and spruik all he wants and call us blockers, and I can tell you now the blockers on that side are the Minister for Planning and the new Minister for Local Government, who blocked development in his electorate. Do not get up there and spruik to us about blocking. The fact of the matter is the government has created this mess. I have just gone through the affordability, how much it has gone up from 2014 to now, and quite frankly this bill is very much the cart before the horse. Wait till the election and then put the bill in.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (18:35): I am pleased to rise to contribute on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. I want to start off by saying everyone should have the right to safe, secure and affordable housing. We know that. On this side of the chamber we know that very well, which is why we are looking at whatever we can do in terms of providing more housing in our communities. We know the challenges. We know that we have to look at different options for people to buy their homes but also to have housing on the ground, and a lot of the work that we have done over the last couple of years has led to this ability to work through what the housing needs are. Nostradamus over there that we have just heard speak – we will see if his predictions come true. That is all I will say. The reason that those opposite have ranted and raved on this bill today is because they have nothing to offer. They did not offer anything during the time that they were in government and they are not offering anything now.

As I said, this government is about ensuring that we are working to provide the housing that is necessary for everyone in our community. I think it is really important that we look at the different options, and the Help to Buy scheme is one of those options. It was originally developed here in Victoria and the Commonwealth has now taken it on, which is what this bill is about. It is a shared equity scheme which has been modelled on the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, so of course it is important that we support this bill. The fact is that during the previous federal Liberal government they had no interest in housing. They had no interest in providing housing to our communities. This Labor government in previous terms developed this equity scheme for Victorian homebuyers, so this legislation actually allows for that to continue as a nationwide shared equity program. Victoria has been a national leader in helping young Victorians access their first home. What this bill provides is amazing. I know many in my community are really looking forward to being able to apply for this homebuyer fund because it means that they will get into housing. They will get into secure, affordable housing that they would not otherwise be able to achieve, so this is really important for them.

Under the Commonwealth constitution Help to Buy cannot operate in a state unless it either refers the relevant state powers or adopts the Commonwealth legislation. That is why this Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025 adopts the Commonwealth’s Help to Buy Act 2024. It means Help to Buy will be able to operate in Victoria and assist more hardworking Victorians into the housing

market. Under the Commonwealth Help to Buy scheme, Housing Australia will make financial contributions to the purchase of residential properties in exchange for an equity share in those properties. The amendment reference in this bill is a specific and limited referral of power to the Commonwealth Parliament, and it is only for the purpose of the maintenance and operation of the Help to Buy scheme. Without this, any future amendments would not apply in Victoria, which would obviously be impractical and could potentially prevent Victorians from accessing future benefits under the scheme.

The bill will also make minor amendments to the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000 and the Land Tax Act 2005 to clarify that the Commonwealth's Help to Buy scheme should be treated the same way that the Victorian Homebuyer Fund was under those pieces of legislation. The Commonwealth will offer an equity contribution of up to 40 per cent of the purchase price for new homes and up to 30 per cent for existing homes. Eligible Victorians will only need a 2 per cent deposit to enter the scheme. This is a real game changer for families in our communities. It is going to make such a difference for them to achieve that home ownership.

Applicants purchasing in Melbourne and Geelong are expected to be able to purchase a property up to \$850,000 and in regional Victoria \$650,000, so it is a huge difference to trying to save that deposit to get into a home when you have only got to provide a 2 per cent deposit to be able to buy a home in Geelong, for example, at about \$850,000, which would get you a very nice home.

The program directions will sit alongside the Help to Buy act and will assist Housing Australia with the delivery of the scheme. The program directions will contain details of the scheme, including the scheme's eligibility criteria and obligations on participants. As I said earlier, looking at all forms of housing opportunities is something this government has been doing over a long period of time, and I am very proud that we have been able to do that, and supporting this bill is a part of that.

In Geelong, yes, there are many challenges around getting into the housing market, whether it be private rental or home ownership. We know those challenges are there, which is exactly why we are doing something about it, as opposed to those opposite, who scream and rant but actually do not present any policies as to what they are going to do if they ever achieve government. This is really important for us, and I know it is important in Geelong.

As I said, there are housing challenges there. We just recently announced 60 new homes to be built in Geelong, in Herne Hill. Sixty homes will make such a difference to so many families, and a portion of those will be social housing. They are in a fantastic community around Herne Hill. These are the sorts of things that this government is doing constantly. This is not just a once-off announcement. We have had hundreds of homes either built or purchased in Geelong over recent years to ensure that we are making a difference in our community, and in Geelong we certainly are. I know that around the state there are many other members that are experiencing the same boosts in their community.

Yes, it is very challenging. Yes, it is very difficult to continue to keep up with the housing demand, but Plan Victoria has dealt with a lot of those planning issues and are looking at what we need to do over the next 30 to 50 years to actually house the number of people that we need to house. In Geelong 128,000 houses are required over that period, so we know that it is challenging, but we are working at it. We are actually delivering on the ground and providing these houses to our communities, including mine, to try and address those housing challenges that we have.

This bill is about buying more homes, and many of them of course will be existing homes and some of them will be newly built homes. But of course shared equity schemes are only one side of housing affordability. We also need to build more homes to increase supply, which is what we have been talking about in Plan Victoria. That is why we have embarked on the Big Housing Build, which when completed will deliver a 10 per cent uplift in the total number of social housing stock in Victoria, delivering 12,000 social housing homes.

Now, as someone who grew up in social housing – and I am sure there are many on our side of the chamber that grew up in social housing or public housing –

Cindy McLeish: And ours.

Chris COUZENS: I was about to say that, Cindy. I am sure there are those that had that benefit on the opposite side. So we should not forget the advantages that we had of being able to live and grow up in public housing or social housing. It is important that we continue to offer those opportunities to young families now who are really totally reliant on social housing and public housing to be able to take care of their families. This really is an important bill. I know that in my community they are excited about this opportunity. There will be applications going in from my community, and they will be able to go out and look at purchasing a house, and in most areas of Geelong they would be able to purchase a house at \$850,000. So I know there is great excitement, and I am really looking forward to the commencement of this program. I commend the bill to the house.

Chris CREWHER (Mornington) (18:45): I rise today to speak on the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025. Before I do so I would also like to join with colleagues across this chamber in acknowledging the member for Werribee and their maiden speech just now. I note that he mentioned he lived for a while in Dimboola and did not play footy there, but one of my fondest memories when growing up that I mentioned to him was actually beating Dimboola in a grand final. So, sorry, Dimboola.

Going to the bill, this bill adopts the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act 2024 to enable the Commonwealth to establish and operate its shared equity scheme Help to Buy in Victoria. The bill also makes amendments to other legislation to clarify the interaction between Help to Buy and certain Victorian entitlements, concessions and schemes available to homebuyers. In relation to this bill today I will talk about (1) the reduction in access for Victorian homebuyers, (2) the Victorian Labor government's poor approach to the housing crisis and (3) other areas of concern.

On the first element, the reduction in access for Victorian homebuyers, the Parliamentary Budget Office estimates that approximately 30 per cent of those eligible under the current Victorian Homebuyer Fund would lose access. That is 668,800 Victorians who are eligible under the Victorian homebuyer scheme who will lose access once the Help to Buy scheme comes in, and they will lose access because the Victorian government announced that they will close the homebuyer scheme upon the Help to Buy scheme coming into force. Also, on income, in terms of single income this is capped at \$90,000 under the Help to Buy scheme versus about \$135,000 under the state scheme. For joint applications you currently have a threshold of income of about \$216,000, which will be reduced to \$120,000 under the Help to Buy scheme. House price thresholds as well are being reduced by 10.5 per cent to \$850,000 in Melbourne and Geelong and in regional areas they are down by 7.1 per cent to \$650,000. As well this will impact, as I mentioned, low-income households particularly because less householders in Victoria will have access under this new scheme as compared with the state scheme. So while the Victorian Labor government might save on their budget, this will come at a cost to Victorians.

Secondly, I want to outline and discuss the Victorian government's poor approach to this housing crisis. This Help to Buy scheme does little to resolve the housing crisis, particularly, as I mentioned, as it replaces the current scheme, which gives more access than under this new Help to Buy scheme. Just some examples of this housing crisis include, for example, that the Mornington Peninsula has the fourth-highest level of homelessness in the state. In addition, we have one crisis accommodation, being the Ranch in Mornington, which I was told in the last couple of weeks will very likely close within six months, so we will be in a situation of having no crisis accommodation on the peninsula, despite the massive amount of people who are needing crisis accommodation, who are needing public housing and who are experiencing homelessness.

We also have an Allan Labor government who are obsessed with things like height approvals and density in metro areas, but who are doing little to nothing to tackle structural challenges holding back development. These sorts of things will only grow urbanisation, not resolve the housing crisis.

And if we put it in context, we have increased taxes. We have, as mentioned by the member for Narracan before, 30 new or increased taxes related to property, and these sorts of taxes are making the housing crisis worse. They are making it hard for new builds and they are increasing rental costs and thus the rents themselves. And as the member for Narracan also mentioned, schemes like these exist and need to be expanded because we do have a situation where you cannot tax to prosperity in Victoria, and the housing crisis is therefore becoming worse and worse.

Another aspect as well is that there has not been a single non-build-to-rent residential tower construction in Melbourne over the past three years. As well, the cost of construction has gone up, we have a skilled worker shortage and there is a lack of developer incentive in Victoria under this Labor government. The focus should instead be on englobo land in outer suburbs and regional areas, which are large pieces of land which are identified for future subdivision. This helps to decentralise and grow our regional centres and means that people can live in and move into houses which are often cheaper and often give community support, particularly in country areas. These days people can often work from anywhere, particularly with the internet, if they are in jobs that enable them to do so.

Instead, as I mentioned before, with urbanisation we have a government that is overly focused on our urban centres and forgetting about our outer suburbs and regional areas, including places like the Mornington Peninsula. That goes to, for example, rail projects as well like the Suburban Rail Loop versus, say, the scrapping of things like Baxter rail – which was funded under the federal government but then they scrapped their funding at the federal level because of the lack of state support – or places like Mildura, which is the largest population centre in the whole of Victoria if not Australia with no passenger rail services.

Let us go to some other areas of concern as well. One other area of concern with this bill is that there are divergent federal major party platforms and positions on this issue. The federal Liberals have committed to repealing this Help to Buy scheme if elected, and only federal Labor have committed to it. Who knows what the teals will do if they help Labor form government in a hung parliament situation. As well as that, the eligibility parameters are in draft form and not finalised. There has also been a lack of consultation, and industry has had either no or insufficient time to provide feedback. However, this lack of consultation has been dismissed as being because the Commonwealth has prohibited states from external consultation.

I will go into the three points once again in relation to this bill. As I mentioned, we have a reduction in access for Victorian homebuyers. We also have the Victorian government's poor continued approach to the housing crisis, and as I mentioned that crisis continues in places like the Mornington Peninsula, where we have the fourth highest level of homelessness in the state. And there are many other areas of concern. That is why the Victorian opposition, as enunciated by the member for Brighton, is moving a reasoned amendment to this bill. This reasoned amendment says:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words ' , noting the contrasting position of the two major federal political parties on this policy, this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the outcome of the federal election is determined.'

Indeed it will be a waste of time for this bill to go ahead if this Help to Buy scheme is then abolished under a federal Liberal government. This bill is premature and a waste of time for this house when we could be discussing many other things. This is the sort of bill that should be discussed and debated after the federal election under, say, a Labor government or a minority Labor government in a hung parliament situation where we know that this Help to Buy scheme will definitely proceed.

As I mentioned, the Labor government continues to fail in housing, they continue to fail in homelessness and they continue to fail in providing sufficient social housing, including public housing,

where we have a waiting list of over 63,000. If I am not wrong, I believe in 2014 the waiting list was about 9000 for public housing. It has now, as I mentioned, gone up to around 63,000, which is an atrocious situation after 10 years of this Labor government.

This Labor government talks the talk but does not walk the walk when it comes to actually delivering on some of its promises in the housing space. I call on the Labor government to reconsider what they are doing in the housing space and to reconsider moving this bill this week and in subsequent weeks, because literally it is a waste of time. We could be actually going into caretaker mode even this weekend, potentially with a 12 April election. So let us talk about bills that would actually have an impact instead of wasting our time.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (18:55): I am pleased to have the opportunity to make what will be a reasonably short contribution this evening to this important bill, which of course goes to many of the provisions around housing and housing affordability, which has been very well canvassed in other speeches.

Before I go to what is contained in the bill before the house, I do wish to, as others have done, acknowledge the outstanding inaugural contribution from the member for Werribee. We got a sense from the new member for Werribee about his values, an understanding about what he will bring to this place and of course an understanding as he read them into his contribution of the views and wishes of local communities within his electorate – with some students, I believe – and made reference to livability and made reference to providing the very best community that can be achieved, which are of course things that I know he will bring to this place. But most importantly we understand that this side of the house will continue, both through this legislation and everything we do right across all portfolio areas, to ensure that we are working with Victorians, whether you live in a growth corridor, like I do and like the member for Werribee does, or indeed any part of our great state, to make sure that the provisions are of course provided and give people an opportunity to have a safe roof over their head.

I listened really intently to the fantastic contribution from the member for Geelong. There is a sense that through the Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025, by adopting the Commonwealth's Help to Buy Act 2024, this bill of course enables Victorians to participate in the Commonwealth's new shared equity scheme. Help to Buy will replace the Victorian Homebuyer Fund and is expected to support 10,000 low to middle income Victorians to purchase a home over the next four years. Victorians participating in the Commonwealth's Help to Buy program will benefit from lower ongoing repayments from a smaller home loan as the Commonwealth will share the capital costs of purchasing a home.

This has been I think well covered by speakers through the journey this afternoon, but what is astounding – and it should not, but continues to surprise me – is of course the continued blocking, the stopping, the deflecting, the finding any which way to pull opportunities apart and to in essence block opportunities for those wishing to get a start in their local community. This comes to one of the most important decisions and opportunities that people within local communities will have, which is that everybody should have a safe roof over their head. Making sure that we are providing initiatives and policies, projects and programs that can deliver this is of course a great responsibility of our government.

What this legislation does, of course, is work with the Commonwealth, and finally there is a partner in Canberra that is willing to tackle these matters and willing to find our great state on the map. What we want to do is ensure that we are continuing to invest and continuing to build all of those supports around what will be our housing targets. They have been thoroughly identified both through the statement and all of the work that has been done particularly over the last 12 to 18 months, and this is

another important piece of the puzzle when it comes to supporting those within communities who need that support. I happily commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Caulfield electorate community safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:00): (1041) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Police, and the action that I seek is that the minister meet with a number of my traders in the areas of Glen Huntly, Balaclava, St Kilda, Elsternwick and Ormond to talk about some of the antisocial behaviour and crime that is happening in those areas that is impacting local trade but also the safety of those that live around it. We have a real issue in terms of these precincts. These precincts, as we know, are quite often the heart and soul of our community. They are places that provide a really good opportunity for obviously great small business options. But they are also places for people to congregate and to meet others, and they really do provide an element of safety, of a place to go. But unfortunately at the moment that is not happening in my electorate of Caulfield.

We have seen the likes of Jinny from Glen Huntly who runs a traders group there, who shared with me recently disturbing footage of a man wielding a machete attempting to break into a local business, Burger Bliss. Jinny herself and the local owner of Swagath Grand, an Indian restaurant, were verbally and physically assaulted by a known drug-affected individual in this area. They are two issues that have happened just recently in Glen Huntly. I also met with a local resident there that has been attacked time and time again, both physically and verbally. In Carlisle Street James Olliver is one of the owners of Las Chicas and has been in that business for probably 19 years – a great institution right next to Balaclava station. He has seen many things come and go. What he never would have thought he would see was an elderly lady punched in the face walking past that particular shop. Another individual had climbed up onto the train station and was throwing bricks into oncoming traffic. This is something that is happening every single day. Rocco of the Acland Street traders has raised concerns about drug camps forming outside the area, deterring families and shoppers from visiting the precinct. He has witnessed individuals openly dealing and injecting drugs in front of customers and reported multiple cases of bike theft.

This is all happening here on our streets. It is happening every day. It is crime that we are seeing impacting on communities. It has got to be fixed. We need a resolution. Victoria Police are doing a fantastic job. They are under-resourced; 1100 police need to be recruited. But we also need the minister to come and talk to these traders and find out firsthand what crime prevention strategies can be implemented in these neighbourhoods so we can get the shops feeling safe, the traders feeling safe and, importantly, the residents who live around the area feeling safe as well.

Greenvale electorate bus services

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (19:03): (1042) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek from the minister is for the minister to meet with me to discuss the progress of bus route 543, an extension project which my community is incredibly excited about. This bus route currently extends from Roxburgh Park station through Greenvale to Greenvale West. Thanks to this significant new investment from the Allan Labor government, it will be extended to Craigieburn Central, connecting Greenvale North communities to public transport for the very first time.

Since my election in 2022 I have been working tirelessly alongside members of the Greenvale community to advocate for better public transport in my electorate. The feedback from residents has been central to this advocacy. I again want to thank every one of them for their great input. Thanks to

this \$13.1 million investment by this government, I am delighted that so many across Greenvale will benefit from this bus route extension and that families will have access to better public transport closer to home, indeed often for the very first time. It is a major new transport infrastructure project that will ensure better access to schools, work, shops and other services while also contributing to less congestion on our roads. My office and I have been contacted by many constituents since the announcement of this great investment, and I know that we are all looking forward to the commencement of this extended bus route. It is real action that will have a great impact on the missing gap in this route. I look forward to keeping my community fully informed about this exciting investment and look forward to meeting with minister.

Shepparton rail line

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:04): (1043) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit the Shepparton railway station to see why funding is desperately needed to upgrade the existing car park. Currently there are just 45 car parks at the station, and with only five return services a day it is still virtually impossible to get a car park. Surrounding streets are becoming clogged with cars as people park within walking distance of the station. In the evening this is a safety risk, with little street lighting and uneven road and path surfaces.

The stage 3 line upgrade, which was due to be completed in 2023, has promised nine return weekday services. When it is eventually delivered, the demand on the station's infrastructure will be impossible to accommodate with the existing car park. At the moment many locals will drive to Seymour and park there, where there are more regular services, when travelling to Melbourne. But once the additional weekday services are finally delivered to Shepparton, these commuters are likely to board at the Shepparton station and will need additional parking. My constituents have raised this matter and are frustrated with the lack of car parks. I have also been contacted about the overcrowded and unsafe trains, with some passengers not able to get a seat – again, a sign of the increased patronage. Locals should not have their narrow streets clogged by parked cars all day and nor should surrounding traders have their car parks used by commuters just because of the substandard facilities at the station. Growing regional communities need to be able to travel safely and get a car park. The Shepp line upgrade needs an adequate car park, and I ask the minister to visit the Shepparton station and see firsthand why the car park upgrade is urgently needed.

Earth Resources Regulator

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:06): (1044) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the Earth Resources Regulator to meet with the Cardinia Shire Council about the regulation of sand quarries in the area. Last year the regulator and the minister joined me to host a local forum to answer questions from the community about how quarries are regulated and managed, whether it be environmental protections, noise and dust or rehabilitation. Work is currently underway to refine the proposed strategic extractive resource area, following community consultation last year. The SERAs identify areas that are most suitable for future quarry development and guide industry investment away from conflicting areas. They consider local environmental and cultural heritage values, existing land uses and access to transport networks when identifying areas to ensure any potential land-use conflicts can be avoided. This gives both communities and industry important clarity about where resources may be developed in the future. The local council also have a role to play to ensure that the planning around existing and future quarries meets the needs of local communities, particularly when it comes to roads and transport links for these quarries. A meeting with the Earth Resources Regulator will help to ensure coordination between state and local governments.

Wandin North Primary School

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:07): (1045) Wandin North Primary School is a fantastic local primary school in my electorate, getting ready for their harvest market in a few weeks time. I am very

excited to again attend and support this harvest market. However, the school's infrastructure consists entirely of old portable classrooms that are no longer fit for purpose for the more than 300 students who attend the school, meaning students and teachers do not have the 21st-century learning facilities they deserve, and there is not adequate access for students with a disability. It is just more evidence that this state Labor government penalises students based on their postcodes. Despite being in power for 10 years, the Labor government have failed to properly plan and upgrade their own schools and assets due to their inability to manage the state's finances.

The main concern I wish to raise today is that there is no fit-for-purpose shelter-in-place building that can adequately house all the students and teachers at Wandin North Primary School in times of emergency – something that, unfortunately, in our community in the Yarra Valley we do have to be prepared for. Principal Paul Bailey has shown me the Building the Education Revolution building that is the school's current nominated shelter-in-place, which is the only building that can fit all Wandin North Primary School students and teachers in the one place – at a squeeze. But in this BER there is no running water and no toilet, making it not satisfactory or suitable should there actually be an emergency such as a bushfire or severe storm that the school community needs to be able to shelter from.

So the action I seek from the Minister for Education is to allocate sufficient funding in the upcoming state budget to build a new permanent building for Wandin North Primary School for STEM and arts, which would double as an actual fit-for-purpose shelter-in-place for this school, with running water and toilets. That is something that these students, their families and teachers deserve: a safe place with running water and a toilet, where they can shelter in times of emergency, and a new 21st-century modern learning environment for STEM and arts.

This new building should replace the two 50-year-old portables – that would be a sensible solution that our community hopes this government will finally listen to. It should not matter what these students' postcodes are or the electorate in which they reside and go to school. The minister talks the talk. Now it is time for him to walk the walk. It is time for the state government, for the minister and for his education department to take this action and replace at the very least the two 50-year-old portables with a fully funded, modern and fit-for-purpose permanent STEM, arts and shelter-in-place building for Wandin North Primary School and the students there. The Victorian Liberals listened. We pledged \$6.6 million for new permanent buildings at Wandin North Primary before the 2022 election, but this Labor government has failed to match this. At the upcoming state budget the minister has a chance to fix it.

Lalor United Sloga Football Club

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (19:10): (1046) My adjournment question is for the Minister for Community Sport. The Lalor United Sloga Football Club has been playing in the electorate of Thomastown for the last 46 years. The club has provided great sporting opportunities for children and young people throughout this time, and we all know how important physical activity is and also the sense of belonging that team sport gives us. This year the club is supporting the sporting dreams of over 250 young people as well as a strong senior men's team. Our Allan Labor government has backed this club to grow, providing funds for FIFA-standard lighting that increases capacity and allows training and games to be held every night during the season. However, this year they have not had enough women to field a seniors team, so the club would like the minister to join with me in meeting the Lalor United Sloga club to look at the new facilities as well as to discuss ways to attract more women to the club.

Maroondah Hospital

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (19:12): (1047) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update to my community on the progress of the Maroondah Hospital redevelopment. Maroondah Hospital has been a cornerstone of health care in Melbourne's eastern suburbs for decades, but its facilities are no longer

fit for purpose. It serves a rapidly growing and ageing population, yet its infrastructure is failing to keep up with demand. Patients, families and frontline health workers are feeling the strain every day. The need for an upgrade is urgent.

Now, in 2018 the government promised a new emergency department at Maroondah, and it was not delivered. Then in 2022 they committed to a full redevelopment and expansion of the hospital. The progress on this, if in fact there has been any, remains a mystery. At the time of the announcement Dan Andrews also proposed the most tin-eared and tone-deaf of new names, the Queen Elizabeth II hospital. This represents a modern-day erasure of Indigenous heritage – just gobsmacking. Indeed it was decried privately at the time by the member for Dandenong as being absolutely incredible that no-one inside the Premier's private office even realised that Maroondah was an Indigenous word.

The proposed redevelopment should provide a modern, world-class facility capable of meeting the growing needs of our community, but last year's state budget buried the project within the Hospital Infrastructure Delivery Fund alongside six other hospitals. It has remained bogged down in the planning stage ever since. A line item in the budget is a long, long way from shovels in the ground. The community is still waiting for a clear timeline and for certainty about when this long-promised redevelopment will actually begin. This lack of transparency is completely unacceptable. The demand for quality health care in the east is only accelerating, and the longer the government delays, the greater the impact on patients and hardworking hospital staff. We cannot allow this to become another project that is continually pushed off into the never-never while families in my community are left behind. That is why I urge the minister to urgently provide a clear update on the progress of the Maroondah rebuild and confirm when we can expect work to begin so that this vital project is delivered as soon as possible for our community. The people of this region have been promised a hospital that meets their needs. It is time for the government to deliver.

Mount Rowan Secondary College

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:14): (1048) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Wendouree to officially open the new classrooms and facilities at Mount Rowan Secondary College. Mount Rowan college is an outstanding school in my electorate with a fantastic principal, incredible teachers, amazing support staff and more than 700 wonderful students. Since 2015 our government, the Labor government, has invested more than \$21 million at Mount Rowan college, ensuring that the students and staff have the facilities they need and deserve. We have refurbished the performing arts facilities, the cafe, classrooms and the VCE centre. We have also upgraded and modernised the old administration areas, completed landscaping work, including irrigation and external lighting poles, and resurfaced the existing courts.

With increasing enrolments and a growing school, I was delighted that in the 2022 Victorian budget \$6.114 million was announced to build new classrooms for specialist subjects of food technology, science and art, as well as a multipurpose room. I had the opportunity to walk through the new building at the end of last year before the students moved in, and it looks amazing. The learning spaces are bright and light, and the food and technology spaces are first class. I wish I had had facilities like this when I was a student, as well as when I was a teacher. Mount Rowan college is emblematic of our government's approach to teaching and learning in the Education State. That is why I look forward to welcoming the Minister for Education to Wendouree to visit Mount Rowan college and to introduce him to the amazing students and staff.

Bayside early childhood education and care

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (19:15): (1049) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Premier to step in and ensure the ongoing viability of kindergartens in Bayside, because the state Labor government's kindergarten policy is having a detrimental effect upon them. The first years of life are important for learning and development. Early learning leads to enhanced lifelong opportunities. Sessional kindergarten offers quality preschool education for both three- and

four-year-old children, but in Bayside our kindergartens face an uncertain future. That is why our community kindergartens now meet as a community kindergarten summit. The summit is an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing Bayside kindergartens, including the shortfall in free kinder funding, with one kindergarten calling out that the implementation of free kinder has put significant financial strain on many kindergartens across the Bayside area.

The summit is also an opportunity for them to raise any other concerns the kindergartens in our community may have. At its most recent February meeting the kindergartens met to talk about the future viability of services in Bayside. That discussion included the need for council to be proactive in its community communications, including the advertising of kindergarten open days and the need for council to better strategically plan. To ensure that the community has access to long-term, high-quality services and assets, council will need to improve their delivery of infrastructure upgrades and improve their long-term strategic planning. That work must be done in partnership with our kindergarten network.

The group also discussed the importance of a sustainable funding model. Only adequate funding will ensure that our kindergartens continue to provide high-quality services. For Melbourne kinders the cost of rent and overheads is greater than the government's funding model, and by blocking providers from seeking support from parents to fill the shortfall Labor is risking the medium-term viability of quality Melbourne kindergarten providers. This is an issue that is felt across Melbourne, not just Bayside. As one kindergarten said, 'We continue to be in a negative cash position due to the Victorian state government's free kinder program. It is unbecoming of a state government supported kindergarten to ask for donations to survive.'

Although the government provided initial transition funding in the first year and a half payment in the second, that funding has not fixed the underlying problem. Premier, minister after minister has ignored this genuine issue threatening kindergartens in Melbourne and responded with the same copy-and-paste letter to every kindergarten that has raised it. Will you help fix it?

Community services sector

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:18): (1050) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the work the Victorian government is doing to support workers across our mental health, social services and community services sector. As the local member for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West but also someone who is proudly married to a long-time former community social worker – my wife Anna Owens, who previously worked for the department of justice in Corrections Victoria, including Dame Phyllis women's prison and the courts; VACRO, the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders; Child Protection Society; and VincentCare in Glenroy – I am committed to doing everything I can to continue supporting and advocating for our incredible local health, wellbeing and community social sector workers.

I am so proud to also represent a community that is home to some of the highest proportions of people, mainly women, who work in our social services sector. Merri-bek is home to 12,800 such workers, who make up almost 14 per cent of our local workforce, with many working across Merri community health, VincentCare, the Smith Family, Melbourne City Mission, Women's Housing Limited, Merri Outreach Support Service and many other organisations. In celebration of International Women's Day for 2025 I would like to thank all of our incredibly hardworking members in these critically important sectors. In doing so I particularly acknowledge the selfless members of the Health and Community Services Union, HACSU, who every single day help serve and support some of our most vulnerable community members across Victoria.

The origins of HACSU can be traced back to April 1911, when it was originally registered as the Hospital and Asylum Attendants and Employees' Union. HACSU has continued to evolve ever since, with its commitment to advocating for the rights and wellbeing of healthcare workers always remaining steadfast and unwavering to ensure a strong and united voice for its members. Today

HACSU proudly represents over 12,500 members across mental health, disability and drug and alcohol services through a range of roles such as nurses, allied health professionals, lived experience workers, disability support workers, program support workers, case administration workers and drug, alcohol and other substances support workers across Victoria, including our northern regions, and the member for Broadmeadows is here. HACSU's members work across the Royal Melbourne precinct, Austin Health, Northern Health, Headspace, Origin Healthcare, Western Health, Peninsula Health, Barwon Health, Grampians Health, Monash Health, Eastern Health, Aruma Disability Services and Scope Australia.

As identified through the landmark Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, we know there is significant more reform required to continue helping our mental health and community workforce. The facts sadly speak for themselves. One in four Victorian health and community service workers has experienced work-related gendered violence, including sexual harassment. Seventy per cent have reported aggression, violence or abuse coming from patients. With women making up 78 per cent of the Victorian health and disability workforce, we have to do better. In this respect I draw the house's attention to recommendation 16 of the royal commission, which was that the Victorian government needs to promote good mental health in workplaces, address workplace barriers to good mental health, promote inclusive workplaces that are free from discrimination and stigma, and sponsor industry-based trials that demonstrate safer workplaces. In this regard HACSU was previously a recipient of the WorkSafe WorkWell Respect funding program that did a great job in this space.

Responses

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:21): The member for Caulfield sought for the Minister for Police to come to his electorate and listen to small business owners regarding the effects of crime in his community. The member for Greenvale called on the Minister for Public and Active Transport to meet with him regarding new bus route 543. The member for Shepparton asked the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to visit the Shepparton train station and understand the community's needs regarding parking. The member for Bass called on the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that she sought was for the Earth Resources Regulator to meet with the Bass Coast Council.

The member for Evelyn had an ask for the Minister for Education. The action that she sought was that he fund a new STEM building for Wandin North Primary School in this year's state budget. The member for Thomastown had an ask for the Minister for Community Sport, seeking that the minister visit the Lalor United Sloga Football Club to see their new infrastructure and discuss how to recruit more female players. The member for Ringwood had an ask for the Minister for Health Infrastructure, and the action that he sought was for her to give him an update regarding the Maroondah Hospital redevelopment.

The member for Wendouree had an action for the Minister for Education, asking him to come to visit and open the new classrooms at Mount Rowan Secondary College. The member for Brighton had an ask for the Premier, and the action he sought was for her to step in and ensure the viability of kindergartens in his community. The member for Pascoe Vale had an action for the Minister for Mental Health. He sought an update on the supports for workers in the health and community sector.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:23 pm.