

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 19 March 2025**



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**Wednesday 19 March 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986 – Minister’s certificate of 16 March 2025 to not require the service of a notice of intention to acquire land, under section 7 of the Act.

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.***Motions***Energy policy**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Honourable David Davis for making a factually incorrect and grossly misleading assertion about the closure of the Yallourn power station in his adjournment matter on Tuesday 18 March 2025 and notes that:

- (1) Mr Davis has no understanding of how the energy system works;
- (2) the only policy idea Mr Davis has proposed to his shadow cabinet is for expensive, toxic nuclear power;
- (3) the happiest the Victorian Liberals get is when they can talk down renewable energy, and it is only them who want to extend expensive unreliable fossil fuels;
- (4) the Victorian Liberals are on the side of the big energy companies and put their profits ahead of Victorian households and small businesses; and
- (5) the Allan Labor government is delivering cheaper renewable energy with the lowest power prices in the country.

**Leave refused.***Members statements***North-Eastern Metropolitan Region multicultural events**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:39): From longstanding traditions to new celebrations, the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region is home to a vibrant array of community and cultural festivals. Last Sunday my team and I proudly hosted a stall at the lively Celebrate Mooroolbark Festival. Since I was first elected I have attended every festival, and this annual event embodies the spirit and creativity of the Mooroolbark community, featuring local arts and crafts, community organisations, diverse food stalls and live performances, including a traditional Chin dance. Not even the wet weather could dampen the vibes at Mooroolbark last weekend.

This previous Sunday I also had the honour of representing the Premier, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the Minister for Small Business and Employment at the inaugural Manningham Asian Cultural Festival in East Doncaster. Organised by the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse in collaboration with the Jackson Court Traders Association and Manningham City Council, this event showcased the rich cultural diversity of the north-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Alongside an impressive array of local businesses and delicious cuisine, the festival featured inspiring Chinese cultural performances.

Looking ahead to next Sunday Croydon will come alive with the sounds and sights of the Scottish Highlands as it hosts the Melbourne Highland Games and Celtic Festival, a traditional gathering with a modern twist. The celebration of Scottish and Celtic heritage will feature athletic feats, dance and instrumental performances honouring the rich cultural roots of many Australians. These festivals not only bring our communities together but also celebrate the diverse cultures that make the North-Eastern Metro Region so unique.

### **Gippsland swimming championships**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (09:41): We know that throughout the pandemic and its closure of many activities swimming pools were closed and swimming lessons could not be conducted. We also know that recently there have been media reports and reviews that students and young people are now not swimming or not swimming as capably as they could. I would like to throw my support behind and congratulate the Gippsland swimming championships, which were run on the weekend in Warragul, and applaud all of the parents, the participants, the coaches, the trainers and of course the wonderful young people who do so well across our regions, from the Bass Coast and Leongatha, the Warragul and Sale swim clubs and of course the mighty Traralgon swim club that often brings home the trophies. But in a broader context, in the unfortunate light of many drownings that we have seen across our Gippsland region, the importance and vitality of learning to swim is not only an enjoyable skill but a life-saving skill, and I appreciate all of the work of our regional parents and clubs and what they have achieved.

### **International Women's Day**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:43): Last Wednesday I had the privilege of hosting March Forward: Empowering Young Women at Brunswick Neighbourhood House as part of International Women's Day, bringing together diverse, passionate group of women to share stories and celebrate leadership in our communities. I would like to extend my gratitude to our incredible speakers: Tigist Kebede, Hannah Heers, Anna Mailei, Nazanin and Chinakila Makwaza. The event was a huge success. Chinakila's powerful poetry encouraged young woman to use their voices; Tigist shared invaluable insights on mental health; Nazanin spoke fearlessly about the collective responsibility to uplift all women, highlighting that violence against women is also a men's issue; at just 16, Hannah proved that leadership has no age limit; and Anna shed light on the challenges faced by young Pacific Island women in leadership and the importance of reclaiming power and safety in their own spaces. Themes of migration, refuge, fellowship and protection from harm were at the heart of the night. The Greens remain committed to equity of opportunity for women and gender-diverse people, and I look forward to continuing to foster strong, supportive communities through events like March Forward: Empowering Young Women for International Women's Day.

### **Bialik College Early Learning Centre**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:44): Kabbalat Shabbat is always an important and poignant time for the Jewish community as it marks the welcoming of Shabbat. Earlier this month with the Minister for Children I was privileged to join the preschoolers at the Bialik College Early Learning Centre in Hawthorn for a Friday celebration of song and prayer and sharing in some delicious challah bread. It was a joyous occasion and the first Shabbat I have ever participated in that involved dinosaurs, but the dinosaurs participated very well, along with all the kids. I also had the opportunity to speak with the principal of Bialik College about their ongoing concerns about antisemitism in the community and the impact it is having on the students. We stand with the students there, their families and the broader community against antisemitism in all its forms.

### **Melbourne All Abilities Cricket Association**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:45): I also recently had the privilege of joining the Melbourne All Abilities Cricket Association at their 2024–25 grand final carnival at the Moorabbin Cricket Club. I got to do the bat toss for the match between Williamstown and Glen Waverley. The

Melbourne All Abilities Cricket Association provides opportunities for people of all backgrounds with intellectual disability to get involved in the game of cricket, and there were some exceptionally enthusiastic players there who were, quite frankly, playing some really great cricket. It was great to see so many in the community involved. We had participants from Williamstown, Glen Waverley, Moorabbin and Bendigo, and a great day was had by all.

#### **United States trade**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:46): Donald Trump has imposed tariffs on our iron and steel exports to the US. In towns like Portland, Whyalla and Port Kembla this will result in the loss of hundreds of jobs, which will impact the lives of thousands of Australians. This is not just unfriendly; it is wanton destruction of Australian lives and livelihoods, and it is likely to be only the first of many such attacks. We have been friends and allies with the US for over 80 years, yet this pathologically narcissistic presidential gorilla clearly accords no weight to our relationship or, for that matter, to that with any of its other allies. Trump is happy to turn his back on long-term friends and bully and damage them on a whim. What are these US tariffs? They are simply a massive tax on imports paid by US consumers, generating huge revenues for the US administration. The benefits of this windfall will be largely shared by the wealthiest Americans via proposed tax cuts to a brotocracy of billionaires, all born-again Trumpers made even richer at the expense of working folks in America and abroad. We must ask ourselves whether we can continue to shape our society and our entire defence policy around US loyalty. AUKUS is now at best a hugely costly gamble. It is time for us to actively develop foreign trade and defence policies that better reflect our geopolitical realities. As a modest protest, Australians can and should wherever possible boycott American products.

#### **Flinders Christian Community College**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:47): We as politicians put ourselves up for public critique on a daily basis, but there is nothing that can quite prepare you for being judged on appearance alone by 50-odd year 9 students. That is what happened last week when Mr Limbrick, the member for Mornington in the other place and I took part in a special civics class being taught by Flinders Christian Community College to its year 9 cohort. The forum involved the three of us, plus a community member standing in as a far-left party rep, answering the same questions put to us on a wide range of topics. The year 9s were asked to vote at three different points. The first, as I mentioned, was when we had just walked in the room, with no other context. That was terrifying. The second was after we had answered the round of questions, and the third was at the very end once our names and our party affiliations had been revealed. On that basis, and a bet is a bet, I wish to enthusiastically congratulate Mr Limbrick on coming first in both the second and third rounds of voting. Though I am disappointed I did not prevail, a steady second place in all three votes I was happy to claim. I would like to thank very much Michael McLean and the team at Flinders, all of my fellow panellists and especially the students themselves for their really great enthusiasm and excitement. The civics program at Flinders sets an excellent example for effective civics education. It is a model I hope to see replicated by other schools right across the state.

#### **Duck hunting**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:49): Labor's shameful duck slaughter commences today, and only hours into the season a black swan has already been killed on the wetlands. It comes as the most accurate surveys show that there is half the amount of waterbirds compared to the year before and birds are not breeding. We have no birds, yet the government, one year out from defying the main recommendation from their own parliamentary inquiry that they established themselves, announced the most barbaric and longest season that we have seen in a long time. Despite all the work we have done, we have gone backwards. Over the next three months protected species will be shot. Thousands of birds will be wounded and left languishing slowly to die on the wetlands. Rules will be flouted, and the Game Management Authority will turn a blind eye while focusing on charging those attempting to render assistance.

I want to send my strength and solidarity to the duck rescuers heading out onto the wetlands today, many of whom I will join over the weekend, just as I have done for over 10 years now. They are doing a job that the authorities and government should do but refuse to, and they refuse to because they know and we know that it is an impossible job to monitor compliance at literally thousands of locations across this state. It is our native waterbirds like the black swan which has already been killed who pay the ultimate price for their arrogance and their negligence. We will never forget or forgive this government's betrayal, and we will ban duck shooting.

### **International Women's Day**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:50): International Women's Day is a reminder to all of us to celebrate and show solidarity with the amazing women in our lives and to acknowledge the continued fight towards equality and women's liberation across the globe. I am going to take this opportunity to give a big shout-out to four incredible women in my community that I had the opportunity to celebrate International Women's Day with – Jennifer Bowden, the CEO of the Mathematical Association of Victoria, who represents and supports mathematics teachers and educators in primary schools, secondary schools, early learning and at home; Alejandra Angeles, the founder and CEO of Gals en Australia, a thriving community of 14,000 people that empowers Latin and Hispanic women in Australia to overcome the challenges that migrant women often face in their careers; Keryn Negri, the CEO of Queen Victoria Women's Centre, which provides an incredible space founded through Victoria's strong and proud feminist history that allows for Victorian women and gender-diverse people to thrive; and Annette McShane, the treasurer of Brunswick Lacrosse, which is leading an inclusive environment for girls and women to thrive in the sport that they love. She has almost got me thinking about taking up lacrosse, she is so passionate. The work these women do, like many women in our lives, is changing our community for the better, and it is essential that we continue to recognise this hard work throughout the year and not just that one day in March.

### ***Production of documents***

#### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:52): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Auditor-General's report, major projects performance report 2024, states at:
  - (a) Appendix D-60 that 'Governance mechanisms for the Suburban Rail Loop East early works package include ... updates to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop';
  - (b) Appendix A-59 that a 'pricing reset' that was to be finalised in June 2024 was still underway at the time of publication and that a gate 4 review had demanded 'clearer contingency options in case the main works are delayed or do not go ahead' and the 'SRLA has developed a detailed contingency plan for the early works and actions to take in each construction zone if there is a delay to the main works';
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council:
  - (a) within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
    - (i) the most recent Suburban Rail Loop Authority (SRLA) update to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop;
    - (ii) copies of the contingency plans and a copy of the most recent, complete or incomplete, 'pricing reset' document referred to in paragraph (1)(b); and (b) every update from the SRLA on the Suburban Rail Loop East early works package that the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop receives within three weeks of its receipt by the minister until the expiration of the project or the expiration of the 60th Parliament.

My short-form documents motion on the notice paper discusses the Auditor-General's major projects performance report 2024 and particularly looks at the most recent Suburban Rail Loop Authority update to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and copies of contingency plans and a copy of the most recent complete or incomplete pricing reset. It was referred to in the Auditor-General's report.



We know that the Suburban Rail Loop will go down in history as the most wasteful infrastructure project in Australia's history. This was a project conceived with only a few people knowing about it – one the current Premier, the former Premier and a couple of goofs at PwC in a locked room – without any consultation with the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning and without any consultation with our public transport experts. It was not on any Public Transport Victoria development plan – those plans that map what Melbourne's transport system should look like in the future based on expert evidence – none of that. This was set up in a locked room by a pretty disreputable organisation at the time, which was doing other pretty disreputable things, but of course the Premier and former Premier decided that was the way they would go.

This project was originally costed at \$50 billion for the whole thing, from Cheltenham to Werribee. It was only going to cost \$50 billion. It sounded too good to be true, and of course we know it was too good to be true. The first stage, on heroic government estimates, is going to cost between \$31 billion and \$34 billion, just for Cheltenham to Box Hill, and we know that that is going to be paid for by taxpayers for generations, just for one project in the eastern suburbs denying every single growth area in Melbourne the opportunity to have the infrastructure that they deserve. The government has had a lot of backflips, and I can almost guarantee you the Suburban Rail Loop will be their next backflip. It is their Achilles heel. Every time I go into the growth areas and people mention the Suburban Rail Loop, they are not kind about it. You guys know that. Those on that side of the chamber know it. It is not popular. An unquantifiable in some respects amount of money is being poured down the drain by a Premier who is too proud to admit that she got it wrong. That money could be spent on a number of other infrastructure projects across Victoria, including in the northern suburbs, including in the western suburbs, including in the south-eastern suburbs, but that money is not available. We know that ministers have been told to stop spending money and to rein in their budgets. We know that local members have been told to halve their number of budget items for commitments this budget and not to include any infrastructure projects – they are completely off the table for funding by local members in this budget. I am doing this in your interests as well. We want projects funded in your seats as well, not just in one part of Melbourne.

This government is not going to admit they got it wrong – I think they eventually will under the leadership of Mr Carroll – but they did stuff up. The Auditor-General's report tabled one month ago today revealed that the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop gets regular project updates from the Suburban Rail Loop Authority (SRLA) on the Suburban Rail Loop East project, so at least one person in this place is privy to the waste and mismanagement going on in this project. We also learned:

The Suburban Rail Loop East early works package is currently going through a pricing reset with SRLA's contractor to factor in items that were unknown or uncertain at the time the contract was awarded –

including unknown ground conditions, hazards and contamination at some sites. I know Mr Welch regularly speaks to locals, and there is I believe much more to come on the amount of contamination there is in the soil, the amount of disruption.

We know that this government is putting businesses out of business with the road closures around the Suburban Rail Loop, offering a pittance of compensation. They say it is worse than COVID and they will not be around by the time this project is built because they are bleeding money, but this government is pressing ahead with those road closures. We also learned that the SRLA has developed a detailed contingency plan for the early works package and actions to take in each construction zone if there is a delay to main works.

There are hidden pricing resets; we do know that. There are contingency plans for when this all goes pear-shaped, yet the Victorian people are not being told the truth. The government is wilfully wasting Victorians' money out of pride and an inability to say, 'We stuffed up.' The Premier and the Treasurer and others did say 'We stuffed up' when it came to bail. They said, 'We're sorry. We're sorry we got it wrong.'

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, I do not know what bail has got to do with this short-form documents motion on SRL that we are debating, and I ask Mr Mulholland to be relevant and come back to the motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** I call Mr Mulholland back to the motion.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** You clearly were not listening. I was making a comparison. The government should apologise, should say it got it wrong, pause the Suburban Rail Loop and invest in infrastructure in our growth areas.

**The PRESIDENT:** Trust me; I was listening.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): I also rise to make a contribution on this short-form documents motion in Mr Mulholland's name on the Suburban Rail Loop. As is our practice over here on the government benches, we will not be opposing this motion. We have a practice of doing that because we are quite happy to release documents, notwithstanding what those opposite might say about that.

The Suburban Rail Loop project is one of the largest projects not only in rail but also in housing, and it is a project that will benefit people in my region, in the North-Eastern Metropolitan region. I know Mr Mulholland does not represent people in that region. I know that even when I have been out at festivals talking to people about the Suburban Rail Loop project, they cannot wait to see it get started. They are excited about the prospect of being able to catch a train and particularly about their children getting from Box Hill all the way down to Deakin and Monash universities for the first time without having to spend 4 or 5 hours on buses that do not connect up. By 2050 Melbourne will be home to 9 million people, the same size as London today, and we need a public transport system that is going to manage almost 12 million extra trips per day. I know that is lost on those opposite because they have never built anything and never do anything other than criticise. We have got a clear and positive goal and vision for making sure that not only can we build a world-class public transport system but we can then support 70,000 affordable homes. People want to live close to public transport; they do not want to be stuck on congested roads.

As for Mr Mulholland's comment about the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report, I find this really curious. The earlier commentary on this project was that we did not have a business case, it did not stack up and it was a secret and all of these sorts of things. Well, the document has been tabled. Not only has it been tabled in this chamber, Minister Shing has talked extensively about the business case, and we saw, maybe in the last sitting week or the one prior to that, Mr Mulholland acknowledge that he had actually read the business case. Despite saying that it did not exist, he then acknowledged that it did exist and that he had in fact read it. What he would know, if he actually did bother to read it, is that there is clearly some excellent information in there.

The VAGO report also talks about the fact that the Suburban Rail Loop East remains on time and on budget. Wow! Tunnel-boring machines will be arriving this year and will be starting in 2026. I am really proud to report and underscore this point to the house: the Suburban Rail Loop project will be the first construction project that will have an all-female tunnel-boring machine crew operating with its crews. Our government is doing fantastic things for women's employment – something that would be lost on those opposite. They are secure and well-paid jobs, and that is what women want. We do not want to be talked down to by those opposite, with them telling us what is good for us and how this government should be operating. What we know is that we are providing well-paid, secure jobs for women in construction, and that is what this project will do. Not only will it be providing jobs for local people who are skilled, but it will be providing 70,000 homes for people to live close to public transport. We know that without this sort of project and without these sorts of construction projects Melbourne will grind to a halt. There is growth in Melbourne, and as I said, we are going to be the size of London by 2050. If we do not build these projects, and that includes rail and road infrastructure, it is going to be very difficult to get around.

Again, the VAGO report says SRL East remains on time and on budget. With tunnel-boring machines arriving this year, tunnelling will start in 2026. That is a good thing, and despite what those opposite want to say and the disinformation that they want to peddle, we have got the independent VAGO telling us that. The report is public, and I do believe, Mr Batchelor, that it has actually been tabled in this chamber as well, so is it public and it is publicly available. I have read it as well, and it is a great report. With those opposite, the disinformation that gets peddled is absolutely shameful. Again, the message on SRL East is that the early works package remains the same. The SRL East is on time and on budget.

The release of documents may in fact impact the commercial-in-confidence information, which would increase the risk to the project. That is lost on those opposite because they never did anything; they never did big commercial projects of this scale. This Parliament does not have the power to prospectively order the production of documents that do not yet exist at the time of making any order that this chamber might seek to make. I will just comment again on the fact that government gets nobbled in not having enough time to speak to these things. That is the wont of those opposite. But nevertheless, the government will not be opposing this motion.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:04): I rise to speak on Mr Mulholland's motion 882 for the production of documents. The ones I am particularly interested in are on the price reset. This is a project that was costed on the back of an envelope. Those costings proved to be completely unrealistic. They were replaced with a \$34 billion project. That assumed 66 per cent of that funding was coming from cash. We now know that it is a 100 per cent leveraged project, and that leveraged project comes at a time of rising interest rates, so state borrowings against this project are precarious. If the budget turns out not to be \$34 billion, if, like every other Big Build project, we have a blowout of even \$10 billion, \$20 billion or \$30 billion, then the funding model will be completely destroyed, and there seems to be no contingency around that. There is no contingency around that for the state's finances, because it would blow our finances out substantially. I have done some modelling on this. We would have a residual debt on this that we would not be able to pay back for several generations. No amount of value capture will address the debt that we are facing on this now, so the model is in jeopardy and it is absolutely contingent on this being \$34 billion.

No other Big Build project has survived without a cost blowout or not had a budget or time blowout. We also have this notion that it is on budget and on time, yet in Box Hill the businesses have had a delay of nine months in being moved out there. In Glen Waverley and Clayton the businesses have had road closures extended by seven months. In Heatherton they found unexpected contamination and had to move certain works, and that remediation that was meant to be two weeks now is at six weeks plus and counting. I know within a big project that none of these individually may hit the critical part, but obviously we would be hitting the buffers, so with the repeated statement that we are on time and on budget the government is painting itself into a very difficult corner. The way we need to be clear about this is to have documents where we can see with clarity where the books really stand. Why hasn't the price reset been released nine months after it was due? What is it showing? What is happening with the funding? You are right: this is Victoria's biggest ever project, and with that scale it deserves proper scrutiny and transparency, and we simply do not have it.

The other element that is in here is: what are the contingencies? I think that is a very, very genuine thing. What are the contingencies for the state if we do not have the funding for this? Closer to home, what are the contingencies for the businesses and organisations that have been forced to enter into agreements and contracts because they are either being moved out or their businesses are being destroyed? They are not being compensated for that. What happens if there is a substantial material delay on this project? We need to know. They deserve to know. This is, like anything else, a simple matter of transparency. We should be able to see what is in the monthly reporting, because any monthly reporting will show how we are travelling against risk, how we are travelling against resource, how we are travelling on budget and how we are travelling on scope. I would not be surprised to see some scope changes coming through in the near future.

I absolutely endorse this motion. I think it is vital for the state to see where we are with this project. We need to tell the truth about this project.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:08): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Mulholland's documents motion with respect to certain matters relating to the Suburban Rail Loop. It is curious that in the course of this debate the opposition have not been able to articulate their policy on what should happen to the Suburban Rail Loop. At no stage in the course of arguing for the production of these documents have they suggested how these documents would help inform their policy formulation one way or the other. They do not know what their policy on the Suburban Rail Loop is. If they did, they would say it and they would have the courage to say it in this Parliament, but they do not, because they do not know what it is.

They are not willing to be open and honest with the Victorian people about what their policy platform is, so I think it is a bit much to listen to their repeated plaintive cries for information, much of which is articulated in the various reports, the various business and investment cases or in the budget papers. Much of this information is made available through the usual government processes, so if the opposition were genuine and serious about wanting to understand how major infrastructure projects work and how they are funded, then they would be serious in that. This documents motion I think on its face demonstrates that they are not actually serious about those kinds of inquiries, nor are they serious about meeting the infrastructure challenges that Victoria faces. We know that if the Liberal Party had their way, we would not be building infrastructure here in Victoria. We know that if the Liberal Party of today had applied this analysis to major infrastructure projects in Victoria in the past we would not have the city loop. Listening to Mr Welch's contribution and listening to Mr Mulholland's contribution on the production of these documents, you would think that Melbourne has never undertaken a significant underground rail project before that has involved getting funding from a range of sources, including from a form of value capture, which was one of the significant contributors to the construction of the city loop here in Melbourne.

If this Liberal Party had any influence on the Liberal Party of Henry Bolte and Rupert Hamer, we would not have a city loop here in Melbourne. We would not have a city loop in Melbourne if the analysis and the approach of today's Liberal Party had applied in the past. I think that tells you everything you need to know about the narrow thinking, the narrow vision and the narrow approach of the Liberal Party of today. They are not interested in building the infrastructure that Victoria needs. They are not interested in making sure that a rapidly growing city has the transport infrastructure to get people from A to B, to get people across our growing city and to make sure that our leading employment and research institutions are connected by rail. They would not have built the city loop, they would not have built the Metro Tunnel, and they are determined to make sure that more suburban rail is not built here in Victoria.

The other thing that is a problem with this motion, other than highlighting the absolute lack of vision and the lack of detail that is within the Liberal Party of today, is that they are calling for the production of documents that do not yet exist. They are trying to cast some exceedingly wide net to possibly capture documents that have not even been created yet. We have had discussions in the context of these debates about how difficult it is for the government to produce documents that do not actually exist.

We are, as a matter of principle and convention, not opposed to documents motions in this chamber. But it is very difficult for the government to produce documents in compliance with the order that do not exist. And I think when writing these motions members should consider those constraints before bringing such matters before us.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Water policy

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (10:13): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that in 2022 the Victorian government published the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*, which highlights the need to reduce reliance on river water for domestic, agricultural and industrial uses;
- (2) further notes that as part of the strategy the government was to release the inaugural water grid plan in 2023, outlining options for future urban water supply measures, a cornerstone of reducing demand on river water and planning for growing population demands on water in a drying climate; and
- (3) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, the water grid plan as outlined for release in the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*.

The documents motion I am putting forward today is a very simple one: for the government to produce its water grid plan, a document flagged for release in 2023 but yet to be seen. The release of this plan should not be contentious. However, while it languishes on the Minister for Water's desk many water corporations are stalled in their ability to plan for significant water management projects.

Victoria's waterways are undeniably in a state of stress due to decades of overallocation and overextraction, paired with the drying conditions of climate change, which will see rainfall decrease by another 22 per cent at least before 2065. Now is very much the time to be taking action. Improvements in household water efficiency have seen demand for domestic water use fall relative to population growth for many years. However, we are now seeing the limits of this. With Australia's population set to reach 40 million by 2063 and Victoria's population, Melbourne's in particular, really set to lead some of that growth, household demand for water in major urban centres like Melbourne is projected to require up to an extra 1450 gegalitres in our water supplies. That is the total volume of water currently supplied each year for Sydney, Melbourne and Perth combined. In the meantime, increasing natural disasters such as floods and bushfires are having a negative impact on our ability to capture potable water from rainfall.

A recent study of the Thomson River catchment, Melbourne's largest water source, estimated a 13 per cent reduction in catchment water yield by 2050 due to the impact of recurring fires on water treatment capacity, so where is the water going to come from? Our rivers are already stressed and will be even more so with climate change. Water needs to be in our rivers and our waterways and underground to support our ecosystems, and we must ensure that traditional owners have their water rights realised. To sustain urban populations we need a plan for water supply that does not continually rely on extraction from our rivers, but what is the government planning to do? Water corporations are already trying to plan for this future of water scarcity but need direction from the state government. The regularly cited water grid plan, mentioned 132 times throughout the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*, is meant to provide the scaffolding for decisions about where water is going to come from. Many essential actions within the strategy rely on the publication of this plan.

Specifically, the feasibility studies and business case development for regionally significant supply options such as desalination and large-scale integrated water management projects are contingent on the water grid plan. These actions are critical to realising commitments for increased environmental flows in stressed river systems, and delay is pushing out the timelines for reduced reliance on river water set in the strategy. What is the place of recycled water in our future? How are we going to improve capture of urban stormwater in existing residential areas and embed water-sensitive design in our planning system? What will be the role of desalination?

While rural communities and ecosystems are feeling the brunt of Victoria's drought conditions, urban communities will not be spared in a drying climate. We need a plan and we have been told there is one, but two years on from when that plan was expected to be released we are yet to hear a thing. This is urgent, and we would urge the government to release this document without delay.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (10:17): I thank Dr Mansfield for her motion on water security, particularly in Gippsland and the central area. The government will not be opposing this motion, and there are plenty of good reasons for that. I am just going to give you a quick overview of the strategic planning framework and the work that gets done in the water sector to ensure that water runs out of the taps for every single urban household and that industry is also secure and the environment.

The *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy* is only one key component of the water sector's strategic planning framework. There is no room for error with water. Water is an essential service. These sustainable water strategies that each water corporation completes on a regular cycle in partnership with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action are only one of the steps along the way.

In terms of covering off on the context there, the highest level direction that the government provides is the *Water for Victoria* water plan, which was initiated and completed by Minister Lisa Neville. It provides a high-level policy and direction for each of the water corporations and the boards. Then there are the sustainable water strategies which cover each region, and they are completed every 10 years. Then there are the urban water strategies. Each water corporation is required to complete one of these and to renew it every five years, and the contents of an urban water strategy are to look at the impacts of climate change in their service area, the impacts of population growth, industry and any other variables relevant with a required forward outlook of 50 years and then to identify an action plan that shows exactly what actions need to be taken and roughly an estimate of when and what that might cost. If you ask any water corporation in Victoria what is the next augmentation they need to do, they will be able to tell you pretty clearly because of these evidence-based studies that they do. Then of course they have the pricing plan, which provides an accountable form of pricing structure. We have in Victoria with government-owned water some of the cheapest water in the country, so not only can Victorians be confident that water planning is very strong in this state and into the future, they can also be confident that the prices are held at bay.

Just before I finish off I want to give a little bit of context of what water is used for in Victoria and summarise this. This is generally of the same proportions around most regions in Victoria. Irrigation is roughly 54 per cent of the consumption of water in this state. Domestic and stock, which is for dryland farming, is about 3 per cent. Environmental flows are growing and constitute around about 41 per cent of the water provided out of the system and back into the environment. Urban water for residential customers is only roughly 17 per cent. So those proportions are incredibly stark, so one saving in the irrigation space could almost profoundly impact the outcomes around water savings quite easily. I just want to close by saying I think the water industry in Victoria has an awesome planning and strategic outlook and I am very confident that the grid will be available when required.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:22): I want to say we support Dr Mansfield's motion for documents, and this relates to the Victorian government's central and Gippsland sustainable water strategy. It relates to a series of documents about the water supply and the urban water grid. It is not clear why these documents are not public anyway. We see this is an important step for the chamber to try to prise these documents from government. The chamber undoubtedly has the power. The chamber obviously is looking at the public interest here. The water strategy and the water grid documents are clearly plans that are of relevance to a broad group of people in the community. Whether it be agriculture, whether it be other water supply, that is important for communities. This will see the Leader of the Government requested to provide under standing order 10.01, within three weeks, the water grid plan as outlined for release. Again, a very simple fact: this is in the public interest. The opposition will be pleased to support this motion.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:23): As noted by others we will not be opposing Dr Mansfield's short-form documents motion. Water is something that I think flies under the radar for a lot of people. It is not lost on me; I think I mentioned in my first speech in this place that drought saw us sell half of the family farm in 1983 and then the millennial drought pretty much finished us off,

with dams gone and nearby lakes that would have had boats out and about and people fishing and whatnot just turned into paddocks where B&S balls were held. Again, as Dr Mansfield commented before, we are in a changing climate. We are 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. At 10 years of increased temperatures around the world, record after record being broken it would seem that we are in for hotter and drier conditions. Fortunately in recent years much of our state has had good rainfall, but of course in the south-west and in the far north-east we have seen drought conditions this year. It is really important for our farms, our small towns and indeed our cities and our businesses, which rely on a reliable water supply, that we are managing that water. It is also incredibly important for our natural environment that our rivers and our wetlands are getting that water for the native animals that depend upon that water and to ensure that we are seeing biodiversity in our natural places so they are able to continue and be resilient and thrive year upon year. It is also about ensuring that the communities that depend on and have been built around that water have that water available.

I have personally been able to get out with Gippsland Water and see the work that they are doing on the ground in a whole range of areas of sustainability. Something I talk about a lot in this place is that we cannot have economic sustainability without environmental sustainability. Ms Ermacora touched on the incredible work our water corporations are doing to reduce water consumption, whether that is with households or businesses, because every drop of water that we do not use is a drop we do not need to find elsewhere, much the same as with other resources. There is incredible work being done on minimising that consumption and on that behaviour change and saving water use up-front but also the incredible investment that we are seeing across the state by our corporations in infrastructure. There is massive, massive investment scheduled between now and 2028 to see the proper use and supply of water in this state.

I mentioned Gippsland Water briefly, but I want to touch on the holistic nature of what they are doing down at Dutson Downs with treated water coming from the valley. It is used to work in with organic matter waste from our metropolitan areas. That is recycled into compost and that water is used on the massive farm they have down there. There are a number of points along the used water cycle. That they have been able to reuse and recycle that water is a fantastic example of what water corporations are doing all across our great state to ensure that not a drop is wasted. As I said at the start, as it standard practice, this motion will not be opposed, and I thank you for the time to contribute.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (10:28): We are pleased to be able to support this motion because we believe that it is really vital that we have transparency in this Parliament, and when it comes to water and requiring transparency on information about water and water planning, that is very important.

I was involved with the flood inquiry, and we saw the significant impact that the floods had on the river system and how it works in our region. I have spoken to a number of residents who are concerned about many of our rivers being quite clogged, which does have an impact on the delivery of water in the region. When I think about the water supply, I also think of Bendigo where we have an open channel of water that goes from Malmesbury right through to Bendigo. It was designed by an engineer, Joseph Brady, in the 1950s. That is still an open channel and has water evaporate, so we need to look at ways that we can be more efficient in the transfer and the delivery of water.

Another issue that has been very relevant to Northern Victoria is the federal government's water buybacks. They have been having a huge impact on our region. We have seen, in the first year, 70 gigalitres of water sold, and then a further 100 gigalitres of water sold. When that water is taken out of the market, it does increase the price of water and it has a big impact on farmers in the region. We have seen that historically. I know the state government has been strong in opposing those water buybacks, but it does continue under the Commonwealth government. I know the dairy industry is very important. There are 13,000 jobs just in Northern Victoria alone, and they rely on water. So we do encourage the government – it was back in 2023 that the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy* was put forward. But the water grid plan is something that is required from the Leader of the Government in accordance with the standing orders, so we support that. It is a tradition of this

house. The ability of our chamber to request documents from the government is a long tradition. We support this motion.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Motions*

#### **Wombat protection**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (10:31): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) the iconic wombat faces a number of threats across the state, including illegal shooting and legal shooting programs, sarcoptic mange, road strikes, habitat destruction and private keeping;
  - (b) bare-nosed wombats are now the only species of wombat in Victoria and populations are declining nationwide;
  - (c) the impact of the threats facing wombats is not fully understood as a total population count has not been conducted in Victoria;
  - (d) alternatives to lethal control have proven to be successful in wombat management on private property including the installation of wombat gates;
  - (e) wombats are ecological engineers who play an integral role by improving soil health and supporting bushfire recovery;
- (2) calls on the government to:
  - (a) review the appropriateness of lethal control for wombats on the approved species list for authority-to-control-wildlife permits and explore alternative control measures;
  - (b) review the appropriateness of wombats on the species list for private-keeping-of-wildlife licences;
  - (c) consider undertaking a total population count of wombats in Victoria; and
  - (d) consider providing additional funding for wombat mange treatment in the upcoming 2025–26 budget process.

This is coincidentally a motion about wombats, and my office has been working on this issue for some time now, but probably it could not be more relevant after the events of the last week. We would have all seen by now the American tourist named Sam Jones, who is also a hunting influencer, and she stole a joey from their mother, running to the camera to show a distressed wombat to her Instagram followers, leaving the mother wombat visibly distressed by her loss. The man behind the camera was heard saying something that would be considered unparliamentary, and it was a terrifying experience for both the mum and the baby.

We heard from a whole lot of politicians about this topic. Home affairs minister Tony Burke stated:

I can't wait for Australia to see the back of this individual.

The Deputy Prime Minister called her an idiot. Shadow finance minister Jane Hume said:

I can't believe this silly, silly woman would do something so stupid, so irresponsible.

Penny Wong said the baby wombat should be left alone with its mum, and our own Prime Minister said that it was an outrage and suggested that she pick on an animal her own size.

But what many people do not realise when we are hearing this confected outrage and performance art from politicians – the government here in Victoria will also likely criticise this tourist today in this debate for picking up the wombat – and what they do not acknowledge is that here in Victoria we simultaneously allow for authority-to-control-wildlife permits, which are issued to kill them on the very land that they live on, and the only difference is that people do not know it is happening under this government.



In 2023 the Victorian government alone issued permits to kill 1902 wombats. In fact only recently it was legal to recreationally shoot wombats in parts of Victoria. To get a permit to kill wombats, only basic contact information is required, and no evidence of a valid gun licence or attempts to deploy non-lethal methods is requested. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action essentially has no record or oversight of who is carrying out the shootings, when they happen and how many animals are killed.

The ironic thing in all of this is that if Jones had instead applied for an authority-to-control-wildlife (ATCW) permit, she could have easily lied about the wombats causing nuisance on her property and killed the mum with a bullet and then, under instruction from the department, killed the baby by, as they advise, ‘destroying the brain’. That is a direct quote from the direction given when an ATCW permit is taken out. Jones would not have been required to show a gun licence or pictures to prove the wombats even exist at all. In as little as 24 hours, Jones could have received an ATCW permit from this government. Probably nobody would have uttered a word, because they would not have known, and it would not have been all over our Instagram feeds.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about authority-to-control-wildlife permits being issued for wombats is that the ability to coexist without killing them is absolutely and entirely possible. There is no justification for shooting a wombat that has decided to burrow close to residential housing when just the slightest bit of effort could resolve the issue without the violence that this government allows. With this motion we are not seeking for nonlethal ATCWs or dispersals to be removed. We are simply asking for their killing to be cut out of the question. Wombat swing gates can easily be installed to effectively remove a wombat from a property or allow them to pass through a suitable alternative route. These gates are put in place across a fence line and enable wombats to come in and out without damaging fences, something that many landowners will often cite when taking out a permit. There are also other types of cross-burrows that allow one-way access, so once a wombat has left the area they just cannot return. And wombats are actually using them here in this state. These have proven to have great success in a trial by the Wombat Protection Society of Australia, who currently provide them to landowners who would prefer to work with expert volunteer groups to install a set of gates than shoot a wombat’s face off. They even have videos on their website that teach handy people to make their own with materials they might just have lying around at home. Currently gates are being supplied by volunteer advocacy groups, and that is not uncommon. Wildlife groups are even resorting to making their own road strike caution signs to warn motorists of native species and the hotspots where they are hit because this government does not invest in anything when it comes to wildlife protection. This government should at the very least provide or subsidise these nonlethal alternatives and encourage landowners to utilise them because, as we have experienced, when it is offered to them, they will take the opportunity up.

I probably do not need to point this out, but wombats are not burrowing near properties to intentionally bother people. They move into residential areas often because we humans have destroyed their habitat. It is ironic that our solution to this problem that we have caused is to just kill them. The other thing I should point out is that wombats are known for their extensive, complex burrowing systems. If a wombat is shot by a landowner, leaving their burrow behind, another wombat is likely to move in, rather than start the lengthy and labour-intensive process of creating a new one. They are prone to moving in and making renovations to have a burrow that suits them. It is smart – in fact wombats are our smartest marsupial. But this is also why shooting a thousand wombats a year through ATCW permits is not only cruel, it is also just completely ineffective.

Personally, knowing what I do about wombats, I would be thrilled to see one of them on my own property. It would not cross my mind to spot one and then seek the approval to kill it. But currently, since our government deals with most perceived wildlife issues with violence and with what they deem to be the easy option, it is what a small percentage of Victorians are still opting for. By supporting this motion today, we could start to change that narrative and truly support our wildlife.

On Friday just last week, as were preparing for this motion, one of the brilliant wildlife rescuers in my electorate was called out to a deceased female wombat in Faraday in northern Victoria. Sam quickly noticed that she had a gunshot wound through the side of her head. On closer inspection, they noticed multiple gunshot wounds in her back and in her jaw. Performing a routine pouch check inspection, as wildlife rescuers do every single day as volunteers, Sam found a tiny newborn joey who was still alive but was far too young to survive without the critical care of their mum. Sam recalls hearing sounds of gunshots the night before and the harrowing realisation that they were coming from the very habitat that rehabilitated wombats in their care were recently released into. This incident was reported through the appropriate channels, but something clear to Sam and everyone who has utilised them is that nothing will come from it. Firstly, what happened to this wombat is not explicitly illegal. Had any person filled out a one-page document the week before, they would most likely have been handed the permit to inflict these horrific injuries by the very department that is also responsible for protecting native animals. And if they did not have a permit, how could the perpetrator ever possibly be traced?

They might not realise it, but how this government choose to treat native animals will be echoed by the broader community. We only stopped allowing the recreational shooting of wombats, as I mentioned before, in 2020, yet there are other species we continue to allow it for, with the duck-shooting season literally starting in this state only hours ago. If we not only permit but encourage the shooting of our native species for fun in selected months of the year, how can we truly expect those who own guns to consider something like what happened to this wombat a wildlife crime? Because that is what it is. Similarly, on 18 February this year there was community outrage when 10 wombats were intentionally mowed down by drivers in Venus Bay in South Gippsland. It was a horrific, disgusting act of cruelty. Bass Coast police have described this as a deliberate destruction of wildlife and believe three four-wheel drives may have been involved. But still no-one has been charged for this, and as always, there are no consequences for killing wildlife and no protection of Victoria's wombats, because the government is consistently blurring the lines on what is and what is not acceptable.

Hairy-nosed wombat species were once common across eastern Australia, but they are now one of the world's most endangered animals, with just over 400 northern hairy-nosed wombats living in three secure locations across Queensland and around 60,000 southern hairy-nosed wombats living in South Australia, Western Australia and New South Wales. In Queensland, populations of southern hairy-nosed wombats dropped to as low as 35 individuals in the 1980s. Bare-nosed wombats, also known as the commons, are now the only species of wombat here in Victoria, and populations are declining nationwide. In fact a 2020 report by the Arthur Rylah institute acknowledges that there is no overall regional estimate for the number of wombats in Victoria. This is coupled with a limited understanding of the threats that they face. It was estimated that at least 21 per cent of suitable habitat for wombats had been affected by fires during that time, with 19 per cent of the overall population affected. Still today we only look to estimations. We do not actually have an overall, updated count, which is something desperately needed in order to understand how to protect our final wombat species from experiencing the same fate.

Wombats are also heavily impacted by mange, road strikes and habitat destruction. These native icons of the Australian landscape are under enormous threat, as too is the structure of the Australian ecosystem if there are no wombats. Yet our government is currently wilfully ignoring it. Not only do they ignore it, but they also play into this narrative that because farmers or private landowners complain about wombats on their properties, they just must be in plague proportions. It is unsurprising that we are in this situation with wombats, because we are also in the same one with native ducks, kangaroos and any other species this government approves the ongoing slaughter of. But the current approach of shooting frantically based on non-existent or fabricated datasets simply is not working.

The impending extinction of wombats in Victoria is entirely avoidable, but first we need to understand how many wombats actually live in Victoria and the percentage of them that are impacted by mange. Unlike introduced species who overgraze, causing soil erosion and the spread of weeds, wombats are

good for the environment. We have this habit in Victoria of noticing what we perceive to be one kind of animal in one place and referring to them as pests. But wombats live in balance with their environment, doing very important work with the soil, bringing important nutrients to the surface, increasing water penetration and helping organic material and seeds to mix into compacted soil. They turn over tonnes of soil, and their cube-shaped poo increases nitrogen levels, boosting plant growth as well. One fascinating thing to understand is the accidental role that they play in bushfires. Their burrows provide a safe refuge underground for other animals. One study of a southern hairy-nosed wombat burrow found 90 metres of tunnel with at least 28 entrances. The temperatures inside are cool and stable, making them suitable hiding spots during extreme weather events. Camera traps in other parts of Australia have observed multiple species, including wallabies, lizards, birds and even penguins, using and sharing active wombat burrows for their own needs, including avoiding becoming prey.

As I mentioned before, one of the sad realities facing wombats is mange, and sharing burrows contributes to the spread of this mange. Sarcoptic mange is caused by parasitic mites that burrow under the skin surface and lay eggs that cause intense itching and pain. Over time the skin develops thick scabs and open sores that slowly take over the entire body. If left untreated, mange in wombats is fatal. Seeing a wombat with mange is absolutely devastating, but the condition is treatable. Current programs facilitated by Mange Management in Victoria and the Wombat Protection Society of Australia are showing great success by engaging landowners with the tools and knowledge to treat their resident wombats.

Other programs involve installing burrow flaps that spray medicine onto wombats as they enter and exit burrows, allowing them to self-medicate. It is estimated that around 1000 wombats are treated for mange in Victoria each year, but the number that die without treatment would be far higher. Although it is under research, experts expect that in some areas up to 90 per cent of wombats are impacted by mange. We need to understand this disease in order to treat it, and that is exactly what this motion is calling for – to properly assess the impact of mange and provide ongoing funding to the few groups that do tireless work to combat it, allowing them to treat more wombats and inspire those with resident wombats on their property to get involved too.

Something that I think will shock many members in this chamber and something that they will not know is under our current laws in this state you can also keep wombats as pets and buy them, trade or sell them under an advanced wildlife licence. Much like ATCW forms, it is easy to obtain the permit. For this one you merely need to state your name and address. That is it. No inspection will be conducted to ensure you can appropriately house or care for the native animal, nor that you even know anything about their care requirements. This is in contrast to the licensing of actual wildlife rehabilitators, who rescue, care for and release wombats that become sick or injured. To be licenced this way, wildlife rescuers are subject to training requirements and an extensive interview process that involves a home inspection and often ongoing ones. But the average individual can just keep a wombat as a pet, with nothing but their name and address provided to the government and the department.

Due to the historic difficulties in breeding captive wombats and their exorbitant cost on sites including Gumtree and Facebook, there is a clear incentive for wombats to be illegally taken from the wild to enter this wildlife trade. Even zoos, which can manipulate the environment wombats are kept in, struggle to breed them, so it is difficult to understand why the government would allow the everyday person to attempt it in their own home. Further, they allow it to go on without regulation or mandatory checks.

The ease with which someone could trap a wombat in the wild and sell their babies online or buy and release captive-bred wombats into the wild without scrutiny is deeply disturbing and should be concerning to all of us. When you look to the catastrophic issues within the wildlife trade of other countries such as America, it should be easy to understand why here in Victoria we should be doing everything that we can to stop it at a local level. I have seen images of native Australian species on American websites, and while their export is illegal, somehow they are still getting there. It is through misguided and reckless permit systems like this one that these very issues begin to emerge. No native

wildlife should be allowed to be kept as pets, let alone a species with such an unstable and unknown wild population as the wombat. I am calling for the review of the basic and advanced wildlife licence species list, with the immediate removal of wombats, through this motion today as well.

In my office we have been talking about this suite of reforms as the wisdom package. If you did not know it, a wisdom is the name given to a group of wombats. The word ‘wombat’ is taken from the Dharug language of the Indigenous peoples of Sydney. The Wiradjuri named them ‘wambad’, and to many First Peoples wombats symbolise resourcefulness and close connection to the land. In Dreaming stories wombats impart valuable lessons to those who are smart enough to notice and appreciate them.

As I have listed off in my contribution today, there are so many reasons why we should be concerned for wombats in this state, and there are just so many reasons that we should be united in protecting them and ensuring that they do not become yet another species that becomes extinct under our state and federal governments. While it was incredibly heartening to see the outrage and the uproar in response to the incident last week with the American influencer picking up a wombat, there is far worse that is being done behind closed doors and not on our phone screens by the very people who have been given the job of protecting wildlife. The only difference is that people just do not know about it. As we talk about this more and more in light of this situation, it has allowed us to open up the door to have this conversation. Victorians are outraged, and they want our government to do better. They want our government to protect our native animals, and they have been failing at that across the board. What this motion calls for today is the very least they can do to ensure that our wombat populations and our wombats across this state are protected into the future. I commend it to the house.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (10:51): I thank Ms Purcell for the opportunity to speak on this issue. I have had a little bit to do with wombats, not a lot, but I appreciate and want to express my respect for her acknowledgement of the Wurundjeri name for wombats and why it is so. I think that is very important at the outset.

I have mentioned a couple of times that I like to get outdoors on my mountain bike and also that my enthusiasm is greater than my capabilities in that space. On occasion that has involved interaction with wombats. Certainly not direct interaction – from a distance. To me they are the quintessential Australian wildlife. Where else in the world can you find an animal that produces cube-shaped faeces? In fact many do not believe it when they see it. It does seem almost manufactured. Another fun fact about wombats that I am not sure everybody knows is that they are indeed, as you say in the motion, Ms Purcell, ecological engineers. They also have this uncanny ability to protect themselves. In digging their holes they use their buttock muscles – they climb in and jam the door. They jam the access to the hole with their muscly rear ends. I am sure this chamber really needed to know that, but it is an adaptation that has occurred. I understand that it is quite effective for protection of wombats against foxes, so good on them. I have been endearingly menaced in the middle of the night by a wombat, who perhaps wanted my muesli bars, and I have been kept company by a wombat at a camp fire.

Like most Australians, I know better than to approach or touch any of our wildlife – unlike the ignorant and possibly narcissistic actions of an influencer who removed a wombat joey from its mother last week. This is extremely concerning. I do suspect that there is a different culture in America about the collection of wildlife. I have met people in the US who have been curious about Australian wildlife and have quite openly declared to me that they collect Australian birds or Australian animals, completely unaware that this is a terribly distressing thing for the animals involved, to be taken completely and utterly out of their own environment, but also ecologically and environmentally distressing, not to mention illegal. I think the actions of the influencer were, perhaps ignorantly, very irresponsible.

I think it was good that there was lots of outrage at her conduct. I just wonder too if it calls into question the role of influencers in our community and in our society. It is a good reminder that sometimes what we see in social media from influencers is there to increase their exposure, is perhaps not very connected to the truth or facts and is more about their own self-promotion. This little joey that we saw

last week on social media, I think we could see the distress in that little young animal, and we certainly could see, momentarily, the distress of the mother. All of that distress was the sacrifice for self-promotion and influencing, which, after all, is a way that some people make a living. I would like to see influencers doing so through the truth and through good works and good deeds rather than by stretching their exposure and using little animals or any other issue as a tool for their own self-promotion.

I want to address a couple of issues before I finish off. I am someone who was raised on a farm, and throughout my childhood and life my family have interacted with native animals on the farm. Kangaroos, snakes, a lot of wallabies, that is mostly what we interacted with, not often wombats. I can vouch for the farming community: there is no willy-nilly slaughter of wombats. There is management of wombats, but in the same way that farmers care about living human beings, they do the same with native animals on the whole.

The *Daily Mail Australia* posted an article on its website on 15 March 2025 entitled ‘Aussie farmers fire back at American influencer’s insulting claims: we DON’T slaughter wombats.’ It quotes interviews with two residents from wombat country in South Gippsland, Len Price and Maurice Hetherington. Mr Price said:

We don’t roam our properties, shooting wombats just because they dig burrows in paddocks ...

Let’s remember they’re a protected species. Farmers understand that they come with the landscape.

Mr Hetherington said he had never killed a wombat in 65 years of rural living. He said:

They certainly dig burrows on our property and the surrounding land but I’d never kill one because it’s their home too ...

This certainly reflects my experience of farmers and the rural community’s relationship with wildlife that surrounds them. There are management practices that are allowed. Non-lethal control options recommended by the Department of Energy, Environment, Climate Action include marking burrows with posts to avoid damage to vehicles, preventing burrowing under buildings or into dam walls by installing reinforced mesh or electric fencing, and, yes, the construction of wombat gates. DEECA even provide plans for the design of a wombat gate for landowners to use to make their very own versions.

DEECA are also less likely to authorise management around boundary fences. The edges of pasture are highly productive habitat for wombats, which means the removal of any individual wombat is only likely to result in their replacement with another. So as always, the best thing we can do to protect wildlife populations is take a systematic and respectful approach. Tempting as it might be to react to the video of a would-be influencer endangering a baby wombat, a grab bag of wombat-related initiatives is not the right approach. The right approach is to manage our magnificent natural assets and the animals that live in them in a measured way. I would like to say that the Allan Labor government is currently consulting with Victorians on how we manage our 1.8 million hectares of forest so that people and wombats can continue to enjoy them well into the future. I think we will let the wombats have the last word. I really wish that the wombat mother and her little baby actually were down in the burrow when that influencer was around and perhaps had the hole blocked as I described earlier, because that would have been better than what happened on the social media post.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:00): I rise on behalf of the Liberals and Nationals to speak on the motion standing in Ms Purcell’s name, 881. In doing so I want to put from the outset that the Liberals and the Nationals know that there are some elements of this motion that are reasonable and that we could abide by and which we could support. I will speak to some of those. There is also one in particular that we cannot abide by and we will not support, so we will oppose this motion.

It is interesting that a lot can happen in a few days. From Monday, as reported in the *Herald Sun*:

Ms Purcell will this week force a debate in parliament calling on the government to stop wombat culling, conduct a population count and dedicate funding a mange treatment program.

‘Stop’ – ban wombat culling. By that it means the authority-to-control-wildlife permit, which is a legal permit that farmers use to control wildlife, and in this particular case, wombats. Now on Wednesday it has shifted. There have been discussions that we are not aware of. There have been discussions and the government said, ‘That’s a bridge too far, but why don’t you go in for a review of the appropriateness of lethal control for wombats?’ We know where the Animal Justice Party want to take basically all farmers – unless you are a lentil farmer, a soy farmer or a rice farmer. We know the Animal Justice Party want to eliminate livestock farming altogether and put a ban on livestock farming, and we have known that since Ms Purcell’s former colleague Mr Meddick walked in here and cast his comments in this chamber and in the community. I will start by saying something has changed between a ban on Monday and a review on Wednesday, but we know where the Animal Justice Party want to go, and we will not be able to support this motion.

However, there are elements within this motion that I think deserve a forensic look, and I am happy to provide some context and comments. I will go through the motion piece by piece. In paragraph (1):

- (a) the iconic wombat faces a number of threats across the state, including illegal shooting ...

Indeed we saw in my electorate, not far from home in wonderful Venus Bay, some atrocious behaviour from recalcitrant human beings. It is unacceptable conduct, thinking that it is in any way reasonable – they are deluded individuals – that they could go out one night and do a bit illegal sport shooting of a protected species in an area that is highly populated in beautiful Venus Bay, where nature meets population and the township. They potentially – allegedly – shot 10 wombats and then went on into other areas as well. This is completely unacceptable, and I thank the community who raised it with me. I have also written to the minister asking what more can be done in this space. We know we do not have enough police force members across regional Victoria, particularly in that South Gippsland area – it is a thin blue line – but also, what is the government doing in relation to protecting wildlife species in terms of rangers and the like? A ranger is not going to sit waiting for a crazed person in the middle of the night, I understand that, but what is the government going to do? The Nationals and Liberals have been active in this space, and we condemn that sort of behaviour. The other part, part (c) states:

the impact of the threats facing wombats is not fully understood as a total population count has not been conducted in Victoria ...

The Arthur Rylah Institute back about four years ago estimated the population of wombats at around 433,000. That is now an old figure, but also it is probably quite a conservative figure because clearly that is an estimate. I have seen in the past where Arthur Rylah have certainly been conservative in their estimates of other wildlife.

In relation to the greatest threat, the greatest threat facing wombats is actually out-of-control bushfires. The Arthur Rylah Institute also provided some context: in the 2019–20 bushfires in the eastern part of the state approximately 3 billion animals were destroyed, incinerated, both domestic and native fauna. They estimate that 83,000 wombats were annihilated. If this government and the Animal Justice Party would like to support a number of endeavours, such as widening and broadening preparatory burns, soft burns, gentle burns that do not scorch the canopy, conducted in the right timeframes, then these animals during those periods of preparatory burns can actually run away and remove themselves overwhelmingly from these cooler burns. Also, firestick burns – I have been a long-time proponent of cool Indigenous firestick burns – are very much gentle burns conducted in the right situations and conditions and, again, can facilitate reduction in bushfire load and reduction of fire load across the forest estate, and therefore the intensity when bushfires come is not so great. There have been many, many evidentiary papers and investigations into that. So if the AJP want to really support protection

of species, they should be supporting preparatory burns and cool burns and not the annihilation, the incineration, of 83,000-plus wombats that we saw in the previous fire.

The other thing that the government does, and this is something that we have supported, is produce these ATCWs – authority-to-control-wildlife lethal permits. Part (d) of this motion looks at lethal control. There are a whole range of parameters around being granted a permit: you must comply with the Firearms Act; if it is a public place you must have a public place permit; depending on the location, you have to check with local councils if this is a farmer applying for a permit; you have to comply with the Environment Protection Act 2017 and the environment protection regulations; you can be assessed by a Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action officer, who may come out and access your property; you must avoid breaching the Wildlife Act 1975 and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986; and the Conservation Regulator can come in and assess. And not all applications are successful. It goes to that point that prior to 2020 we did not have ATCWs for wombats, and now they exist – if you look at 1900 in 2023, and 83,000 incinerated in 2020 in the bushfires.

I also want to reference the same article that Ms Ermacora did in relation to Len Price and his very important words:

Let's remember they're a protected species. Farmers understand that they come with the landscape.

Farmers do not go out and shoot them willy-nilly.

The other point I want to talk about is the importance of – and this motion goes to it – ecological engineers and soil health. We have got 'friends of' out in the hall today – friends of various areas. We have got certainly friends of Mount Worth and others. We have got Landcare there. Landcare is a vital, vital movement, and I thank them all for being here. There is a compelling case for continuing to support habitat restoration, soil health and the continual flourishing of wombats. I endorse the groups for being here today. As I said, in relation to the ATCW, the authority to control wildlife, the agenda of the Animal Justice Party is to stop those permits entirely. They have had a chat and the government has said water it down a bit between now and then. We know that it is a last resort when all other activities have been tried by farmers. We know that it is heavily regulated, and we certainly know that we will not be supporting a motion that, in the end, seeks to close this down as an option.

The other point I make is that the government has been very tardy on its forest review. It also needs to present the review of the Wildlife Act 1975 to Parliament. We are happy to see that and refresh that particular act.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (11:11): On behalf of the Victorian Greens I would like to thank Ms Purcell for bringing this motion before the chamber today, and I flag that the Greens strongly support the motion. It goes to the heart of what the Greens have been calling for, which is a review of the Wildlife Act 1975 and the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, because what is happening with the wombat population here in Victoria is yet another example of how our laws are failing nature. Wombat populations in Victoria, as Ms Purcell outlined, are declining. The bare-nosed wombat is the only species currently found in Victoria, but even so we do not have a strong idea of the species population count. With the threats of habitat destruction from climate change, death from road strikes and conditions like mange increasing, it is becoming increasingly important that the government take assertive action to support the wellbeing of this species.

Last week there was outrage – it has already been mentioned by a number of contributors – when a video of a woman picking up a wombat circulated around the internet. It is not hard to see from the response to this video that there is really strong community affection for this species. But the outrage from our political leaders was a joke given that it has not been matched by meaningful action to strengthen our laws to protect wombats. While some find wombats hard to live with – farmers may find wombat holes dug in their paddocks frustrating or damage to their fences tedious to repair – what is needed is for the government to support initiatives that work around these behaviours rather than turning a blind eye to reactive behaviours that put these populations in danger.

In fact behaviours that are seen by some as destructive, such as digging and burrowing, actually play a really important part in ecosystem health. Studies show that while Australia was once home to 29 digging mammal species, only six are still present in the wild. These mammals, with their digging and scratching, break up hard soils, which supports seedling growth and improves water infiltration. It can even assist with the spreading of important fungi spores across landscapes. These animals belong here. This is their home, and we are the source of the destruction. Wombats are not just a cute national emblem. They also play a critical part in our ecosystems, and they deserve protection.

But we know that our nature laws are not up to scratch. I would like to take this opportunity to once again reiterate that the buried review of the Wildlife Act must be released and acted upon. This motion further demonstrates that there are significant systemic issues inherent in our current wildlife protections. Whilst we can continue to advocate for action one species at a time, what we need is a systemwide response to our threatened species. Victoria is facing ecosystem collapse. 2000 species are at risk of extinction, and so, so much work needs to be done to address this. We know that this is a significant undertaking, but Labor already has most of the solutions in the form of the Wildlife Act review and the ecosystems decline inquiry. It has had these recommendations for three years now. Why haven't they responded? Why aren't they taking action? It is shameful. Once we lose these species and ecosystems we lose them forever. Is the legacy of this government going to be one of biodiversity collapse and ecosystem loss? Is that they want? If not, it is time that they took action and fixed our broken environment laws, massively lifted investment in nature and prioritised biodiversity in this state.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:15): I cannot help but feel just a little bit paternal when we talk about wombats in this place. I am very excited to be speaking on the motion today that has been put, indeed, around about 12 months after our previous motion on wombats that Ms Purcell brought before us. Wombats are very special creatures, and a few contributions have already been made by many members, including Ms Purcell and Ms Ermacora, with some very fascinating facts that I now know as a result of these contributions. But they are special creatures. They are one of our native animals. They have been here for centuries, and it is really important that, when it does come to all the very valid issues such as climate change and land use and especially encroachment on their spaces, we are doing everything that we can to support our native wildlife populations. That certainly includes very precious, very cuddly wombats. I will come back to some comments about the topic that everyone has been talking about in just a bit, but I do want to at the outset just note for the chamber that the government will be supporting this motion today. It is a motion that seeks to improve some controls, implement some reviews and undertake some research, and that can only be a good thing. I do thank Ms Purcell for working constructively with the government and with the minister and his office too to come to a point where we can indeed be supportive.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: Sorry, Mrs McArthur, I missed your interjection. I am usually all the worse when I do miss your interjections, because they add a lot of value. But I can say that the government will specifically be supporting this motion for the review of the appropriateness of lethal control arrangements for wombats under the authority-to-control-wildlife system, noting of course, as others have mentioned, that control arrangements can still be important in some cases for farmers to manage their property. We will also be supporting a review into the appropriateness of wombats on the private-keeping-of-wildlife list. We will be considering undertaking a total population count of wombats in Victoria – noting, as others have mentioned, that the Arthur Rylah Institute estimated that the statewide population of common wombats was around 433,000 in 2020. We will also be considering providing additional funding for wombat mange treatment, noting again the support that the Victorian government has provided over the last four years in considerable ways, including through wildlife rehabilitator grants and through other methods.

I think it is also worth mentioning the point that, when it comes to investigations of bad behaviour, we saw allegations of a fairly serious incident at Venus Bay, and through the conservation regulator the



Victorian government is continuing to work with Victoria Police to investigate the deaths of those wombats at Venus Bay. The regulator recently put out a further call to members of the public to assist with the investigation, and I will take the opportunity to really implore anyone who has any such knowledge in any way, big or small, that might be able to assist to contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000. I understand that there is no further information that the regulator can provide at this time, and that is to be expected as the matter remains under investigation. But I know I speak for many if not all in this chamber when I say that we hope that investigation will be successful and we very much sincerely hope that we do not see that sort of activity take place again.

Without going too far into this, I think it is important to note one of the nation's biggest stories in the past week, and I note Ms Purcell's comments on that as well. We did see a very horrific video come out of a woman bothering a baby wombat, causing it serious distress. I have to admit I had to turn the volume off on the video. I could not watch it with full volume, because it was just quite frankly very distressing seeing the mother have its child snatched away for the purpose of being held up, and possibly injuring the wombat all for the sake of a video. It is vapid, it is vain and it is a horrendous way to treat any living creature.

I am not opposed to hunting per se. Obviously we can go into various different discussions and different topics and more nuanced details there, but I do not oppose the rights of people to hunt for food. But to bother an animal like that, to grab it from its mother, is despicable. It warrants every bit of outrage that this issue has generated. I do take issue with Ms Purcell calling it 'confected outrage', because I do not think it is confected outrage; it is genuine outrage. We have seen bipartisanship from the Prime Minister down with his comments. It is actually a good thing, because it is making the conversation about our wildlife. It is making the conversation about wombats. I dare say that this particular motion will be receiving far more publicity today as a result of that news story than it otherwise would have, noting of course that this is something that Ms Purcell has been working on for some time. It is perfectly justifiable for us to be outraged at this. It is not confected. There is always more that we can do, and that is indeed why the government will be supporting the motion today. There is more that we can do, as this case shows. But to accuse politicians of making up outrage when I actually do not think they are is simply not fair. It is actually undermining the very argument that you are seeking to make. We should be outraged about this.

There is absolutely no place for violence against anyone, even against this individual, but the public has every right to be outraged and wants to know the truth. That is a good thing, because that stimulates conversation about how we can protect our wildlife, specifically in this instance and more broadly as well. I note that the seppo wombat botherer has already left the country and let us hope her equally despicable friend goes with her. It is an extraordinary attack on our native wildlife, and to see Australians unite over this has been a good thing. It is a good thing – not for this wombat; it is, again, very distressing – because it is making us talk about how we do regard our native wildlife, how we do look after our wombats or in some cases how we do not look after our wombats well enough. That is what this motion today is all about. I actually think it is a good thing that we have had that discussion. In adding my voice to the outrage at the actions of the seppo wombat botherer and her despicable friend, I think we should be capturing that – not just letting it end there – capturing the spirit of the justifiable and genuine outrage and channelling that into achieving better outcomes for all wombats. We have an opportunity to do that here in the state of Victoria with this motion today. That is why I am so pleased that the government will be supporting this motion.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (11:23): I rise also with my colleague Ms Bath to speak on this motion 881 by Ms Purcell. Ms Purcell, I admire your passion for animals, and I would actually like to think that everybody in this place was passionate about animals – I know I am. We do not ever want to see animals badly treated. I take issue with you sometimes –

**Georgie Purcell** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Not all the time, just sometimes. A lot of derogatory lines get permeated here about how bad farmers are. I am standing up for farmers and Ms Bath stands up for farmers and my colleague Dr Heath here stands up for farmers. If it were not for farmers, you would all be starving for a start – that might be a good thing if some of us ate less, speaking for myself. They do a fantastic job in providing the food for all of us and for our exports. I mean, where would we be without agricultural exports? Just bear in mind that farmers do a very good job and they do care about all animals, including the ones they are producing and the wildlife they have to put up with sometimes.

We have heard about this dreadful publicity stunt of some influencer. I must say, I thought we were the influencers, but there is this new breed of people called influencers. Anyway, some sort of influencer got on television to do with this wombat. I remember another publicity stunt that happened, actually in the last term. You were around about this place, Ms Purcell, but you were not actually in the chamber at the time. It is to do with Angel. For all of you who were not around, Angel was a baby goat. Angel was extracted from the Gippy Goat farm, taken and put in a car. This was cruelty on steroids.

**Georgie Purcell:** On a point of order, Acting President, the motion is very specifically about wombats, and I would note there was a previous ruling where the same topic was brought up and the member was brought back to the motion.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Do you want to have a say on it, Mrs McArthur?

**Bev McARTHUR:** On the point of order, Acting President, I do think the debate has been fairly wideranging. I mean, we have gone to rectangular faeces and muesli bars, even.

**Michael Galea:** Further on the point of order, Acting President, Ms Ermacora's contribution, whilst it was about rectangular-shaped poo, was specifically about wombat poo.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Let me ruminate about this for a moment. I will bring you back to the topic du jour, Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** While we are talking about rectangular-shaped faeces, this poor little goat had a nappy applied to it. I think that was cruelty on steroids for a bit of publicity. I do not know whether that was by an influencer, but it was an animal activist anyway.

Ms Purcell is calling on the government to do a total population count. I have serious apprehensions about the government counting. They are not so good with numbers really, and their ability to count animals really leaves a lot to be desired. I have called them out when they have been trying to count brumbies; they got that completely wrong. Ms Purcell, I know you are concerned about this.

*Members interjecting.*

**Bev McARTHUR:** They have difficulty counting, Ms Purcell. This is a major problem. They got the brumby count wrong. They got the kangaroo count wrong. I detailed just yesterday – I think it was yesterday or the day before – the fact that they cannot count kangaroos properly. Take the koalas as well – while we have done away with locking up the forests, we are now growing eucalypts at a massive rate, and that is more food for koalas, so we are growing them exponentially as well. Then there are wild dogs. We cannot count wild dogs. When is wild dog a dingo? It is quite a major problem. And, Acting President Bourman, you would be aware of how bad they are at doing the duck counts. So asking them to do more counting, Ms Purcell, is probably not a very good idea. I think they get more involved in the politics than the science, and I just do not think that is a good idea.

But if we are really concerned about the wombats and the life of wombats, we would have to be extraordinarily worried about the fact that – what was it, Ms Bath?

**Melina Bath** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** 83,000 wombats were incinerated in one bushfire alone. If you were really worried about them, you would have to get involved in the reduction of fuel in forests. You are locking up the forests and you are throwing away the keys. You are making it harder for the wombats and every other fabulous native animal to survive because you are opposed to cool burning. If you reduce the fuel loads, you are going to save the wombats. Here is a really easy way to save the wombats.

I know you are interested in additional funding for wombat mange. This is meritorious, I agree, but I am actually passionate about making sure we just get a paltry million dollars to save the lives of children with bowel diseases. Really, the government have to get their priorities right in these matters, and I think we have got to be very careful. I do not know whether they had mange pre-settlement. Is this a recent phenomenon? I suppose if we did a major study on wombat mange, we might find out. But I would like to think that if we were a bit short of funds, we would direct them to children who are dying and make their lives better. Dr Mansfield mentioned an ecosystem. Extraordinarily, a biolink near the Lerderderg forest is going to be completely decimated by transmission towers. If you were really worried about native wildlife, you would not cut a swathe through a biolink for which 45 farmers gave up land. Some of them are out there in Queen's Hall at the moment; they are in the Landcare exhibition. They gave up their land, and hundreds and hundreds of thousands of trees were planted. Even schoolchildren planted them. A swathe is going to be cut through that biolink, and that will be a real problem for wildlife, including the wombats.

Let us make sure we get our priorities right here. I must say, I am with you. I do not know why you would want to keep a wombat as a pet. That does beggar belief a bit. I mean, I am struggling to keep the dog as a pet. Keeping a wombat would just be beyond my capacity, and I cannot imagine why you want to do that. Let us have a look at keeping wombats as pets. Maybe that is not a good idea.

We need permits for farmers to make sure they can control their wildlife. Do you know what? Give you an inch and you will take a mile, Ms Purcell. I am terribly worried that you will get this permit banned for farmers and the next minute they will not be able to get rid of the kangaroos. I can tell you that we have got no food out in the country at the moment. There is no food for livestock. There is barely any water; we are carting water. The kangaroos are decimating all our fencing and eating what foliage that there is for animals that you – not you, but others might want to eat.

There are a lot of requirements for somebody to get a lethal permit. I am grateful to Ms Bath for giving me this fabulous information. You have got to comply with the Firearms Act 1996. I would be lost after the first stop. You need a public place permit, depending on the location of activity. I have never heard of a public place permit, but there is such a thing. Then you have got to check with your local council – hopefully they know where the wombats are – and comply with the Environment Protection Act 2017 and the Environment Protection Regulations 2021. You have got to be assessed by a Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action officer. Have you got any left? You keep sacking people out in the field – all those 150 Parks Victoria –

**The PRESIDENT:** I am sorry, Mrs McArthur –

**Bev McARTHUR:** Do not tell me I have finished, President.

**The PRESIDENT:** Your time has expired. If anyone seeks leave to extend your contribution, I will deny it.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:33): It is a hard act to follow Mrs McArthur, but I do rise to speak to this motion on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. Like many here in the chamber today, I found it was deeply disturbing to see the recent footage of that American influencer laughing while taking a wombat joey from its mother. As someone who does follow Ms Purcell on social media, I think the only person we want to see on social media interacting with wombats is Ms Purcell when she visits the wildlife rescue. One particular video that I am quite partial to relates to a kissy-faced wombat. I continue to support those wildlife rescue initiatives.

Like my colleague Ms Purcell, I felt this outrage failed to confront our society's involvement in wildlife destruction and how governments often put killing before coexistence. This motion sensibly requests a number of things that will meaningfully help improve the treatment of wombats in Victoria, including a review of the appropriateness of lethal control for wombats on the approved species list for authority-to-control-wildlife permits, and for the government to explore alternative control measures. It will review the appropriateness of wombats on the species list for private-keeping-of-wildlife licences, consider undertaking a total population count of wombats in Victoria and consider providing additional funding for wombat mange treatment in the upcoming 2025–26 budget process.

I would like to begin by discussing the authority-to-control-wildlife permits program. These licences that apply to many of our native animals, including wombats, give landholders a licence to kill. There is a disturbingly small amount of information that must be supplied to obtain these licences. You do not need to provide proof of having tried nonlethal methods, nor do you need to provide evidence of a valid gun licence. This kind of licence scheme essentially lets every Tom, Dick and Harry go out and kill native wildlife without any oversight, and in 2023, 1902 of these licences were issued, but no-one knows how many were actually killed. It is not uncommon that shot animals are not killed instantly, or that when they are those joeys are orphaned. The wildlife carer community is left to pick up the pieces, and this is a broken system.

What is our world coming to, when I can tick a box to get a licence to kill native wombats, but I still cannot legally consume cannabis? There is no shortage of viable nonlethal alternatives. In the current context of declining population figures for wombats, we must learn from the mistakes of our past and fully explore these alternatives. For too long, habitat destruction, road strikes, mange and lethal control permits have all been contributing to the negative impact on wombat populations. In Queensland populations of the southern hairy-nosed wombat dropped to as low as 35 in the 1980s. We could not allow our native species to again be threatened in this way.

Another important issue raised by this motion is the existence of advanced wildlife licences. Disturbingly, these also only require minimum information to be provided before they are issued. These licences allow people to acquire captive-bred wombats as pets and buy, trade or sell them. They do not require any prior knowledge of the species, and they incentivise taking wombats out of the wild to be illegally traded. Native animals with unstable wild populations should not be able to be privately kept in this way.

Finally, this motion raises the issue of mange in wombats, pushing for investment in long-term mange management and research programs. Mange is an awful thing, fatal if untreated in wombats. Promisingly, programs of Mange Management Victoria and the Wombat Protection Society of Australia show success in combating mange. They are experimenting with different self-medication mechanisms and engaging and resourcing landowners to treat resident wombats, but as this motion indicates, combating mange must be informed by investment in data collection for a total population count of wombats in Victoria to effectively manage wombat populations in Victoria. Without an understanding of rates of mange in wombats, government decision-making capabilities will be limited.

Legalise Cannabis Victoria supports this motion, and we thank Ms Purcell for her continued advocacy for our voiceless furry friends.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (11:38): I stand up to make a short contribution to this motion. I will not be supporting it. I do not think that will be particularly surprising. But I am actually quite fond of wombats. I believe that authority-to-control-wildlife permits should not be given unless they are necessary, and that is why we have a system. We have a system where you can get the permit, but it does not necessarily follow that you can just go out to shoot them. Just to expand on what Ms Payne said, you do not need a shooters licence to get one, but you need a shooters licence to actually execute, pardon the pun, the permit. So everything that Ms Bath and Mrs McArthur said is true. It is not a licence – well, it is a licence to kill, but it is a licence to do a surgical removal. I would like to hope

that those permits are not just issued willy-nilly, because I know a lot of people complain about how hard they are to get, and they are only issued when they are needed.

The mange stuff – absolutely. Mange is a horrendous disease. Unfortunately it is not just kept to wombats. There are a lot of other animals that get it, and I am not even aware of a proper cure. It is effectively a long-term death sentence.

I am going to finish off my contribution with a bit of commentary. Over the last day I have sat here and listened to outrage for people's visa status when they are being searched by the police, or armed offenders being done by the police, and outrage over wombats, but never outrage for the victims of crime by a certain part of this Parliament.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:40): Thank you for the opportunity to rise and speak on this motion. The Allan Labor government has a strong commitment to protecting the environment, promoting animal welfare and supporting environmental volunteering and the Landcare program. I think there is no better example than that. If you look into Queen's Hall behind us today, it is full of volunteer Landcare and 'friends of' groups from all across Victoria. It is absolutely buzzing in there. I will just give a quick little plug: at 1 o'clock today we are going to have the Minister for Environment and the Shadow Minister for Environment in there speaking to volunteers from all across our state who are dedicating themselves to improving the local environments of the places in which they live. Whether that is farmland or public land, they are all getting in there and doing incredible work.

I was up at Korumburra just last week with the Korumburra Landcare Group on one of the farms, on Jim Ahon's property. Through a seed grant amount that the Landcare group received they have set up their own nursery, and it is incredible, with plants growing all throughout this beautiful property in the hills of Korumburra. That is then being taken and either given away or sold at a discounted rate to other groups to plant out rail trail areas or other areas that create really good biodiversity links, areas that are identified as high value. This benefits us in so many ways. It is obviously a benefit to everyone living in all the areas that our Landcare members and volunteers are working on through the enjoyment of the local areas and local spaces, connecting different areas of biodiversity value so our animals can move between them and protecting against erosion, salinity and all sorts of things, which so many groups have done over time. I just wanted to note that and give that a bit of a plug, so thank you for allowing me to do that.

The efforts of the state government are crucial for maintaining the health and the balance of our ecosystems, which provide essential functions for us through clean air, water, productive soils and natural pest control. It is when we get these sustainable balances right that we all benefit, and we cannot benefit economically if environmentally our natural balances are not in place. The state government has invested over \$609 million to make sure our biodiversity is healthy, strong and valued across the state. It is the largest ever investment in biodiversity by any government. Since 2008 the Victorian government has invested a total of \$3.2 million in wildlife rehabilitator grants, which I think have been really important for so many of our wildlife but indeed for wombats, which we are here to talk about today. As other colleagues have mentioned, the government supports this motion from Ms Purcell, who has just joined us here in the chamber.

**Georgie Purcell:** I was gone 2 minutes.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Just ducked out, sorry – I meant to say 'who is with us in the chamber'. We support the motion that has been put. On the investment in wombat management, as I stated before, since 2008 the Victorian government has invested a total of \$3.2 million in the wildlife rehabilitator grants. The Victorian government has allocated a total of \$300,000 for the 2024–25 wildlife rehabilitator grants to support authorised shelter operators and foster carers to rehabilitate sick, injured or orphaned wildlife, with the goal of releasing these animals back into the wild. Authorised shelter operators and foster carers have provided records about wombat rescue and rehabilitation across the state. The Victorian government has also provided over \$2 million to support specific wildlife projects,

such as wombat gate trials across Ripon, Bungalook Creek Wildlife Shelter and East Trentham Wildlife Shelter, since 2015–16. In 2020 the Victorian government committed \$400,000 over four years to Mange Management, who have undertaken the important work of the government's commitments to tackle mange in wombats. It can cause significant health and welfare impacts for individual wombats. Research undertaken in Tasmania has indicated that while there may be localised population impacts from a severe mange outbreak, there is limited evidence that mange poses a significant risk to the species.

In 2019 the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research reviewed and collated available monitoring reports and data to determine wombat distribution and abundance in Victoria. They estimated the statewide population of common wombats was around 433,000 at that time. The highest populations were predicted for the ranges to the north, north-east, east and south-east of Melbourne. The common wombat is protected under the Wildlife Act 1975 in Victoria. Wombat populations are considered to be secure in Victoria and, as a result, are not listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 or the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. As I noted at the start, the government is supporting this motion, and I will conclude my comments and remarks there.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:46): Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a contribution on the motion. Can I just begin by saying that I do want to lend my full support to this motion, and I want to thank Ms Purcell for bringing this to our attention.

I would also say that we do desperately need to recognise the iconic wombat, particularly those in Victoria, and protect them from various threats that jeopardise their very survival. The motion calls upon the government to review the appropriateness of lethal control measures, assess the private keeping of wombats, consider conducting a total population count and allocate additional funding to combat wombat mange. Each of these actions is crucial to ensuring the welfare and sustainability of wombat populations here.

What was interesting to me was to find out that Victoria is home to only one species, the bare-nosed wombat, or *Vombatus ursinus*. I think I said that right. Apologies – my Latin is not great – to the Hansard team. Despite being an iconic native species, wombats face numerous threats, including habitat destruction, road strikes, illegal and legal shooting and the devastating effects of sarcoptic mange. Unfortunately, I have got to tell you, the full impacts of these threats remain uncertain as there has been no comprehensive population count.

Sarcoptic mange in particular poses a threat to wombats and their lives. It causes severe suffering and hurt and leads to high mortality rates in affected populations. I did have the opportunity at a wildlife centre – not here but a little further north of here – to see the effects of this on some species. Can I just thank the wildlife rescuers operating in and around the Glass House Mountains for the work that they do there. Can I also say that without adequate treatment and funding for community-led management programs, this disease will continue to cause widespread harm to Victoria's wombats. Maybe it says something that I have not had the chance to see its impact here in Victoria. That is not to say I will not have a more active look at it in the future.

One of the key points in this motion is the call for a review of the appropriateness of lethal control measures for wombats under the authority-to-control-wildlife permits. While farmers and landholders must be able to manage wildlife on their properties, it is essential that lethal control is only used as a last resort and that nonlethal alternatives are prioritised. There have been trials to this effect, including wombat gates, that have demonstrated that humane alternatives can effectively mitigate wombat-related damage to property without resorting to culling. These gates allow wombats to move freely without damaging fences, providing a practical solution that benefits both landowners and the wildlife. There is success that has been reported in such alternatives, and they do highlight the need for a formal review of lethal control permits, ensuring that nonlethal permits are prioritised wherever possible in the state.

The motion also calls for a review of the appropriateness of wombats being kept on the list of species available for the private keeping of wildlife. This private keeping of wildlife raises some really significant ethical and welfare concerns. I too join Mrs McArthur by being quite bewildered in understanding why anyone would want to privately have a wombat. This is a species that is best left to enjoy their lives, not in the private backyards of strange folks, can I just say. It is of course worth recognising that wild animals have really complex needs, and it is really difficult to meet those in a captive setting, particularly a private captivity setting. These animals are burrowing animals, and they require large home ranges. They require some really specific environmental conditions that are incredibly challenging to replicate in captivity. I do acknowledge absolutely that some individuals may seek to keep wombats for rehabilitation or for educational purposes, but there must be clear regulations in place to ensure that their welfare is not compromised. A comprehensive review of private keeping regulations will ensure that safeguards for the best interests of wombats are around and ensure that their conservation remains a priority.

I know that the Arthur Rylah Institute in 2020 did do some estimates on the populations of wombats here. Can I just take a moment to acknowledge the incredible work of the Arthur Rylah Institute. I had the good fortune of meeting them and understanding and reading a bunch of their research and also working with some of their professionals in a time long ago. I just want to acknowledge and thank them for all they do here in Victoria. We are really uniquely placed with the Arthur Rylah Institute, and it is a special institute indeed, and so I just want to lend my support to the ARI for all that they do. Their work in fact suggested that the population was around 433,000, but this figure does not take into account recent environmental challenges experienced across the state, including habitat destruction. But also as I said earlier, there are disease outbreaks that do affect species and any research into populations at that time needed to also think about that, and that is why in this motion there is a call for a thorough population survey. That would provide the government with accurate data on the distribution and the numbers and allow for better informed conservation and management strategies. Without such data I think it is fair to say that it would not be possible to gauge the full extent of the threats facing wombats and whether current policies are effective in maintaining really stable populations.

As I said earlier, sarcoptic mange is a particularly insidious disease that causes some really severe skin infections. It leads to emaciation, blindness and ultimately death, and it is really troubling to see. Can I just let members of the chamber know that it is really tough to see when a species is impacted by this. There is pain; it is visible, and I can only imagine it. It is worth noting that this disease spreads through burrows and it has had really devastating impacts on populations across the state. There have been some community-led initiatives such as mange management supported by the Victorian government, which provides treatment kits and educational resources to help control numbers in local populations. While this support has been incredibly invaluable, further funding is necessary to expand treatment efforts and increase public awareness of the disease. There have been some calls for investment in wombat mange treatment. It is not the only matter for the welfare of wombats, but it really is an essential step in ensuring the long-term survival of this keystone species. Of course there has been, as I recall speaking about not too long ago, quite an incredible investment in biodiversity initiatives across the state. But it is clear that protecting our native wildlife is a priority.

Recent measures such as the revocation of outdated unprotection orders that previously allowed unrestricted culling of wombats in eastern Victoria highlight the government's dedication to aligning wildlife management policies with modern conservation principles, and this motion before us moved by Ms Purcell certainly aligns with those efforts, ensuring that wombats receive the attention and the protection that they deserve.

Wombats are not just an iconic Australian species, they are ecological engineers. Their burrowing behaviour plays a vital role in improving soil health. It facilitates water infiltration, and it also creates habitats for other species. In some bushfire-affected areas wombat burrows have provided refuge for smaller animals and contributed to ecosystem resilience. Protecting wombats, therefore, is not just

about conserving a single species, it is about maintaining the balance and health of Victoria's natural landscapes. By implementing the measures that are outlined in this motion we can ensure that wombats continue to play their essential role in the environment.

I will finish off by saying: if you do know of any bad behaviours, report them to Crime Stoppers Victoria.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (11:56): I thank all members for their contributions today and particularly the government, the Legalise Cannabis Party and the Greens for supporting this motion.

I think what is really clear from this debate is that there has been, as expected, a lot of condemnation of the US tourist incident over the last weekend. Whether or not it is confected outrage, as I described it, or genuine care, something that is abundantly clear from the contributions today is that there is very minimal understanding about the threats that wombats are facing, even from the government, who have the task of protecting them. I would encourage all members to actually go online and look at the authority-to-control-wildlife (ATCW) permit system application form after this debate to see just how easy it is to fill out that form and potentially kill wombats on private land across the state.

I just really want to reiterate: we spoke about rigorous checks and apparently the fact that it is 'heavily regulated', but this is just simply repeating what the department has been saying, which we have proven is untrue. We do have the evidence to show that, from a number of people have come to us and spoken to us about just how easy it has been for them or their neighbours to get these permits. I spoke about this in my contribution, but not all members were here for that. It is not a requirement to prove you have a gun licence. It is not a requirement to prove or provide evidence of damage and have it verified. There are rarely property inspections. In fact there are barely ever property inspections. There is no confirmation that nonlethal methods have been explored. It is simply a box you have to tick on the form. They do not come out and talk to you about potential nonlethal methods or even make a phone call about it, in the experiences we have heard about. In fact you do not even have to prove evidence that wombats or any native animal actually exist there, that they are even actually there.

Recently a report was released that I should have spoken about in my main contribution, called *Licence to Kill*, which examines this permit system across the entire country, and it shows that Victoria is the least regulated system in Australia. 1902 wombats were permitted to be killed under ATCW permits in the last year alone, and again we do not know how many of them were actually killed, which leads to the need for a thorough individual population count. We have heard about the Arthur Rylah Institute's counts, and of course sometimes we can gather information from this, but just like the many other native animal counts conducted in this state, this is an extrapolated count. It means that wombats are counted in one area and that is extrapolated across the state. We know that they do not live in certain areas; we know that they do not live in bodies of water; we know that they do not live in metropolitan areas for the most part. That is why we need to know just how many there are – to know the threats they are facing and how serious they are.

It was great to hear the support from members across the chamber about the need to treat mange and combat mange, and it seems we are united on that front. The government spoke about the funding that they have given to this initiative over the past four years, and we appreciate that. In fact it is an issue that I worked on in my previous role with Mr Meddick, the previous Animal Justice Party MP. But what we are saying is this funding is about to expire and this program may no longer exist. It is treating thousands of wombats every year across the state, and we want that work to continue.

I think, in closing, if members found the video last week distressing and are genuinely concerned about this, they would be even more distressed if they saw the things that are being approved under the government's watch across the state every single night where wombats are being killed and, as I said, joeys are having their brains destroyed as per the advice from the department. We just want consideration of this species, which is so important, to be taken off the permit list. One member said



they would let the wombats have the last word, and I would like to do that as well. I think that if the wombats could make a contribution today, they would say, ‘Please stop killing and harming us.’

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

**Motion agreed to.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Land tax**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:07): (853) My question is for the Treasurer. There were recent media reports, rather concerning reports, about home owners receiving land tax liability notices from the SRO despite not normally being liable for land tax. Would the Treasurer be able to confirm what the situation actually is here for property owners receiving these types of land tax assessments?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:08): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question in relation to land tax. As many people in the chamber would know, land tax has been around for some time and the settings that have been in existence for over 10 years have not changed. What have been altered recently are thresholds in relation to introducing the temporary changes for the COVID debt recovery plan. Many people that may have had properties valued at over \$300,000 have been used to getting land tax notifications. Now, in relation to the changed threshold of a reduction to \$50,000, that would be the vast majority of a new cohort that have been asked to contribute to this.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:09): I thank the Treasurer for that answer. But specifically this was around people who work from home or run a business from home. There was an implication in the article that the SRO was receiving some data from the ATO related to this, and these people had previously never been liable, even though they were working from home. Under what conditions does someone become liable for land tax if they are working from home? Because lots of people do it these days.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:09): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. To be really clear, land tax does not apply to home owners or renters merely for working from home from time to time. If you are in the office five days a week then working from home two days a week et cetera, this is not what is intended to be captured. As I said previously, the settings have not changed in relation to those who operate a substantial business from home. What has changed is the threshold. A good example of that is that if you are a mechanic and you run a business from a garage in the main street, you have always been subject to land tax. It is only fair that the same settings apply to someone who may operate the same size business outside of the garage that may be connected to their principal place of residence. That has not changed. The only thing that has changed is the thresholds.

**Child protection**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): (854) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, Labor has been in power for more than 10 years now, and during this time child protection failures have seen Victoria’s most vulnerable children and young people exposed to extreme risk, which includes 2615 at-risk children who were not investigated for over 29 days according to ROGS; premature case closure when the child was still at risk; and a lack of proper oversight with no case worker allocated to them. Due to these and other failures, at least 66 children who were known to child protection authorities have died since 2020. So I ask: will the minister accept responsibility for the thousands of children at real risk of abuse, harm or serious neglect who were left to fend for themselves for a month before an investigation was started?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:11): Can I say at the outset that this question again shows that those opposite (1) do not understand how the ROGS work and how to read them and (2) certainly do not understand how the child protection system works. It is an absolute mischaracterisation –

*Members interjecting.*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: Sorry, President. I cannot hear myself, so I do not think the chamber can either.

**The PRESIDENT**: The minister is doing her best to try and answer the question under duress from the people who actually asked the question. So the minister to continue without interjection.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: Thank you, President, and I appreciate your assistance in being heard. Those opposite simply do not understand how to read the ROGS and therefore how to interpret the data. They certainly do not understand how the child protection system actually works. If they did know how to read the ROGS, what they would find is that Victoria leads the nation when it comes to home-based care. Ninety-four per cent of our placements are in home-based care, which is above the national average of 88 per cent. To go to my statement yesterday in relation to the Aboriginal Children’s Forum and the work that is being achieved by that collective of people, Victoria leads again when it comes to placing Aboriginal children with relatives and kin. Eighty per cent of all Victorian children in care are placed in kinship care, which is again well above the national average. All of that is detailed in the ROGS.

I suspect those opposite are referring to table 16A.10 in the ROGS, which also shows that 93.6 per cent of child protection reports have an investigation which is commenced within 28 days of that report, which is again the second-highest nationally for child protection investigations commenced within 28 days, and it is well ahead of the national average of 80 per cent. The table also shows that 66.7 per cent of child protection reports in Victoria have an investigation commenced within seven days, which is the third-highest rate in the country and again well above the national average.

What is clear in the question from those opposite is that they do not understand (1) what this data means (2) how to interpret it or (3) how the child protection system here in Victoria actually works.

**Georgie Crozier**: On a point of order, President: Minister, 66 children have died.

**The PRESIDENT**: It is not an opportunity to repeat the question.

**Georgie Crozier**: The minister is accusing the opposition of not understanding what the data is suggesting, and she said that it was a mischaracterisation, so I am asking: 66 deaths – is that a mischaracterisation, Minister?

**The PRESIDENT**: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister is being relevant.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** As I was about to go on to say, all reports are allocated to an intake practitioner, and work is undertaken in this phase. Reports do not come in and sit there unattended, as is the implication of your question. All reports are allocated to an intake practitioner, and extensive work is undertaken from the time that report is made to the intake practitioner until the – *(Time expired)*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:15): Minister, I note your response and I note that you did not answer the question around accepting responsibility. I will ask: can the minister confirm child protection services will be exempt from any upcoming cuts in this year's budget?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:15): The Premier has made it very, very clear that frontline services are absolutely critical to the delivery of important services in this state, and child protection workers are absolutely a frontline service. We stand by child protection workers and the work that they do. From the very moment that a report is made to an intake practitioner and they assess the risk of that child, there are eyes on that child – each and every child – by these dedicated child protection workers. They are working to ensure that from the moment a report is made, there are eyes on a child. Those important frontline workers are working day in, day out to protect the most vulnerable children in our community.

#### Ministers statements: pill testing

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:16): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government's pill-testing service is helping save lives and reduce harm. Over the Labour Day long weekend our pill-testing service attended Pitch Music & Arts Festival near Moyston. Members will remember that this is the same festival where last year, tragically, a young Victorian man lost his life after overdosing in the extreme heat, and I want to again extend my condolences to the loved ones and that young man's family. This year's festival took place over another hot long weekend, but with an important difference: as part of our pill-testing service, this year's event hosted a multidisciplinary team of chemists, healthcare professionals and peer workers to provide festivalgoers with access to vital health information to help them make safer and more informed decisions. More than 550 samples were tested over the three-day event, and for 70 per cent of the 480 festivalgoers who used the service it was the first time they had ever had a conversation with a health professional about their drug use. In the conversations experts were able to provide patrons with potentially life-saving information about the risks of consuming certain substances in hot conditions and the steps they can take to reduce those risks. But the benefits go far beyond these conversations: testing conducted at the festival led to the rapid issuing of two statewide drug advisories, including one about high-dosage MDMA and the dangers of consumption in hot conditions. These advisories were quickly shared far and wide, with alerts broadcast at other festivals over the long weekend. Quite simply, this is harm reduction in action and it is why, under Labor, pill testing is here to stay.

#### Housing

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:18): (855) My question today is to the minister for housing. Minister, I understand the government procures accommodation from the Coburg Motor Inn for people who would otherwise be homeless when recently released from prison. This venue has been plagued with issues for a number of years and residents report that the site is in terrible condition with housing that is unfit for people, with some saying that they would rather sleep on the streets than the motel. There have been deaths and suspicious activities, with regular police and ambulance call-outs. Neighbouring residents are very concerned about the welfare of those forced to live there. Minister, when will your government provide appropriate transitional housing to accommodate homeless Victorians leaving prison?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:19): Thank you, Ms Copsey, for raising what is in fact a really important issue, namely the assistance provided and the assistance required for people in situations of extreme vulnerability, whether they are completing a process of

being exited from the correctional system or the justice system on the one hand or whether they are victim-survivors of family violence on the other. We know that homelessness, rough sleeping and extreme disadvantage affect people from all walks of life, and we know that the pressure on the homelessness system and services extends to people who are currently, for example, in rental accommodation – between 30 and 40 per cent of people accessing homelessness services for the first time are coming from private rentals.

That gives you a sense of the complexities associated with the need for housing, and we know that family violence is one of the key drivers of demand upon transitional housing. Exit from the carceral system is also part of providing a system that gives people support in transitional housing.

I am very happy to have some further conversations with you about specific issues, but I would say to anybody in any housing – whether it is social housing, assistance with temporary accommodation or crisis accommodation, affordable rentals, the private market, whether you are a home owner or not – is if there is any issue around a compromise to your safety, for whatever reason, please contact law enforcement for assistance. What I would say to people who are exiting the correctional system is that that may in and of itself be a difficult thing to do, but if there are challenges associated with safety, then again it is important that people have access to those processes.

What I would also say is that if there are any examples of deficiencies in the security, the safety or the quality of housing being provided in transitional housing, there are processes whereby that can be notified. We do have settings in place whereby people do pay for the services that are delivered through transitional housing. They are not contracts managed by Homes Victoria, but if there are specific examples that you have of individual matters around hotel accommodation or other transitional housing or crisis accommodation, I would be very happy to have a conversation with you about those examples.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): Thank you, Minister, for that response. I note the advice provided in the response, and I will just comment that it seems that the issues have been going for many years, with repeat attendances by emergency services, so it would seem in the case of this premises that those avenues are being utilised and we are not seeing a change. But I will take the advice to pass on to those who are concerned to keep trying. You may have touched on and may have partially answered this, but my supplementary is: has the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing calculated that accommodating people in this motel is cheaper than providing public housing?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:22): Again, just to the preamble of your question, people who are exiting correctional systems require ongoing support and assistance that involves wraparound and whole-person support. It is about making sure that we have those post-correctional and post-justice system supports in place. That is not something that sits with my portfolio, and I am not saying that to create any further ambiguity, but there are other issues there that again may speak to a need for other wraparound services, because they are culminating in the sorts of issues around call-outs for emergency services and frontline responses, as you have indicated.

Transitional housing and crisis accommodation are by their very definitions transitional and temporary. Public housing and social housing are long-term accommodation. The distinctions between cost as they relate to what a standing tenancy looks like and what a transitional housing arrangement looks like are actually really difficult to compare and contrast. I am, again, very happy to talk you through that work, but we do know that the social housing system with permanent accommodation is something which reduces demand on frontline services and on those supports.

#### Child protection

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:23): (856) My question is again to the Minister for Children. Minister, how many children in state care are currently on bail?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:23): This is a question that has been asked of me previously, and bail is not a matter for my responsibilities. Children who are in the child protection system are exactly that, children in the child protection system. The question in relation to bail is a question for another minister. I am happy to –

*Members interjecting.*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: President, again, I cannot hear myself.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT**: Order!

**A member** interjected.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: Exactly: anything to demonise child protection workers and the children who are in care is where those opposite are sadly, sadly at. I am more than happy to continue to talk to you about the achievements of our child protection system and the work that we are doing with vulnerable children. I am happy to go back to your previous question, Ms Crozier, and talk to you about how our child protection workers, from the moment a report is made, are working with the reporters, the children and the families to assess risk and make sure that appropriate case management is given to each and every child at the appropriate stage that they come into that system – 17,000 children on any given day – but bail is a matter for a different minister.

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:25): Of course she knows. If she does not know, it is total incompetence. There is a supplementary question I would like to ask, and I take note that the minister just refused to answer that very simple question. Your government has failed to keep the community safe as the rate of serious youth crime continues to rise. Sadly, many of those youth offenders are in state care. You are failing them and you are failing the workers. So why won't you be honest with the Victorian community about the number of children under your care who are on bail, because isn't the community entitled to know?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:25): The Treasurer opposite just made the point that the numbers of children who are in care change day in and day out. Day in and day out, it is a fluid proposition, but at any point in –

*Members interjecting.*

**Gayle Tierney**: On a point of order, President, I cannot hear the minister and she is sitting right next to me. I ask that the house be called to order.

**The PRESIDENT**: I uphold the point of order. The minister, without any assistance.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN**: I appreciate that. On recollection, I believe Ms Crozier asked me exactly this question back in November last year. But I am more than happy, Ms Crozier, to talk to you about the ways in which we support children in out-of-home care, whatever their circumstances. They are children who are in the care of the state, and it is the state's responsibility – a responsibility, I know, of child protection workers day in and day out. You might think that child protection workers are failing those children, but on this side of the house we have confidence that our child protection workers work tirelessly in very difficult circumstances on the front line – as, again, your previous question went to – with vulnerable children and their families, whether they are in home-based care or residential care or receiving the support of the system in other ways – (*Time expired*)

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): I move:

That the minister's answer be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ministers statements: Ryans Lagoon**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:27): Wetlands are critical for reducing the impacts of floods, improving water quality and providing crucial habitats for animals and plants. In the past, many wetlands in northern Victoria would naturally have been filled by overbank flows from the Murray River, but regulation of the river has meant vital flows do not always reach these important wetlands – places like Ryans Lagoon near Wodonga, which was dry for a number of years. So it was fantastic to visit a restored Ryans Lagoon last week. Ryans Lagoon is now under the care of the Duduroa Dhargal Aboriginal Corporation, DDAC, with a three-year project to restore the landscape. Pumps delivered water aiming to match the natural flow that existed before the Murray River was regulated. Ryans Lagoon is a nationally significant wetland, home to at least 29 species of waterbirds, the wedge-tailed eagle and the eastern long-necked turtle. A huge thanks to Uncle Allan, Uncle Phil and Aunty Valda for sharing their culture and the significance of this site, where traditional owners have cared for the Upper Murray flood plain for tens of thousands of years.

To effectively deliver water where it is most needed, partnerships are crucial, and it was great to see the North East Catchment Management Authority, North East Water, the environmental water holders and DDAC working together to deliver this vital project. Restoration of the area’s plants and animals also provides a site for cultural education. The collaboration with DDAC is a great example of what is possible when First Nations people are empowered to care for country in their own ways and of the important role waterways play in bringing together community and of course in our enjoyment of our beautiful, beautiful environment.

**Duck hunting**

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:29): (857) Politics, like comedy, is a little bit in the timing. My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and it is about wetlands. Minister, the wetlands management committee has an important role to play in ensuring that hunting is undertaken in a sustainable and ethical way. An important part of this process is that of trigger points. Trigger points offer management, not closures. Closures should be the last resort, not the first or only option. Management practices like partial closures should be considered with appropriate buffer zones, should the size of the wetland permit it. Other factors that should be taken into account are the number of hunters and hunted creatures that regularly use the wetland, the size of the refuge area available in or near the wetland where the birds can escape hunting pressure and the potential significance to the population of the proposed closure. My question is: would the minister support the wetlands management committee to consider more management programs like hunter education and signage?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:30): I thank the member for his interest and his ideas around further protections. I will refer this matter to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation for his response.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:30): I thank the minister for forwarding it on. Closing wetlands due to the presence of a game species such as the blue-winged shoveler is always going to be problematic. The major issue is that they are not officially being closed due to the risk of them being shot, they are being closed due to disturbance. Some of the areas are multi-use wetlands. In off-hunting seasons they can be used for other noisy pursuits such as motorboating. Minister, why is disturbance from boats on these wetlands not treated the same as disturbance from hunting?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:31): Again, I thank Mr Bourman for his ongoing interest in this area. This matter will be referred to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation.

**United Firefighters Union**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:31): (858) My question is for the Minister for Industrial Relations, and I refer the minister to her responsibilities to ensure that industrial actors in Victoria act

lawfully as state government employees. I refer particularly to the operational enterprise agreement with the United Firefighters Union. Will the minister insist that the UFU comply in full with the ruling of the full bench of the Fair Work Commission to hand over all documents relating to a secret slush fund and insist the UFU return to the commission after their extraordinary walkout?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:32): Mr Davis, often I reflect on the fact that you ask me questions that are not appropriately put to me. It is a matter for the commission to enforce their orders. My understanding is perhaps some of these matters have been referred to police, and again I do not step into the shoes of the operation of law enforcement officers. It continues to concern me the questions that you ask about the expectations of ministers of the Crown and what you think we should and should not do. It is terrifying that you think that we should step into the shoes of independent bodies, that we should influence outcomes inappropriately, because that is exactly what you are asking me to do.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): Minister, given that Fair Work has refused to rule that the scheme satisfied the requirements of the enterprise agreement and the union will not submit to Fair Work rules, these payments are in fact corrupt fees routed through the secret UFU trust and have all the appearance of a rort. I therefore ask the minister: will you order an independent investigation into the UFU's secret trust fund?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:33): Mr Davis, if you had listened to my response to your substantive question, there is capacity for the commission to enforce their rulings. There is also the matter of referrals to the Federal Court, and anything that could be considered illegal or corrupt could be a matter for Victoria Police.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, it was a simple question about whether she will refer this for an independent investigation – will she order an independent investigation – and the answer is yes or no.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! The minister indicated in her substantive and in her follow-up answer to the supplementary that this does not fall within her remit, and she also believes that it is inappropriate for her to do so. That is the answer.

#### **Ministers statements: housing**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:34): I rise to update the house on how Development Victoria is delivering on the Allan Labor government's plan to build more homes in areas where people want them. Last year our government announced that the Inner North Collective Joint Venture consortium will deliver 820 homes on two parcels of land at the Fitzroy Gasworks site. I can now report that expressions of interest have opened for the final parcel of land. Approximately 350 more homes will be delivered for this parcel, with 20 per cent of the new builds slated to be affordable. This will contribute to around 1200 new homes across the entire Fitzroy Gasworks precinct. EOIs will remain open until Thursday 17 April.

The message that we want to be sending, and sending very clearly, is that we are determined to provide more homes and more opportunities for Victorians. We do not block; we build.

The Fitzroy Gasworks site project will unlock opportunities for more Victorians to live close to jobs, open spaces, education, transport and health care. This is surrounded by the Darling and Edinburgh gardens. It is a 5-minute walk to the route 86 tram, a 10-minute walk to Alexandra Parade and a 15-minute walk to the iconic Fitzroy Market. We have consistently –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, I cannot hear the minister's response, and she is just here to my left. I would ask that you call the house to order. There are constant interjections from those opposite.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will let the minister start from the start, because I could not hear her. But I have got to say it was not just one side of the chamber that was making a bit of noise. Let us all respect the person on their feet – everyone should.

**Harriet SHING:** What a joy it is to have the ear of the chamber to talk about how Development Victoria is delivering on our government's plan to build more homes in areas where people want them. Last year we announced that the Inner North Collective Joint Venture consortium will deliver 820 homes on two parcels of land at the Fitzroy Gasworks site. I can now report that expressions of interest have opened for the final parcel of land, where we will deliver 350 more homes with 20 per cent of the new builds slated to be affordable. This will contribute to around 1200 new homes across the entire Fitzroy Gasworks precinct. EOIs will remain open until Thursday 17 April. The message that we are sending is really clear. We are determined to provide more homes and more opportunities for Victorians. We do not block; we build.

The Fitzroy Gasworks site project will unlock opportunities for more Victorians to live close to jobs, open spaces, education, transport and health care. Whether it is a 5-minute walk to the route 86 tram, a 10-minute walk to Alexandra Parade or the Brunswick Street tram stops or a 15-minute walk to the iconic Fitzroy Market, we are providing housing that is close to open spaces and amenities and providing the opportunity for people to live where they wish.

We have consistently fought to find more opportunities for housing projects across this state, but the same cannot be said of the Greens political party. Does anyone remember what the Greens political party has actually done? The Greens representative for housing in the other place has consistently opposed the delivery of housing. When she was mayor of Yarra City Council, she deemed it to be too close to the town hall. The recently departed Dr Ratnam has been sending out material –

**Evan Mulholland:** On a point of order, President, ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack either the opposition or minor parties, and I will remind the member that it was actually Richard Wynne who blocked the gasworks site.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is not a point of order. This is very good opportunity for me to say that I do call the chamber to listen to ministers statements and members statements in silence in fairness to the person on their feet. But if someone is going to provoke interjection, that is a different thing.

**A member** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Not you, the minister. If it is someone doing a members statement, it is the same thing – if they provoke interjection, it is very difficult for me to call people to listen in silence. That is not on the point of order; it is just a chance for me to be an old man who has not had any sleep and ramble.

**Harriet SHING:** Dr Ratnam, who was here in this chamber, has been sending out material lauding her party's efforts to secure both public and community housing, and other members of the Greens political party have changed their tune, putting up posters from Southbank to Box Hill advocating for renters and first-time homebuyers. That is exactly what this development will deliver. We are looking forward to continuing with the work, and perhaps the Richmond member should have a chat to her colleagues about getting some clear messaging.

#### Medicinal cannabis

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:39): (859) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. A recently published Canadian study found that regular cannabis use can have therapeutic and harm reduction applications and lead to a reduction in opioid use for chronic pain



management. The survey, conducted over eight years, tracked people who use unregulated opioids to manage chronic pain. It found that those using cannabis were able to reduce their opioid use by around 50 per cent. Researchers cite the ability of cannabis compounds to activate opioid receptors in the brain, leading to the release of endogenous opioids and enhanced pain relief. The study highlights the potential for reducing the harms associated with opioid use and shows the need for further research. I ask the minister: has the government considered conducting or encouraging similar research in this field of harm reduction?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:40): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question. It is quite a detailed question, but I appreciate where you are coming from, and I do certainly think that emerging therapies and research into these issues are very important. What I say in response at a kind of high level is that to help us better understand and respond to these sorts of challenges and to emerging issues in the AOD space, we are developing, as I am sure you are aware, a statewide AOD strategy. I have got no doubt that that work will heavily feature emerging therapies, research and harm reduction. As you know, we have also appointed Victoria's first chief addiction medicine adviser, the very excellent Dr Paul MacCartney, which is an easy name to remember. I am not actually familiar with this Canadian study that you are raising – I have not been briefed on that – but what I can offer to do, if it is helpful, is take the detail of your question on notice and ask Dr MacCartney to provide me with a little bit of advice that I might be able to provide back to you in the form of a written response.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:41): Thank you, Minister, and thank you for that very generous offer – I do appreciate it. Drug overdose is a major cause of preventable death and the leading cause of death amongst people who inject drugs across the world. Opioids have continued to be the largest contributor to drug-induced deaths over the past two decades, with numbers steadily rising. The Victorian government's statewide action plan highlights that alternative therapies, such as pharmacotherapy, lead to high rates of retention in treatment, with sustained reductions in the use of illicit heroin and other drugs, plus marked health and social improvements, including reductions in criminal activity. Given the promising results of the Canadian study, and I think other studies, will the government consider including cannabis as part of its pharmacotherapy strategy to reduce the harms of opioid overdose in Victoria? I am cognisant that that in part overlaps with your previous answer.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:42): I thank Mr Ettershank for that. As I said in my substantive answer, it is an interesting area, and one that is obviously exercising people's minds when it comes not only to the AOD strategy development, but also you would be aware that we have got a number of elements to the statewide action plan which go to pharmacotherapy. We will be expanding access to treatment. We will have naloxone-dispensing units out across the state. We will be trialling Australia's first overdose prevention and response helpline, and we will be trialling, at 244 Flinders Street, a very large hydromorphone trial. There is work going on – (*Time expired*)

### Bushfires

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:43): (860) My question is to the Minister for Water. Minister, Grampians residents who opened their private dams, private wetlands and water reservoirs for firefighting efforts over the summer have still not received their complete water top-ups promised at the time by government agencies. When will GWMWater and the Victorian government fulfil this water top-up commitment?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:44): In relation to this question, I think that it falls more within the remit of the Minister for Emergency Services. I will absolutely double-check on that. It was a matter that was raised with me when I went into the bushfire regions of the Grampians in January and February. I will seek assurances, regardless, in terms of what the current state of play is, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:45): Minister, in relation to the owners of the Grampians Paradise Camping and Caravan Parkland, they facilitated CFA trucks day and night to utilise their award-winning wetlands – as you commented in your ministers statement as an example of wetlands – for firefighting efforts. They were some of the unsung heroes in this firefighting effort. Despite being promised water top-ups for their business, they have only received a 1 per cent allocation of the top-up so far, leaving the viability of the wetlands, which are central to their caravan and camping business, in limbo. Despite numerous attempts to secure the additional water top-ups, Grampians Paradise has not had any positive response. Minister, will you now personally step in and ensure that small family businesses like the Grampians Paradise Camping and Caravan Parkland, which have saved regional towns, are provided water top-ups as they have been promised?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:46): I thank Ms Bath for her supplementary. This matter has not been specifically raised with me, and I am not in a position to provide a direct response in relation to it because I have not received correspondence or details in respect to that. But I am happy to follow this through and to get further updates and information.

#### Ministers statements: economy

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:46): Victoria’s economy is galloping ahead at full force, and I want to use the opportunity of my ministers statement to put some facts and data on the record today. The Allan Labor government has obviously been working very hard to drive economic growth and create opportunities for Victorians, and the latest economic statistics prove that our plan is working. Overall economic output increased by 1.5 per cent in 2023–24, and the economy is now 11.5 per cent larger than prior to the pandemic. More than 132,000 Victorians found work over the year to December 2024, which is one of the largest increases in Australia for this period. Both workforce participation and the share of Victorians in jobs were also near record rates at the end of last year. These numbers show that everyday Victorians are better able to get ahead because the government is backing them in. Victorian business investment grew by 3.7 per cent over the year to December 2024, compared to negative 0.1 per cent nationally. Data shows that Victoria has added more than 108,000 businesses since June 2020, an increase of 17 per cent, the largest percentage growth of any state. Retail trade is strong too, up 5 per cent over the year, overtaking the Australian average of 3.8 per cent.

Businesses invest where they think they will get the best chance to thrive and grow. Clearly businesses are voting with their feet, and they are voting for Victoria. We know that there are some that are always talking down the Victorian economy, hoping to get political advantage, secretly wishing things were not as good as they are, but on this side we will not apologise for doing everything we can to make Victoria the best place to live, to work and to invest, and the numbers that I have gone through are proving we are on the right track.

#### Written responses

**The PRESIDENT** (12:48): I thank Minister Tierney who, in line with the standing orders, will get written responses to both of Mr Bourman’s questions and both of Ms Bath’s questions, and I thank Minister Stitt for Mr Ettershank’s substantive.

#### Questions on notice

##### Answers

**The PRESIDENT** (12:48): I have received a written request from Mr Davis seeking the partial reinstatement of question on notice 1565. Having reviewed the response, I order parts (b), (c), (d) and (f) of the question on notice to be reinstated again as the further response once again does not provide the information sought, which as noted in the previous reinstatement, is not available in the department’s annual report.

**Harriet Shing:** On a point of order, President, I am just after some guidance here. Mr Davis misled the house egregiously last night when he referred to the Yallourn power station and discussions which were proven immediately to be incorrect. Quoting the *Australian* does not make it a fact, and I was wondering if Mr Davis wished to make a personal explanation to the house.

**David Davis:** On the point of order, President, I hear that the government's desperate attempt to put out a news release and to attack the *Australian* in this way is not borne out by all of the facts. I read what has been put out by the government, but I have since been further informed that there is actually some significant doubt about the government's veracity on these matters indeed and the *Australian*, as I understand it, is actually very well informed.

**The PRESIDENT:** There is no point of order. It kind of all got weird. Is it going to get weirder?

**Harriet Shing:** On that basis, I move, by leave:

That an opportunity be given right now for debate for the purpose of hearing Mr Davis provide a personal explanation to the house in relation to his comments last night around the Yallourn power station.

**Leave refused.**

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:51): (1468) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place. Minister, with the cost of living being front of mind for Victorians – unlike for the state Liberals, who are providing misleading information and are more interested in doing that in the Parliament rather than providing Victorians with an actual energy policy – what is the Labor state government doing to ensure that Victorians, including my constituents in Eastern Victoria, can power their homes with affordable, reliable electricity. Last week the Essential Services Commission released its draft decision for the 2025–26 Victorian default market offer. Their proposed rates vary between our state's five electricity zones, but on average residential customers would see a rise of less than 1 per cent on last year. This compares to an increase of between 5.1 and 8.8 per cent expected for households in New South Wales, south-east Queensland and South Australia that rely on their default offer. According to this draft decision, households on the default offer will pay on average \$448.90 per year or 21 per cent less than those in other states.

#### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1469) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Elgar Road in Box Hill is one of the key arterial roads linking the Box Hill township to Doncaster and the Eastern Freeway. At peak hour, particularly during school pick-up times, the Eastern Freeway turn-in to Elgar Road is very congested and backs up significantly. This means that locals on streets leading off Elgar Road also struggle to turn in and out of their streets. The most significant of these is the corner of Elgar Road and Anthony Crescent in Box Hill. Residents have been seeking assistance with this. I went out to meet with residents last week and to see it for myself. Minister, will you please work with your department to see if we can get a box intersection painted on the roads outside Anthony Crescent on Elgar Road.

#### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1470) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. My constituent is a resident of Rowville and volunteers for the Friends of Lysterfield Park. These volunteers care for local parklands, including Churchill National Park in Endeavour Hills. Churchill park is a breeding site for the endangered southern toadlet. My constituent was alarmed to find a new landfill site adjacent to the frogs' breeding ground. The site is roughly 3 metres deep and sits just outside the national park's fence line. Landfill gases collect and spread underground, harming ecosystems. Casey council and Parks Victoria advise my constituent that

planning overlays in the area negated the need for an environmental impact assessment. This is despite the landfill's proximity to the national park. So my constituent asks: what safeguards exist to protect flora and fauna from contaminants when zoning overlays bypass an environmental impact statement?

#### **Western Victoria Region**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (12:54): (1471) My question is for the Treasurer Jaclyn Symes. Treasurer, from 1 July 2025 the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund will replace the fire services property levy. For the first time, the fund will be used to benefit broader emergency and disaster response services, not just fire services. Every dollar raised will go to emergency services, ensuring all our hardworking emergency services have the tools and resources they need. My question is: Treasurer, which emergency and disaster response services will benefit from the ESVF and how, in my region?

#### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (1472) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. People in Lang Lang are extremely concerned about the dangerous volume and speed of heavy vehicles, particularly B-double sand trucks travelling across the town's main centre. Until the bypass is constructed, these narrow roads remain high-risk zones for both drivers and pedestrians. The community and local councillors have requested a reduction in the limit from 60 to 40 kilometres per hour, but the Allan Labor government's Department of Transport and Planning have declined this request, citing technical guidelines and freight efficiency concerns. Given the serious safety risks involved, will the minister urgently review the current speed zoning criteria and take action and prioritise pedestrian safety in Lang Lang's main street?

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1473) My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. The Grand Prix is expected to lose at least \$100 million this year, as it has in previous years, and it is Victorian taxpayers that will subsidise that loss. Victoria's other major events do not rely on taxpayers to cover, by law, their annual operating losses. The excuse for such an atrocious waste of public funds is that the attendance generates economic activity. In fact there have been years of concerns that the attendance figures for this event are grossly inflated. What other major event, or any event, would hire a legal heavyweight and go to VCAT to keep its methodology of counting its attendances hidden from scrutiny and then contend it is in the public interest to keep it hidden from scrutiny, given the level of public money that this event devours? Minister, why is the Grand Prix trying to hide its true attendance figures?

#### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:57): (1474) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. How many of the government's new neighbourhood batteries will be located in the Southern Metropolitan Region? Last week it was announced that the government will be launching 65 new neighbourhood batteries across 43 locations in Victoria. It is the biggest rollout yet, and a significant step towards helping more Victorians access localised storage for renewable power. By trapping the power of the sun, local batteries are lowering costs. One of the locations announced was at a new social housing development in Hampton East. Thanks to some support from the federal government's Housing Australia Future Fund, there is a big new social housing development being built. At the moment it is just a big hole in the ground, but when it is complete there is going to be a neighbourhood battery, providing residents with not only brand new energy efficient homes but a battery to support their lower power costs.

#### **Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:58): (1475) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it concerns Syncline Energy's proposal to install a 2000 megawatt underground

direct current cable along the Calder Freeway. While this would not replace overhead transmission, it would affect the requirements of our transmission network. Syncline’s owner Phil Galloway describes it in today’s *Weekly Times* as:

... an opportunity for the government to rethink WRL (Western Renewable Link) and halve VNI West

This is a serious company, responsible for the Melbourne renewable energy hub, and it is a serious proposal, not a thought experiment. Options agreements have been signed with landowners. It is refreshing to see consultation with landowners done first, rather than the top-down approach taken by state and federal agencies. Minister, previous requests to consider existing projects have been stonewalled. Sometimes there seems to be a siege mentality – (*Time expired*)

**The PRESIDENT:** Time, Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Will you ensure it is treated with an open mind?

**Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:01 pm.**

### Western Metropolitan Region

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (14:01): (1476) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding the intersection of Ballarat Road and Anderson Road in Sunshine North, which is listed as one of the five most dangerous intersections. I received correspondence from Brimbank City Council, with local residents expressing their concern to me about the safety of this intersection. It essentially is a bottleneck for traffic travelling east–west on Ballarat Road and north–south on McIntyre Road and Anderson Road. I ask the minister to provide my constituents with an update on the government’s plan and a timeline for a complete upgrade of the Ballarat Road and Anderson Road intersection in Sunshine North. The residents deserve closure on this matter and for the dangerous intersection to finally be addressed. The western suburbs deserve better roads, and they need them now.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): (1477) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. In October 2024 the government announced the completion of the Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road upgrade in Cranbourne East. The upgrade process was stressful and sometimes dangerous for residents, which I have discussed in this house before, but now, from the moment the sun rises to the moment the sun sets, the residents are breathing easier thanks to the improved infrastructure. However, then the sun goes down and the feelings of stress and danger begin to return to local residents. This is because their brand new infrastructure is blanketed in darkness. Despite the Big Build website describing only minor works left to be completed, the streetlights do not turn on. Only major intersections have temporary diesel generators lighting pedestrian crosswalks, but these generators have proven unreliable. There have been multiple cases reported to my office of near misses between cars and pedestrians at unlit intersections on this strip of road. Will the government assess the safety and efficacy of short-term and long-term street lighting of Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:03): (1478) My constituency question this afternoon is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Recently I joined the Belgium Avenue Neighbourhood House community to celebrate the launch of their newly refurbished kitchen, an exciting milestone made possible by the dedication of local volunteers and the support of this government. The upgraded kitchen is more than just a space for preparing meals, it is a hub of care, connection and nourishment for some of our most vulnerable communities. The project was supported by the community food relief program with a little over \$47,000 to help expand its food relief services. These funds deliver real impact, helping provide fresh, nutritious meals to public housing communities in Richmond and Collingwood. With rising cost-of-living pressures, local, community-led food security work is more

important than ever. My question is: how is the Allan Labor government continuing to support community organisations in the Northern Metropolitan Region to ensure their essential work in providing community food relief continues?

#### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:04): (1479) We all know that cost-of-living pressures are playing havoc with family budgets right now. Perhaps it is an opportune occasion to reflect upon the school saving bonus.

This the government touted as a one-off \$400. In the other chamber now for some weeks, if not months, the Minister for Education has, seat by seat, or electorate by electorate, gone through how much of that money has actually been expended. My question to the minister is: how much of that money has been expended in the electorate of Ringwood? And for that matter, how much of that money has been expended in each of the lower house seats in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region? It is important because parents have, as we know, up until the end of June this year to claim that money before that money goes into the families school activities account. Those parents who need and are looking for cost-of-living relief can claim that money, but they ought to do so before the end of June this year.

#### **South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:05): (1480) My question is to the Minister for Planning. The question I have is: will you give constituents who live near the Kingswood golf course, who are concerned about the redevelopment of the course into an 800-plus housing development, an opportunity to look at the plans for the land and provide them with an avenue of open community consultation since they will be affected by any building works in the area? Given that the City of Kingston has written to the Minister for Planning asking for broader community consultation since the last application for the site attracted over 8000 objections, and with Dingley Village's probable population increasing by 20 to 25 per cent, which would bring major changes to traffic, local services and open space, we want you to assure the residents of Dingley that further consultation will be provided. There is only a single-lane main road in and out of Dingley Village and no high school. The nearest college, Parkdale Secondary, is already turning away student applications. Primary schools are operating out of portables, and there are no increased childcare or medical facilities to support this type of increased population. There really needs to be more community consultation and consideration.

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:06): (1481) My constituency question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, will you give a guarantee that the Shepparton Search and Rescue Squad and the Echuca and Moama Search and Rescue Squad will receive ongoing annual funding from the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund and that their volunteers will benefit from the same benefits as other eligible entities? The Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025, recently introduced into the Legislative Assembly, lists many organisations that will receive funding from the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund and whose members will benefit from exemptions, but it fails to include the Shepparton or Echuca and Moama search and rescue squads, which are independent entities and not part of VICSES. During the bill briefing a ministerial adviser claimed that the two independent search and rescue squads in my electorate would receive funding auspiced through the Victorian SES. Can you confirm that this is correct and that the two squads will not have to rely solely on Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program grants for government funding, as was indicated in the government's response to the flood inquiry?

*Bills***Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024***Council's amendments*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger)** (14:07): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003** and the **Control of Weapons Act 1990** and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

*Motions***Construction industry**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:08): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) the Premier, the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP, supported the strongest possible action to stamp out the rotten culture in the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) and supported Mr Mark Irving KC as administrator;
- (2) Mr Irving appointed Mr Geoffrey Watson SC to probe into the wrongdoings in the construction sector;
- (3) Mr Watson alleged on *60 Minutes* that:
  - (a) the Premier's response to the CFMEU corruption scandal in commissioning the independent review into Victoria's construction sector (the review) amounts to a 'cover-up' because 'It was hopeless. Where it didn't go was where it needed to go';
  - (b) the government, including senior bureaucrats and ministers, undoubtedly knew of the corruption and underworld influence on Big Build sites;
  - (c) the government failed to ensure that the review adequately probed Big Build wrongdoing;
  - (d) gangland figures appeared so unconcerned by the government's response they were still profiting from taxpayers;
- (4) the government failed to ensure the safety of women on Big Build worksites, where at least three horrific attacks were perpetrated and in all instances victims were blacklisted from all government worksites;
- (5) underworld gangs and bikies are fleecing millions from taxpayers, profiting from corruption, standover tactics and intimidation on Big Build sites;

and calls on the Premier to immediately establish a royal commission into the nature and extent of misconduct, corrupt practice, waste and abuse of women on government worksites with the commission following the recommendations of Mr Geoffrey Watson SC.

I rise to speak on motion 879, which is a very, very important motion on shocking allegations that we have seen play out. I do not think anyone could look at these allegations that have been aired both on *60 Minutes* and in subsequent media and then look at the response of the Allan government and think that this is adequate or this is taking action. It is not. We know that the government has not taken action on some of the horrific allegations that we have seen to stamp out rotten culture in the CFMEU.

I just want to go through a few things first. Geoffrey Watson SC was appointed by Mark Irving KC. Mark Irving's appointment as CFMEU administrator and the putting of the CFMEU into administration was thoroughly endorsed by Jacinta Allan and this government. He appointed Geoffrey Watson to be a chief corruption investigator looking into corruption on CFMEU-controlled government construction sites. The Premier really should take stock of his comments about her performance, and let us have a look at what he said. He has said that the Premier's response to the CFMEU scandal in commissioning an independent review into Victoria's construction sector amounts to 'a cover-up', because it was 'hopeless'. It did not 'go where it needed to go'. The government, including senior bureaucrats and ministers, 'undoubtedly knew' of the corruption and underworld influence on Big Build sites. The government failed to ensure the review 'adequately probed Big Build wrongdoing', and 'gangland figures appeared so unconcerned by the government's response that they were still profiting' from taxpayers.

We and the opposition at the time did warn the government that the terms of reference of the Wilson review were too narrow. The review conducted by Greg Wilson was deliberately limited by narrow terms of reference set by the Allan Labor government, which sought to avoid responsibility and avoid accountability. Why? Because we know Jacinta Allan has been in charge and responsible for major infrastructure projects for nearly 10 years. She must accept responsibility for standover tactics, thuggery, abuse, abuse of women and the fleecing of taxpayer dollars to go toward the criminal underworld. This is what has happened on her watch. There has been about \$50 billion in cost blow-outs on major projects where Jacinta Allan the Premier has been the responsible minister in charge. Why aren't they acting? Because they are obviously hopelessly captured by the militant CFMEU and because, as Geoffrey Watson said, they undoubtedly knew. If you watched the *60 Minutes*, and Jacinta Allan actually did – I hope the rest of the members in the chamber did – he said they must have known, and he said that he had spoken to senior bureaucrats who did know. He has evidence that senior bureaucrats did know. Now, are they thoroughly incompetent? I doubt they are, because they would not be doing their job as a public service if they did not run it up the chain to the minister. So what did Jacinta Allan know and what did she do about it? That is what we need to get to the bottom of.

Underworld gangs are fleecing millions from taxpayer-funded construction sites. Standover tactics, intimidation – this is why we need a royal commission and this is why this motion calls on the government to set a royal commission. When you have people as eminent as Geoffrey Watson SC saying that the government's review did not go far enough, surely something needs to be done about this.

Some of the revelations were absolutely shocking. CFMEU heavyweights have been terrorising workers. While Victorians are struggling with a cost-of-living crisis, underworld figures and bikies are using taxpayers money to host souvlaki days and boxing events. That is not a big build; it is a big rort. They know it, we know it, this chamber knows it, and this chamber has the capacity to call on the government to do something about it, which can only be done, clearly, through a royal commission.

The only people that seem to be benefiting from major projects in Victoria are the criminal underworld. People wanting to get home that minute earlier to see their family, to see their kids before they go to bed, would be left wondering who is benefiting from infrastructure projects in Victoria. But this is because Labor cannot manage money, they cannot manage major projects, and it is hardworking Victorians that are the paying the price. It is hardworking Victorians that are feeling those blowouts in higher taxes.

We saw the Premier get up on Monday and announce that she has a new police taskforce, Operation Hawk, which was established after chatting to Acting Chief Commissioner of Police Rick Nugent. She said this new police taskforce will get to the bottom of all of this. I found that curious because governments do not establish police taskforces; police do. We found out more later, after her heroic response. After last time she said she was angry, this time she had this response and said they were immediately going to implement the recommendations from the Wilson report they have been sitting on for six months. Not only did it take a *60 Minutes* report to spring her into action, even though she knew and was warned about what was happening on the Big Build, but also it took two reports to get them to actually implement what the review found. We still have not seen any piece of legislation, so at the moment it is all talk. She said that she had set up this police taskforce, only for it to be revealed that the taskforce had actually been operating for nine months. As Chip Le Grand said in the *Age*, surely the Premier and the Minister for Industrial Relations, who sits in this place, would have been curious about what the police have found and what the police have looked into regarding the fleecing of taxpayer money, abuse on worksites and abuse of women. We have heard nothing. It is absolute incompetence that they did not know that a police taskforce had been stood up to investigate all this. The Minister for Police seemed to know, but not the Premier or the Minister for Industrial Relations. It shows a negligence that is unheard of.

I just want to go through some of the allegations. Particularly horrific were some of the allegations about women. The standard we walk past is the standard we accept, and I think it would be disgusting



for this chamber just to accept what is going on on our building sites without demanding action and without calling on the government to do something about it. For those that want to criticise and want to politicise, we have to do something about this, and I will take you through it. As reported in the *Age*, one woman was:

... bashed by a bikie-linked health and safety representative on his lunch break from a government-funded project in an attack caught on camera.

I do not think anyone could look at that footage and not be sick to the core.

Another was locked in a small room at a half-built state government hospital by a man previously jailed for violence against women, who smoked ice as he detained her.

A third was bashed outside her work site, also taxpayer-funded, by a man with deep connections to senior CFMEU figures and a similarly frightening criminal past.

...

Leading domestic violence campaigner Jess Hill said the Victorian government must take ultimate responsibility for violence linked to its sites, adding that inaction on bikie infiltration was always going to lead to unsafe work environments and violence against women.

“We can get tangled up in legal questions about who is legally responsible for protecting these women. But ultimately this is taxpayer money. So I think Victoria has a unique responsibility to be fronting up and making sure women on these sites are protected,” Hill said.

The worst response of all, after I have just read out those horrific stories, is what happens to those women that reported abuse, being beaten up and abused on taxpayer-funded worksites. They reported it to their women’s officer and then they got kicked off their taxpayer-funded worksites and they got black-banned from all other taxpayer-funded Big Build sites in the state. That side, and the CFMEU, run 16 days of gendered activism and then pull crap like this. It is a disgrace. To walk past it and accept that that is just what goes on on Victorian construction sites is not good enough. I will be sitting through this debate and looking for decent explanations from the crossbench and from the government about what the response will be and whether the government will intervene to allow these women back on construction sites. Will they stand up to the CFMEU bosses, the thugs, the bikies and the criminal enterprises that have been abusing women on construction sites? Or will they just sit idly by and not get involved, not want to rock the boat? The government need to take a good hard look at themselves if this is the standard they walk by and accept as just a part of construction sites. I will be looking for the Greens’ explanation too, because we saw the member for Griffith fronting protests with the CFMEU after the revelations, after they went into administration and after what we have seen. They are all big on talking about transparency in funding of political parties, but are they now on the tote from the CFMEU due to their very political response? How can you look at that original *60 Minutes* report, see the corruption going through and then have a prominent federal member of Parliament front a rally with the CFMEU? I do not know.

The chief investigator for the CFMEU administration Geoffrey Watson said the Big Build has become a place of last resort for violent criminals. The CFMEU ordered the employment at the Footscray Hospital project of an ice addict after he was released from jail for viciously stalking and threatening to kill a woman. That is who is on our construction sites. The man, Nick Bouras, is accused of subsequently locking a female worker in a small room on the site where he then smoked drugs – a crack pipe with ice in it, blowing it in her face – and locked the door to the storeroom. That was to a traffic management worker.

On all occasions these women, instead of being supported, were kicked off government construction sites and then blacklisted from all other work. What I want to know from the crossbench, and what I want to know from the government, is have they sought advice from the government and advocated to the government to make sure those women are supported? Because for all the trope we hear from this government about supporting women, none of it means anything unless they are now willing to support these women. Are they? Probably not, because that would require them standing up to the CFMEU.

Because of the amount of taxpayer money that we are seeing fleeced, we know, and Geoffrey Watson said, that ministers and public servants undoubtedly knew. We know about the ghost shifts on the Metro Tunnel. We know about gangland figures receiving money to be standover men. To get your enterprise bargaining agreement you have to deal with Mick Gatto. That is what we have heard. That is what we have seen. We know that the police asset seizure laws were bungled, so police do not believe they can use them even though they were intending to use them on construction sites. I remember sitting in this chamber at the time and saying the exact same thing: that we would support it but these have not worked in the past, and do you know if you have it right? Again, they could not give any guarantees. They still cannot use them because they keep botching them. Is that on purpose? I do not know. We see fleeced taxpayer money going to the criminal underworld, paying for souvlaki days and boxing matches. We see workers being stood over across the state, from the Mickleham Road project in Greenvale, where Indigenous labour hire companies get kicked off in favour of labour hire companies with connections to the CFMEU. We see ghost shifts taking place with particular labour hire companies. We see corruption and standover men on the North East Link project, in all parts of it.

This is not a functioning democracy. This is not what happens in a functioning democracy. Why is every other state able to get to the bottom of these issues but we cannot? Why can't we? It has become a haven of last resort for the criminal underworld around Australia to come down to Victoria. We saw one bikie who was banned still getting paid about \$10,000 a week to do nothing. And you do not think this needs a royal commission? This is taxpayer money. Hardworking Victorians are being charged for having a home business in their home because of the increase in land tax because this government cannot manage money and cannot even be accountable for its own money. Of course it is increasing taxes. This is taxpayer money, and the fleecing of it to the criminal underworld is an insult to every hardworking taxpayer.

I know what the Premier will say and I know what the government drones on the other side will say: 'Oh, the federal royal commission, they already had one of those and it achieved nothing.' Well, recommendation 1 made it clear that we need a national approach to enforcement and regulation, which is why the former coalition government re-established the Australian Building and Construction Commission – it had a double dissolution election on it – to crack down on lawlessness and corruption. When the ABCC was established, the number of working days lost to industrial disputes in construction plummeted from around 58,000 to less than 5000. The moment the current federal Labor government got in they played along to the CFMEU's tune and abolished the ABCC, and the number of working days lost to industrial disputes skyrocketed back up to around 48,000 – you wonder why. The royal commission also made 93 referrals for proceedings relating to possible breaches in law, and more than half relate to potential criminal prosecutions.

We see the need for this royal commission. The CFMEU administration and administrator were endorsed by this Premier and by this government. They appointed Geoffrey Watson SC to lead these investigations. He has called out this government for a weak and pathetic response. A cover-up, he called it. More needs to be done. We need to get to the bottom of which bureaucrats knew, which public servants knew, which ministerial officers knew and which ministers knew that were responsible and did nothing.

I remember sitting in this place in early 2023 and calling on the minister to get to the bottom of the thuggery going on on the Mickleham Road project. It came out in the *Australian Financial Review* that Jacinta Allan was warned several times about standover tactics and coercion on that said project. Then she was asked by Nick McKenzie and she said, 'What documents do you have?' – literal emails, requests for meetings, requests for help and assistance. We need a royal commission.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:28): This government does not and will not tolerate corrupt, criminal, intimidatory behaviour. It condemns what we have seen and heard in recent days with the violence towards women on construction sites. The Premier has been quite clear, and I understand she has just been making comments condemning this behaviour. Let us be really clear –

let us start with that. Understood? The government is taking steps to ensure that with legislation imminent for a complaints referral body it is taking action around fit and proper person tests for people who have contracts on government sites and strengthening Victoria's unlawful association scheme with the passage of the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Act 2024. The government is taking this very seriously and condemns the activities or actions of those who are conducting this sort of behaviour.

I want to make the point that this sort of behaviour we have seen occur over decades – whether it is violent behaviour, whether it is white-collar crime or whether it is abhorrent acts that have occurred across various organisations or institutions in this state and across our country – and every time that happens, you have to reach in, you have to remove the perpetrators and you have to rip out the culture. We have seen it in religious organisations. We have seen it over decades. That is something that we as a society have had to deal with. We have seen it across institutions such as our banks, with the royal commission that went on around fees for no service, where dead clients were paying for services. We have seen wage theft across a variety of industries and sectors, whether it is airlines, universities or the banking sector. We all remember the Australian Wheat Board saga where there were kickbacks to the Saddam regime.

There are even perhaps lesser examples. Whether it is our sporting codes or our sporting clubs and institutions, whether it be doping scandals or salary scandals, every organisation and institution that has people doing the wrong thing in positions of authority needs to be dealt with, and all of us need to take responsibility for being on constant watch for this sort of behaviour and dealing with it.

Unions are not exempt or above any of these human behaviours that we see play out in all of these organisations, but like all the organisations I just went through – whether it is people's faith, whether it is our banking institutions, whether it is major corporations or whether it is major sports clubs that we all may love and have a generational history attached to – when they do the wrong thing, we have got to acknowledge and lean in on that. But we have also got to acknowledge that all of these organisations and institutions play pivotal roles in our society, and they are incredibly important. It is exactly the same for unions. Whether it be retail workers, transport workers, health workers or emergency workers – some of the workers in our state who do some of the most incredible work for us that we depend on so much – they depend on their unions over the decades and over the generations to deal with issues as they emerge and ensure that their pay and their conditions are fit for the time and place where they are. We all know about the cost-of-living pressures that we have experienced with the global inflation in recent years. That just highlights the need for unions to be there to represent their workers.

When it comes to our blue-collar unions, whether that is in manufacturing or in construction, we see maiming, we see injuries and we see deaths occur all too regularly. I have got stats here of the deaths that have occurred in construction in recent years. I should not need to say it, but I will just say it to put it on the record: every worker that goes home after a traumatic incident of losing a digit or a limb is going to be impacted for the rest of their lives. In that instance, or when those workers do not go home and their families do not see them walk back in the door, that is exactly why we need unions standing up for workers' wages and workers' conditions. I am very proud to be part of a government that through its projects has ensured that we are seeing a pipeline of apprenticeships –

*Members interjecting.*

**Ingrid Stitt:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr McIntosh is talking about pretty sensitive issues to do with occupational health and safety in a very dangerous industry and he is being heckled by the opposition. Nobody interrupted Mr Mulholland while he gave his contribution, and I would ask you to bring them to order.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** I ask that Mr McIntosh be heard in silence.

**Tom McINTOSH:** As I was saying, I am proud to be in a government that is, through government projects, ensuring that apprentices and trainees, a pipeline of apprentices and trainees, are being invested in to ensure that we do not have workforce gaps into the future. We remember the privatisation of the 1990s just decimated those pathways. I am proud that women, particularly in blue-collar industries and particularly in construction, are having more and more presence in what was a completely male-dominated industry. I am proud that First Nations workers are being supported, that multicultural communities and young people – young people who may otherwise find themselves on very different paths in life – are getting jobs on construction sites.

Working in construction is not easy. You are very hot and very cold; you are exposed to the elements. Not everyone is going to be able to go to university, not everyone is going to be able to succeed in their early education to be able to go to university and not everyone is going to grow up in a home or a house that enables them to even get a basic start with their education. So the construction sector provides a really important place for a whole lot of people to go and work and build for this state – build things like level crossings, the West Gate Tunnel, the Metro Tunnel, the big homes build, the hospital infrastructure, the sports infrastructure – the major infrastructure that this state needs for future generations, not just for here and now. Those opposite want to talk about costs of projects in one of the highest inflationary environments we have seen in probably five decades, but it is the investment now that is going to set future generations up for economic prosperity. By investing in a generation of young workers, we are going to make sure we have got a workforce through the end of this decade and next decade and that a pipeline of skilled workers is there to continue to do the work that we need it to do.

I am not going to have time to talk in detail about the things that those opposite have stood against, whether it is our nation-leading reform of the labour hire industry, whether it is our wage theft laws or whether it is our portable long service leave, which I think is just so important to our most vulnerable contracting industries. But we know that the Liberals' economic policies are to drive down the pay and conditions of workers. That is their economic policy. We have seen that play out when they have federally been in government, and we know that that is one of the few policies they have as a party and that they hold dear. I have run out of time, Acting President, so I will leave my contribution there.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:38): I rise to contribute on behalf of the Greens to notice of motion 879 in Mr Mulholland's name from the Liberal Party. I will state from the outset that the allegations of criminal and corrupt behaviour that we are talking about here, including the most recent horrific reports of violence against women on government worksites, are extremely serious and concerning, and that is something the Greens have said all along in relation to these matters. These are very, very serious incidents and allegations we are talking about.

All workers deserve to be safe at work. That is one of the many reasons why so many of these allegations are particularly concerning – because it is workers who suffer when they do not have strong, effective union representation that is putting their safety and wellbeing, the wellbeing of workers, as its top priority. Workers, especially women, clearly have not been safe on these sites, and that is something that is unacceptable. The violence and bullying that, we are hearing in the allegations, have occurred on government worksites at an expense to taxpayers are completely unacceptable. We understand that Victoria Police have established a taskforce to investigate these allegations of misconduct on worksites and that the Labor government are moving ahead with implementing recommendations from the Wilson review. The Greens wish to state that these investigations need to be properly resourced to ensure that this horrible behaviour is rooted out.

We will not be supporting the Liberals' motion today. I will be quite blunt here: it is a motion that will not result in any meaningful change. It will not. It will not result in a royal commission happening. That is something for a government to enact. Instead I am quite concerned that this motion is being used as a political opportunity for the Liberal Party to use this issue as a political tool for their own benefit, to politicise our workers and the wellbeing of our workforce for their own political gain, and that is not something the Greens are going to stand for.

The government needs to ensure that authorities are properly resourced to do their job of investigating and prosecuting the matters that have been raised here. Clearly that has not been happening to a sufficient level to date, but the reality is that we have had corruption and integrity scandal after scandal here in Victoria. We have had over the years red shirts, we have had developer donations and inappropriate developer links to Labor and Liberal MPs and to councillors. These repeated scandals in Victoria say to me that Victoria's anti-corruption systems are not up to scratch. If we want to fix these scandals at their root, we need to fix Victoria's anti-corruption system.

The Greens have a bill to fix IBAC, to bring it up to the same standard as bodies in other jurisdictions so it can investigate all corruption, such as kickbacks, conflicts, jobs for mates, those kinds of misuse of taxpayer money. I urge the government to support that bill, but failing that, we will continue to fight to increase the strength of Victoria's integrity and oversight systems, just as we will continue to stand with unions in their work to improve the rights and conditions of workers across our state.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:41): I will not say I am pleased, but I welcome notice of motion 879 that Mr Mulholland has brought to the chamber. It is an important motion, and I do not think anyone in this chamber or through the community will have been anything but shocked and horrified at what they saw in *60 Minutes* on Sunday night. The comments that were made by Geoffrey Watson SC, a person respected widely, should give us an absolute cause to look closely and to listen to what Mr Watson has said.

It is important here, I think, that the points made by Mr Mulholland are understood. There is a rotten culture at the CFMEU. We knew that earlier. We had earlier warnings on that. The state government has taken some actions but clearly nowhere near enough. Labor is a wholly owned subsidiary of the CFMEU, let us be quite clear. They have got them absolutely controlled. They are fearful of moving. Mr McIntosh and people like that were put here in this chamber through preselections that were controlled by the CFMEU and other groups.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**David DAVIS**: No, it is not right. Mr Irving appointed Mr Watson to probe into the wrongdoings, and I just want to quote some of the points made by Mr Watson. He said: the government's response, the independent review – the so-called review, the review undertaken by Mr Greg Wilson – was a cover-up. He said it was hopeless in where it did not go and where it needed to go, and I could not agree more. Mr Wilson has not covered himself in glory. He is a toady; I am going to put that clearly on the record here. He is not up to scratch. Yes, there were some recommendations there that would improve the situation, but Geoffrey Watson is completely and utterly correct: the Wilson review was a sham. It was a very weak approach that the government undertook, and the government did this because it did not want the probing.

The government, including senior bureaucrats and ministers, according to Mr Watson, undoubtedly knew of the corruption and underworld influence on Big Build sites. We have got these massive construction sites, with tens of billions of dollars in some cases being spent, and the CFMEU and its bikie mates are siphoning off taxpayers money. If you go down to Parliament station tonight, there will be thousands of people going home on the train, all of them working hard, all of them paying their taxes, and these robbers – the CFMEU robbers – and the bikies are taking their money. They are stealing their money, siphoning it off so that every sensible, honest, hardworking Victorian pays more in taxes because of these corrupt and crooked bodies. The Labor Party is part of this protection racket. They are up to their collywobbles in it. They are part of it; they know what is going on. The emails have gone in and out of ministers' offices, but ministers do not want to move, because the CFMEU has traditionally had votes on preselections. The CFMEU, and other unions of the like but this one in particular, have made significant financial donations. And they, by the way, are not the only party in this Parliament that has had donations from this corrupt and crooked organisation. This organisation should be run out of town; it should be closed down. We need proper unions that actually help people.

Mr McIntosh was standing up there wringing his hands before, saying that workers should be able to go to work and be safe. I could not agree more. But what is so wrong here is the very people who are meant to be helping the workers are the people who are threatening them and bullying them. They are the ones who are locking the apprentices in the sheds. It is the unions, who are meant to be protecting people, who are actually the thugs locking the young apprentices in the sheds. How can this be? How can this be allowed to continue – a registered union with thugs and people connected with crooked bikie gangs?

Let us be clear: many people are very afraid. They are afraid. If you are a young apprentice, male or female but especially a young female apprentice on one of these sites, a group of bikie thugs can come to you and say you will do this otherwise you will never work again in this industry. That is what they do. They actually black-ban people. So your career in construction is over; you will never, ever get another job. An employer who may want to stand up will be fearful. He or she will be fearful about their family, their children. This is just so wrong. I cannot be clearer about what is so wrong with this. These are the very people who are meant to be helping the workers, yet they are threatening them and they are stealing their money. Let us call it for what it is: it is a mafia-like standover tactic. That is what it is. This is what happens in certain places in Italy. This is a standover tactic. You are made afraid if you stand up. You are made afraid that your brother, your sister, your daughter, your son or your dog might be threatened if you step out of line and cross these thugs. These people are absolute thugs, and we ought to be calling it out and stopping it.

I am very happy that Mr Geoffrey Watson SC has been prepared to stand up and point to the failings in the Wilson review and point to the fact that Jacinta Allan knew – the Premier of this state. She is overseeing all these projects. She has been told time and time again of this corruption, yet she refuses to act and end it. That is because the Labor Party is a wholly owned subsidiary of these parts of the union movement. Labor MPs, including the Premier, are afraid to stand up. They are afraid to say, ‘We are going to call a halt; we are going to call a stop to this.’

I thank Mr Mulholland for bringing this motion. We do need a royal commission. I accept that there have been royal commissions in the past, but this has gone on much further, with the systematic nature of what is happening particularly in Victoria and particularly on this state government’s Big Build sites. They are nearly \$50 billion over budget on these sites, and is it any wonder? Money is being siphoned off on ghost shifts. The Metro Tunnel, not very far from here, will open in a year or so. It will be \$4 billion or \$5 billion or perhaps even \$6 billion – \$6000 million – over budget. Yet there have been thousands of ghost shifts – people who did not turn up, who got paid – with the CFMEU and bikie gangs deeply and closely involved. I say it is wrong, and I say this motion is a very sensible start in cleaning up this mess.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:50): I rise to also make a contribution on this motion standing in Mr Mulholland’s name. I have had the benefit of listening to some of the contributions that have been made, and of course Mr Davis’s contribution, and it never ceases to amaze me, some of the things that are said by those opposite about the union movement. What we do know is that those opposite do not actually know anything about the union movement, and obviously this motion is really another opportunity by those opposite to kick the union movement and besmirch the many thousands and thousands of workers who belong to their unions, who have good unions who protect their rights at work and fight for their safety at work as well.

What I want to do is go back to the beginning of this, where the Premier is on the record as saying a number of things. If you listened to Mr Davis and Mr Mulholland, there was no mention of some of the things that our Premier has said in regard to this. If you listened to them, you would think that we condone everything that has occurred. I note Mr McIntosh went to some of this in his contribution as well. It goes to what I have just said – unions protect workers. Unions are there because they have fought for –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I am sorry, Acting President, but speakers on the government benches did not interrupt any of the opposition speakers when they were speaking, and I would ask that you call the chamber to order when I am speaking, because I ask to be heard in silence.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** I ask that Ms Terpstra be heard in silence.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Thank you. As I said, unions protect workers. I and Minister Stitt and others in this chamber, and you, Acting President Berger, we have all come from the union movement, and we know what effective unions do and what they look like. Those opposite have come in here today and besmirched every worker who belongs to a union, rather than identifying what is going on here, which is that there is a small cohort of people who have chosen to take the wrong actions, whether they be criminal or corrupt, and our Premier has called that out. Our Premier back in July 2024 said:

Unions protect workers. But what we've seen isn't unionism ...

Those opposite would not know that – they do not know what unionism actually looks like. What they want to do – and Mr Puglielli said this in his contribution – is use this as an opportunistic attack on all workers and unions. That is what you want to do. We all know on this side of the chamber that what we are seeing is not unionism. You want to conflate what is happening. You want to besmirch all unionists and unions – yes, you do. We will not stand for that because what we know is that unions protect workers, and they protect workers from attacks by conservative governments. We can go through and talk about the history and the record of those opposite and their colleagues in Canberra and the attacks on workers and working people that they have stood by and perpetuated. This is why we need strong unions. We need strong unions, and we have a culture of strong unionism in this country. It is constantly under attack from conservative Liberal governments.

As the Premier said back in July:

... what we've seen isn't unionism –

That is the difference –

it's self-interested thuggery ...

The Premier back then expressed her personal regret and deep-felt disgust at the activities that were reported and the people who perpetuated them. She also said the rotten culture should be pulled out at its roots. Firstly, what she did was ask Labor's national executive to immediately suspend the CFMEU construction division from the Victorian Labor Party. So Mr Davis was quite wrong in his contribution when he said that the Labor Party is a wholly owned subsidiary of the union movement. That is wrong. CFMEU – out.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Acting President, I ask that I be heard in silence.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Continue on.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Thank you. The union needs to fix its conduct and should not have anything to do with the party until it does. We have been very clear about that, and the Premier took strong action. The Premier also asked the Victorian Labor Party to immediately pause political donations from the CFMEU. Also, the Premier referred these matters to Victoria Police and the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. When she became aware of matters, she referred them on. I make the point that you, Mr Davis, and any of your colleagues, if you are aware of corrupt or criminal activity, should also refer it on.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Good, and you should. But I note that you come in here and you politicise – and also your colleagues have politicised the violence that has occurred and been experienced by women – something that has been reported in the media.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Yes, you do. Because this government has taken strong action and the unions have taken strong action to make sure that women can go to work and feel safe in their workplaces. We have also taken strong action on family violence. These are matters that you should also support.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Mr Davis, it is all very well to come in and to point out there are women who are experiencing violence but it is for political purposes, because when you really need to show up, you do not. That is the reality. I say again: if you have any allegations that you are aware of of wrongdoing, violence or corruption, you should report them. Also, Victoria's anti-corruption commission and police have the appropriate powers to investigate or refer allegations of corruption and criminal activity.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Sorry, Acting President, the constant interjection from Ms Crozier opposite –

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, Acting President, I was talking to Mr Davis about the fact that he has referred several of these allegations on the CFMEU corruption to the appropriate authorities, yet Ms Terpstra keeps carrying on.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Sit down.

**Georgie Crozier:** And to be told to sit down – the way Ms Terpstra speaks in this chamber, I think, Acting President, you need to take control of what she is saying and doing and hold her to account.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** All right, perhaps we can try this: Ms Terpstra continues her speech without any further interruption from anybody. We have got 2 minutes, 54 seconds to go.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Thank you, Acting President. Ms Crozier, you were not in the chamber earlier. The point was made that the government –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Sorry – government MPs –

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, Acting President, I will remind the member that she cannot address Ms Crozier directly. She should be speaking through the Chair.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** I remind Ms Terpstra to speak through the Chair.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Through you, Acting President, Ms Crozier needs to be reminded that the government members on this side of the chamber let Mr Davis and Mr Mulholland continue their speeches in absolute silence. Acting President, what I am reminding Ms Crozier of, because she was not here, is that we asked that they do the same in reply. That is the point. I note that my clock is running down because all Ms Crozier is wanting to do is continually interject and disrupt. I make the point again, through you, Acting President, and I remind those opposite that when they made their speeches we sat here in silence. I ask that I be allowed to do the same. I will continue.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Thank you.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** The Premier also said she will stamp out any criminal conduct that is brought to our attention on Big Build sites in Victoria. The conduct of unions is regulated under federal laws. The Premier has been clear. She said she will join forces with the Prime Minister to do whatever needs to be done. She said we will toughen bikie laws and make it easy for police and courts to prevent certain individuals from associating with each other. We have also talked, and there is more detail coming, about giving the Labor Hire Authority a stronger regime that it might need to make sure that



it can have more stringent tests around certain types of people who are being employed in labour hire and who may be working in the construction industry. These are matters that our Premier has taken strong and swift action on.

Acting President, I note that my clock has been run down to about 49 seconds now, but in concluding my remarks on this motion I will just highlight the fact that what is disappointing in regard to this motion is that it is a political stunt. It is being used for nothing more than to attack workers, to attack unions and to besmirch the union movement that is made up of thoroughly decent, good and hardworking people and organisations who stand up for workers rights and protect worker safety each and every day that they turn up. For the opposition to also use this as an opportunity to politicise the fact that women on worksites have experienced occupational violence and aggression is nothing more than shameful. The government will not be supporting this motion.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:00): I also watched the *60 Minutes* report the other night, and it was frankly shocking, especially after earlier reports when the government said that they were going to clean up the CFMEU and the union, to see shocking footage of a woman being bashed in front of a camera by her health and safety representative, of all people. The first thing that sprung to my mind was: what happens when the cameras are not there? How many more of these incidents have been happening on worksites? I mean, who could blame anyone for remaining silent in this sort of situation, when you are on a worksite where your health and safety rep, if you step out of line, bashes you? You have got organised crime running everywhere. It is just unbelievable that the state has gotten to this point.

I am supporting this motion, and it is very, very rare that you will see a Libertarian jump up and say the government should be spending more money on something, but in this case I think it is entirely justified. My criticism of Mr Mulholland's motion is I do not think it goes far enough. I do not think it goes far enough at all, because the real problem here is not the union itself. The union is just a business unit of a larger criminal enterprise, which is organised crime, which is running this state. I have said it before, the government does not regulate tobacco in this state, organised crime does. The government does not regulate drugs in this state, organised crime does. And the government does not appear to be regulating government construction projects, organised crime is. This is just another business unit of these crime gangs, and they have infiltrated these government worksites. They have put in all sorts of criminals. Every action that the government takes, organised crime just sees it as a new opportunity.

The government passed, in the last term, the Gender Equality Act 2020. Of all things you would think, 'Oh, well, this is a really good thing; we're going to have procurement requirements on government contracts that stipulate you need some sort of action plan to have more women on your worksite,' and they have got all these requirements in procurement contracts for more Indigenous workers and all these sorts of things. Organised crime just saw that as an opportunity. They set up labour hire companies that will provide that diversity quota, and then to get your EBA you go and talk to your local organised crime boss – boom, you have got the EBA. It is just unbelievable. Everything that they do is just a new opportunity for organised crime in this state. This royal commission just looking at the union itself will not fix it, because whatever is left after it gets cleaned out, organised crime will be back in there again, infiltrating it again, just like they have done in the past.

I am not against unions. I do agree with the government that unions are important for protecting workers' rights and stuff like that. But clearly in this particular sector they have been taken over and infiltrated by organised crime. It is obvious to anyone that wants to look at it, and it is just nuts.

As Mr Davis and Mr Mulholland have pointed out, this money is being taken from taxpayers, from other Victorian workers and their children in the future. God knows how long it is going to take to pay off this debt that Victoria has. We keep raising taxes and we keep hearing of budget blowouts on projects. I tell you what, this puts a very dark spin on a budget blowout. Where has that money actually gone?

And another thing: these organised crime business units – drugs, tobacco, vaping, government construction – are not isolated enterprises. They are integrated with each other. Think about this: the billions of dollars that are being diverted from federal excise tax, because they do not really collect that much anymore since all the money is going to organised crime for tobacco, needs to get laundered. Where do you launder \$2 billion or \$3 billion a year? You do not go through pokies and launder it through pokies. You do not go through wholesale fruit and veggie markets. There are in fact only a few industries in this state that could handle that sort of laundering, and they are construction and property. That is about it. I think the royal commission really needs to look at where all this money is going, and at these foreign assets. We have organised crime being controlled by foreign countries – by people from overseas. It has been reported in the media, but I have heard stories as well, that you get standover tactics. You get handed a mobile phone, and it is a phone call from someone overseas telling you what you are meant to do or else. They do not even need to tell you. They do not even need to make a threat. Everyone knows what happens if you do not do what you are told. Everyone knows what happens if you open your mouth. You will get bashed, you will get stood over, you will get an arson attack and in some cases you will get murdered. That is what has been happening in this state.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** It is absolutely terrifying. A lot of this money is going overseas. Where is it going? We have heard even recently that some of these antisemitic attacks that we have seen in Melbourne have actually been contracts put out on the dark web and taken up by organised crime. I mean, how far are we going to let it go in this state? I would hate to think where this money is going overseas. We know that most of the tobacco seems to come from the UAE. They do not seem to care about shipping it to Australia. Is it ending up in the hands of Hezbollah and these other organisations? We just do not know where this money is going. I think that this has corrupted our state to the point where you cannot run legitimate businesses in many industries now without having to deal with organised crime.

We have to clean it up, because you cannot have a functioning union that is controlled by organised crime. You cannot have a functioning capitalist liberal democracy that is run by organised crime. You cannot have innovation in new industries and technologies when they have been stifled and stolen from by organised crime. The government need to seriously look at the incentives that have been set up by their own policies and their inaction on stamping out some of this, and they need to look at the bigger picture. It is not just a union and it is not just government construction. Organised crime has infiltrated a huge amount of the economy in this state. In fact it is probably one of the biggest industries in the state if you add up the money that it is stealing from government construction projects, plus the tobacco industry, vaping and drugs. Organised crime is one of the biggest industries in this state, and it has got to stop.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:08): I was listening to Mr Limbrick's contribution then. He was very passionate and very concerned about the issues that are confronting this state, and I could not agree with him more. His explanation of why he is concerned and about why this corruption has to stop is 100 per cent correct. That is the point here in terms of what this motion that Mr Mulholland has brought to the chamber is about.

We have got a serious problem in this state, and it is corruption that is so deep and ingrained in so many different areas, but in relation to the construction industry, the Big Build and the CFMEU that this particular motion addresses, it is so extreme. I think that is the concern of Mr Mulholland, who spoke, and Mr Davis, who spoke, and we have just been listening to Mr Limbrick, who also spoke about the depth of this corruption, about the rottenness and about the standover tactics and the way that business is done in this state.

It is unfortunate that there are some members of government who do not quite grasp the severity of those issues. We need to address this. We need to stamp it out. We need to really find out what on earth is happening here. We all know union members who are doing their best. In fact I spoke to one

yesterday, and you know what he told me? He said that they are leaving the CFMEU and they are going into another union. The union members working on these sites are really concerned about what is happening. They do not want this either. Government MPs say that this is a politicisation and that what the Liberal–Nationals are trying to do is an attack on workers, but it is far from that. They have families; they are concerned about what is happening on their sites. When I speak to these people – and they speak to me – they tell me what is happening underground in this city, the sexual exploitation of women, the abuse. That appalling video that was aired on *60 Minutes* on Sunday night – how can anyone condone that? By a union official to a woman, and it is filmed for God’s sake. As Mr Limbrick said, goodness knows what is happening off camera. Quite right, because I have heard these stories too. I want to congratulate Nick McKenzie and the team, who have actually had the guts to really probe this issue to the extent that they have to highlight just how deep this is. Look at this issue with open eyes. Do not close yourself to what is going on, government. I am really sorry to say that the Premier has failed to address this. There has been a bandaid approach to try and look like the government is doing something. They have failed. That is exactly what the investigator Mr Watson said about what the government has failed to do. I am quoting from the *Age* article of 16 March ‘‘Nobody’s stopping it’: The taxpayer money trail from building sites to the underworld’. The very first line of this article says it all:

The Victorian government covered up rampant and ongoing CFMEU-linked organised crime infiltration and corruption on its multibillion dollar Big Build infrastructure scheme by failing to ensure scrutiny of “senior bureaucrats and ministerial offices” ...

That is the investigator who was appointed by Mr Irving that was looking into this issue – that is, the Labor government’s activities. But this is somebody, the investigator, saying that about the failures of this government, of the Premier, and that raises the very simple question that Mr Limbrick alluded to when the Premier was asked in question time a few minutes ago: if there is so much wastage in these projects, how much taxpayer money has gone to these organised crime figures?

**David Limbrick:** We’ll never know.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Well, surely the government should be doing something about it, Mr Limbrick, to take up your interjection. We will never know, I think you are right, but when you have got tens of billions of dollars of overruns in projects and this has been siphoned and funnelled through, you have got to ask: how is this happening? We must stop this. This is taxpayers money being wasted and blown and siphoned through in a very seedy way. In fact it is more than seedy, it is so dark – it actually terrifies me what is happening in this state. But look at the issue around the violence against women, where this government say they stand up for women. Well, we all stand up for women. No-one wants this violence to occur. But it is occurring, and it is being reported. The women are coming out and speaking about it, saying that they are being locked in cupboards, that they have got these ice-fuelled addicts threatening them, intimidating them, and that sexual exploitation is going on, the standover tactics and then the bashings. We do not know the extent of those either.

This is not acceptable in any way. We have got to do more and we have got to do better. I am not surprised that the government is not supporting this, because the Liberals and the Nationals have been calling for a royal commission to get to the bottom of this. A government-initiated inquiry that does not have the broad terms of reference to look at this very dark and terrifying and very concerning corrupt culture is not the answer. We need openness and transparency. We need people to have the confidence to come forward and speak about their experiences so we understand what is going on. That is why the Liberals and Nationals consistently say we need a royal commission into this. The federal government abolished the Australian Building and Construction Commission, the building commission to oversee some of this. Since that abolishment occurred under Labor at a federal level this corruption has skyrocketed. We need to see: did that work, or did it not work?

The royal commission can look into all of those things, apart from all of the other things. While the government and others will not agree to a royal commission, what is happening in this state is an appalling chapter in this state’s history. It is so dark, it is so menacing and it is so concerning that there

are people now that feel that they cannot speak out, that they have nowhere to go because of the standover tactics, because of the abuse, because of their job security. And they look and see what is happening: the corruption, the ghost shifts. They know that is not right. The ghost shifts – that is taxpayers money. That is their children's futures being squandered by a government who has lost control and oversight of what they have a responsibility for, and that is to ensure that when you are charged with infrastructure projects they are overseen properly, that money from taxpayers is spent properly and is not abused and laundered through these criminal gangs, that these bikies that are infiltrating multiple unions now, by the sounds, are not taking that money out overseas. Bokie gangs, as we know, have got a very wide international web. It has lost control here. Then we have got –

**David Limbrick** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Multinational, yes, quite right. This is really hugely concerning, but what concerns me more is that we have got a Premier completely out of her depth. She does not know to deal with this. She has got CFMEU mates. Her husband was a CFMEU official. I am not criticising that, but she is close to these people; we understand that.

**Ryan Batchelor:** Different division. What's that got to do with it?

**Georgie CROZIER:** I do not care. I am not criticising it. I am just saying –

**Ryan Batchelor:** Why are you raising it? You are casting aspersions on her.

**Georgie CROZIER:** This is the problem, because there are close relationships to –

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I am telling Mr Batchelor and others there are relationships with government MPs and that is why Mr Watson said that the Victorian government covered up rampant and ongoing CFMEU-linked organised crime infiltration and corruption on its multibillion-dollar Big Build infrastructure scheme by failing to ensure scrutiny of senior bureaucrats and ministerial offices. There are close links in all of this, and I am not suggesting anyone has closer links than others. I am just saying there are links with this union, and this is the problem that the government will not address. We on this side will continue to stand up for every single Victorian, for every single union member who wants to clean this mess up too, and there are plenty of them that want this cleaned up so that they can get on and do their work.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (15:18): I rise to make a contribution on this motion from Mr Mulholland. I have been overwhelmed by where this discussion has gone in the last few speeches, to a sort of global organised crime conspiracy, but we will come back to that. As has been alluded to, it has been nine months since the opposition last brought a CFMEU motion into this chamber. In the words of Yogi Bear, I have this feeling of 'Oh, no, it is *deja vu* again,' because it is *deja vu* again; it is the same stuff that was dragged up in July of last year. I think we are going to cover much of the same ground, except we now have gone from a royal commission into the construction division of the CFMEU – although they just talk about the CFMEU, which is a much bigger entity, as Mr Batchelor alluded to – to now apparently a royal commission into global organised crime and everything in between.

First and foremost, let us just get to a certain thing that I think we all can agree on: there are deeply, deeply disturbing elements that are correctly identified in this motion that strike to corruption and that strike to violence against women. Both are intolerable. Both are crimes. Both can and should be prosecuted with the full force of the law however and wherever they occur. I think we can all agree on that basic principle, and then probably we go in different directions.

Reading this motion one might get the sense that these crimes are happening in some sort of a legal process vacuum – that *60 Minutes* and Nick McKenzie have shown this up, and I want to come back to the question of the investigative journalism, because it has been outstanding – but that is simply not

the case. Currently we have, working on the construction division of the CFMEU – and I would also hope we can agree, apart from the criminal question, that we are talking about the construction division of the CFMEU, not the broader union –

**Ryan Batchelor:** How do you know the difference between the divisions?

**David ETTERS HANK:** We will come to that as well. Currently we have running Operation Hawk by Victoria Police, and we have Operation Rye by the Australian Federal Police. A lot of this is from my discussion last year. We have the implementation of the Wilson review, which made recommendations specifically on Victorian government sites and is, as I understand it, the subject of forthcoming legislation. We have a very vigorous administration of the Victorian construction division of the CFMEU, with multiple investigations running off that. We have the Fair Work Commission's ongoing investigation into improper conduct, which is also leveraging off the administrator's appointment. We have the ongoing Fair Work Ombudsman investigations, and there are multiples of those. Then there is also the very real possibility that there are federal and/or state anti-corruption commission investigations, but neither of those agencies is in the habit of making their investigations public until they so choose.

There is such a thing as too many cooks in the kitchen. The opposition is well aware of this. The call for a royal commission in this context is, I fear, frankly theatre. It is mischief, and it is quite possibly something a little more sinister. It is hard not to see that this is basically an opportunity to attack the construction division of the CFMEU, the broader CFMEU, the broader construction industry group of unions and the trade union movement as a whole. Just as outlaw bikie gangs and organised crime will follow the money, as Mr Limbrick quite accurately asserted, so too is the opposition inextricably drawn to its beloved union-busting agenda, like flies to excrement. What is that agenda?

Firstly, and we have heard it directly, it is to bring back the Australian Building and Construction Commission – the so-called tough cop on the beat. Their greatest achievement was to lower productivity. They did have a few weeks of some happiness, and some stats that keep on being bandied around, but overall during the period of the Australian Building and Construction Commission, productivity on construction work sites went down. Workplace deaths and injuries increased on their watch, and they used to stomp around threatening people with jail terms if they did not take down union flags. That was the glorious ABCC. And that was at a cost of tens of millions of dollars to the taxpayer.

Let us not pretend that this problem in the construction sector is new. A lot of this was absolutely happening on the watch of the ABCC, and what did they do about it? They went after Bill Shorten. Jeez, that was good, wasn't it? The reality is that it is the likes of investigative reporters like Nick McKenzie and the other great journos who have worked in this area – not the ABCC and their army of so-called 'investigators' – that have brought this stuff into the light. Let us put that in some perspective. But you still long for the glory days when this army could be deployed under the banner of the ABCC to try and smash unions in the construction sector. Secondly, in terms of the grand plan, there is clearly an intent to deregister unions – to kneecap their ability to organise and protect workers – and that is an action that is so dumb that it is up there with the Kennett government's decision to hand over their industrial relations powers to save some money. We still have these Liberal wet dreams about reregulating industrial relations as though it has not already gone. You have already given it away, and it is not coming back. I hope you did save some money, because it is something you have lost absolutely now. That was just an extraordinary decision. If you deregister a union, all you do is convert it into an incorporated association, which is far less regulated and far less required to report and be transparent. Isn't that just a remarkable achievement?

Thirdly, let us face it, at the end of the day there is still this dream of a golden age which was the WorkChoices IR law. That is where you want to go back to: to attack wages, to attack conditions and to attack the safety of all workers. That is what sits behind this sort of resolution, so we do not support this motion for a royal commission.

Let us just ponder for a second the history of royal commissions that have been deployed by conservative governments to attack the union movement. I think perhaps the most marvellous example would be the ship painters and dockers inquiry, where clearly there was a desire to smash the waterfront unions. What did we end up with? We ended up with bottom of the harbour. That was a really good inquiry, and in some ways it lends veracity to Mr Limbrick's big picture that is, can I suggest respectfully, far, far, far bigger than anything that the opposition are talking about in their motion. But that is where it went. In terms of the actual waterfront unions, bugger-all – pardon my French – happened.

I want to try and end on a positive note. We have already discussed these crimes and the fact that these crimes should be dealt with by the people who are qualified to do that, and that is the police through an investigation. We also know that there are now a whole lot of agencies who are all having a particular role to play in this process. We have already discussed the huge, huge amount of change that is underway in the construction industry, but ultimately major cultural change is only possible in an industry – (*Time expired*)

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:28): I rise to contribute to the motion brought forward by Mr Mulholland and those opposite me. The motion begins by talking about how the Premier:

supported the strongest possible action to stamp out the rotten culture in the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union ... and supported ... Mark Irving KC as administrator;

The motion notes that:

Mr Irving appointed Mr Geoffrey Watson SC to probe into the wrongdoings in the construction sector;

Then it goes on to the most recent *60 Minutes* investigation and the independent review of Victoria's construction sector. It then talks about the response of senior bureaucrats and ministers and the government's response. It touches upon the important matter that is the safety of women on Big Build work sites, something all of us in this chamber should support. Then it goes on to call for a royal commission.

The Allan Labor government will not be lectured by Mr Mulholland on improving diversity within the construction industry. The Allan Labor government is committed to improving diversity within the construction industry, and I am proud to talk about the work we are doing in this space to keep women safe and to promote their careers. The *Building Equality Policy* is designed to disrupt existing gender stereotypes and roles in the construction sector by creating training and employment opportunities for women. How does this work in practice? It means that through government procurement on building infrastructure, civil engineering and any other capital works we are encouraging women's participation. That means encouraging women tradies, and it means that projects with a combined value of \$20 million or more will benefit. The *Building Equality Policy* addresses barriers that women face to gain a good, often union-based, job. It is meeting project-specific gender equality targets, engaging women as apprentices and trainees and implementing gender equality action plans.

The Allan Labor government is committed to increasing the targets and requirements, as our side of the chamber has done for the past 11 years, and that is what we will continue to do. We are committed to a more inclusive industry, a community where people feel safe, a community where everyone feels appreciated, a community where everyone is respected and a community where we value the work that is done and we pay fairly for it.

The Premier has had a strong record of fighting for women's rights her entire career. Last year she introduced a wide range of reforms aimed at reducing family violence after listening to victim-survivors, and a package that announced the change in culture to build strong prevention responses. The Allan Labor government will never accept abuse against women. Our work in the building industry comes through long-term engagement with the industry, and yes, we talk to unions, the organisations that represent working men and women.

The government, as I am sure the chamber has recognised by our debate so far, will not be supporting this motion, because when Mr Mulholland was in his early primary school years, in grade 1 and 2, I was out there fighting for workers every day. Our government does not and will not, now or ever, tolerate corrupt, criminal or intimidatory behaviour in any workplace or any organisation, and our approach to dealing with these allegations has made it very, very clear. The government responded fast. It acted on the allegations of bad behaviour, including by the CFMEU, including commissioning the Wilson review to provide an independent assessment of how we can strengthen the government's ability to respond to allegations of criminal and other unlawful conduct in the Victorian construction sector, and we referred them to the appropriate authorities like Victoria Police and other partners.

The context for this we all know – we saw it on the *60 Minutes* documentary last year. It was unacceptable and it was not on. It led the Commonwealth Attorney-General on 23 August 2024 to place the CFMEU and all construction and general division branches into administration pursuant to new legislation, and it appointed Mark Irving KC as the administrator.

On 20 July 2024 the Premier established the Wilson review under the Inquiries Act 2014. The interim report was delivered to the Premier on 29 August 2024. It investigated how Victorian government bodies interacted with construction companies and unions, and the final report was delivered on 29 November last year, with the government releasing the final report and its response to the formal review on 18 December. On this date the Allan Labor government and the Premier accepted all the recommendations either in principle or in full.

These recommendations included establishing a central body to receive and refer complaints to appropriate agencies, establishing a joint alliance between the Victorian and Commonwealth law enforcement regulators and infrastructure delivery agencies to address systemic drivers of criminal and other unlawful conduct, amending the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018 and the labour hire licensing regulations and incorporating clauses into construction policies and contracts that cover criminal and other unlawful conduct, with reporting requirements to the principal contractor. Re-evaluations and recommendations – *(Time expired)*

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:33): Thank you, everyone, for the contributions in this debate. We have had a few interesting contributions. I would like to thank my colleagues, particularly Ms Crozier for getting into the effects this has had on women on construction sites that we need to get to the bottom of.

I want to take issue with Ms Terpstra, who went on to say that we are just in it to besmirch unions. As I told the ABC yesterday, I know people in the CFMEU. I am friends with people in the CFMEU, and they tell me that there is nothing that gets them more pissed off and angry than when a bloke with a leather jacket and a bikie logo on it rocks up to the construction site. They hate it, but it happens regularly. Even despite the latest *60 Minutes* episode, it is still happening. There are crooks who have been kicked off construction sites that are still earning \$11,000 a week despite doing nothing.

There were great comments by Mr Limbrick, particularly about taxpayers that are paying the price, and Mr Ettershank went on to say that it is sort of a global conspiracy, linking it to the criminal underworld and the tobacco wars and everything else. We see Nick McKenzie has actually made the link for us. Of course Joe Myles, who has commented in there, has been associated with a violent bikie and convicted criminal called Joel Leavitt, who was a Big Build health and safety representative. Influential CFMEU member and Rebels bikie Jahmahl Pearson was recently jailed for tobacco wars arson and previously worked on the Metro Tunnel, and Luke Collier is a criminal who previously pleaded guilty to assaulting a woman and who the CFMEU forced onto Big Build labour hire firms. So there is an actual connection, Mr Ettershank. I am not sure what you have been smoking there, but you are saying that it is an opportunity to attack the CFMEU, that we use every opportunity to attack the CFMEU and that no-one is saying they are terrible. Well, I lead you to the comments of Federal Court Justice John Snaden, who said the CFMEU is a 'well-resourced, recidivist offender' after three construction officials were fined over workplace breaches on a major freeway upgrade. He fined them

a combined total of \$108,000 after they admitted to contravening labour laws. They continuously end up in court.

It I did find it amusing, though, Mr Ettershank, that you seemed to know about Operation Hawk before the Premier did. The Premier established on Monday that Mr Ettershank knew about it prior to then. So well done for having more information about operational police investigations than the Premier, who lied to the Victorian people. Maybe with a new chief of staff in charge of the Premier's private office she thought she could spin her way out of this *60 Minutes* episode and thought she could spin her way out of a scandal. Ms Symes was obviously in on it as well. She said she had met with the Chief Commissioner of Police and established a new taskforce. 'Met and was briefed' sounds like you sat down at a table. It was a Teams meeting while you and Ms Symes were in the car on the way back from the North East Link, because they could not possibly have held a press conference there. This is just laughable. The Premier said she had established it, and the police were like, 'No, it's been going for about nine months.'

This is a laughable Premier. She has been responsible for the Big Build for the last 10 years. There is Westminster accountability. She is ultimately responsible for this – every woman that was abused on taxpayer-funded construction sites and bikies earning \$11,000 a week for not turning up. No wonder we have about \$4 billion of blowouts on the Metro Tunnel, where bikies and CFMEU bosses are just filing invoices and not even showing up. How many invoices have been put in for inclement weather – that might come out soon – on the Metro Tunnel underground? Ghost shifts – really? Mr Berger said the government will not tolerate this kind of stuff. Yet you not only tolerate it, you all aid and abet it.

#### **Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (15):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

#### **Motion negatived.**

#### **Health services**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:46): I am pleased to be able to rise and speak to the motion in my name. I move:

That this house:

- (1) condemns the lack of action by the Allan Labor government to address the rising number of sentinel events in Victorian hospitals;
- (2) notes that:
  - (a) the 2022–23 sentinel events report found a record number of sentinel events were recorded, including 16 more deaths than the previous year and only 23 per cent of sentinel events were reported within the required three-day reporting window;
  - (b) in the past five years, the Latrobe Regional Hospital has reported nine sentinel events to Safer Care Victoria (SCV), including:
    - (i) the deaths of newborn babies and children;
    - (ii) claims that four sentinel events reported were patients who died due to delayed care and two other patients experienced severe postoperative complications and serious lifelong morbidity;
    - (iii) staff involved in a number of the sentinel events were not interviewed during investigations by SCV;



## MOTIONS

- (iv) one case involving the death of a patient where medical notes show there was chaos on the ward with understaffing and no access to computer systems and pathology;
  - (v) concerns raised by anaesthetists, surgeons, nurses and midwives on the clinical experience of staff and the lack of education and training provided to doctors;
  - (c) the Australian Medical Association raised concerns about the lack of consistent oversight and reporting within Victoria's health system by writing to the Minister for Health in November 2024 and SCV in December 2024; and
- (3) calls on the government to immediately undertake a fully independent inquiry into the reporting and investigations of sentinel events.

This is an important motion. Victorians have died in our hospitals and in our healthcare system, and they are deaths that could have been avoided. There has also been concern around comorbidity and issues that have arisen due to mistakes being made in our hospitals.

If I can go to the first point around the lack of action by the government to address this rising number of sentinel events, we have had various sentinel event reports. To go back and just give a little bit of history, Safer Care Victoria was established after there was a cluster of deaths at the Bacchus Marsh Hospital. An independent investigation was undertaken, and out of that investigation and report Safer Care Victoria was formed. The investigation was done by Professor Euan Wallace, an obstetrician, who then became head of the Safer Care Victoria entity within the health department. When the former department secretary Kym Peake left after the debacle of COVID, he took over that position, and just a couple of weeks ago he also left.

Now the department is in chaos. There is no leadership. The senior roles have gone from within the Department of Health, and we have got a huge issue around what is occurring in the Department of Health and how it is being administered and how these bodies within the department are undertaking the work that they are responsible for. That is a bit of a history of how Safer Care Victoria came into being and what it is responsible for – to look at these events – and the reporting mechanism that is supposed to be happening that goes through to Safer Care Victoria, and then investigations occur.

But if I can just get back to the sentinel event reports, there is a bit of a trend in this. I have referred in my motion to the 2022–23 sentinel events report, because that is the last report that the Victorian public has seen. We have not seen the 2023–24 report, and we certainly have not seen any reports relating to this financial year. Normally those reports would be handed down in March, but they have been delayed time and time again, and the last one, that 2022–23 report, was provided 18 months or thereabouts after it was due to be made public. Over that time there has been an increase. In 2020–21 there were 168 sentinel events and in 2021–22 that jumped enormously to 240. Of course that took in the terrible situation of the failures within 000 where over 33 Victorians died. We could not get true transparency of that report about what was actually happening. The government gave us a pathetic report. It was flimsy, a few pages long, half of it was not even filled in, and it had all this waffle at the start. It was a disgrace in terms of this very important issue and what it did not show. The last report that was made public is the one I mentioned, the 2022–23 report, which is from a few years ago now. It showed that there was an increase of five events to 245, but concerningly there were 16 more deaths. There was a huge jump in the deaths and there were also various other issues. There was a spike in medication errors in that report, a 94 per cent increase year over year. That is a very big concern when you think about the number of mistakes, and of course a medication error can lead to very significant co-morbidity issues, but it can also kill you.

Concerningly, there have been reporting delays. Only 23 per cent of sentinel events were reported within the required three-day window. That is what is required for any sentinel event or any adverse issue – a sentinel event of course being a death or an adverse event where somebody is impacted in the hospital. There might have been a medication error, as I have said. There have been tragedies where people have suicided in our hospitals, or the wrong blood was given in a blood transfusion, or delays in care have contributed to a death or a decline in someone's overall health status. Those could all be regarded as sentinel events, along with many other areas that I have not covered off, but that is

just to give you a bit of an idea. When these are increasing as they have been, they need to be reported, and there is a number that have not been, and I want to come back to that with some of the latest data.

The medication errors doubled, and that is a very big concern because that talks about the safety component. Nobody wants to go into hospital and get the wrong medication or have any of these issues arise. Nobody expects to go into hospital and have that happen, and our workers do not want this to occur either. But errors unfortunately do occur, and we need to minimise these as best we can. Part of the way to do that is to identify where these issues are occurring so you can identify the problems and then address them. So it is identifying the problems, looking at the gaps, and then finding out – but if they are not being reported or they are not being investigated properly, then we are never going to know the true extent. That is a concern that has been raised.

In that last report that I mentioned, the event locations: 26 per cent occurred on the wards, 20 per cent in emergency departments, 9 per cent in operating theatres and 9 per cent in intensive care units. The latest reporting shows that in the quarter from October 2024 to December 2024 there still is a very big issue with this reporting and statewide there were still too many health services – Ambulance Victoria was right up there too – that submitted their cases and their investigations late, and there was still some outstanding root cause analysis, which is very concerning. That was Ambulance Victoria, and we have seen those issues today – 300 paramedics not available over the weekend, dozens of ambulances not available on the Saturday night, and that is putting patients at risk

For those delays, if there is a death, it would be in this. If there are investigations going on, that is going to be adding to the total that this data relates to. The other hospitals in this are the Alfred, Northern, Grampians and West Gippsland – very high in their lack of reporting, which is very concerning. We have seen that data. Unfortunately the data found 45 per cent of the investigations were overdue across the state in the services that I have just mentioned. For Monash, Ambulance Victoria and Grampians the rates were between 80 and 100 per cent. That is very, very concerning. The Minister for Health says she too is concerned, but she is actually not addressing the issue that she needs to. For this report, as I said, we need to understand why they are not submitting and not being investigated properly or on time.

I want to just draw attention to part 2(b) of my motion in relation to the Latrobe Regional Hospital. I am not wanting to demonise this hospital in any way or the people involved, but it is a case study of what is happening. And if it is happening here, it will be happening elsewhere. I want to make that point. It is very concerning. There have been nine sentinel events to Safer Care Victoria in the past five years, and these include the deaths of newborns and children. I have spoken to various clinicians who have been involved in these cases, and they have told me what has gone on. I am a former nurse and midwife, and when they explained to me what had gone on I was horrified. What they told me and what they are concerned about should not be happening. That is why they are speaking out, and I want to thank them for having the courage to do so, because if we do not understand what is going on we are never going to fix it.

This government is very good at covering up stuff, and they cover up things time and time again. That is why last March, in fact 12 months ago, I finally got some data around Latrobe Hospital. How did I do that? The government would not give me the data, so I FOI-ed it. It included unreported sentinel events, and it was just really horrifying. There was a failure to even inform Safer Care Victoria. It included patient 1: failure to provide the necessary attention and timely intervention; the delay in providing appropriate treatment ultimately resulted in the loss of their life. For patient 2, medical staff failed to accurately diagnose their condition and administer the required treatment; the on-call surgeon never once attended to the patient in the emergency department. This misdiagnosis and subsequent lack of proper care led to their unfortunate demise – meaning they died. For another patient, failure to diagnose and institute treatment on time resulted in death. For another patient it was untimely death due to negligence.

These issues are very concerning. People are dying because proper treatment and care is not being administered. We need to understand why it is not. That is why I also note that staff involved in a number of these sentinel events were not interviewed by Safer Care Victoria. They think they should have been, because they wanted to give some insight as to what the issues are. But when there are reports around no access to computers or pathology you are going to have a problem. To say, in the instance where there was a tragic death that, and these were the words used:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

... there was chaos on the ward with understaffing and no access to computer systems and pathology ...

you have got a systems issue here. That is what the government can fix. The government cannot fix an accident; you would not expect the government to fix every little issue that happens. But for these – understaffing, no access to computers, no access to pathology – something is not going right and needs to be addressed.

I was just horrified when I was alerted to what went on, what was done and, ultimately, what sadly transpired. That is why those anaesthetists, surgeons, midwives, nurses and others involved have been wanting to fix it. They want to fix this as well. But some of them say that there is a lack of training for some of the staff, and what they are expected to do, they are not trained to do – they do not have the experience or the expertise to do. You should not be putting people in that situation. You should not actually be putting people in this very critical area where there is emergency care required, where diagnoses need to be made and where decisions and management and treatments then occur, if they are not qualified or do not have the expertise to be able to do that. That is a shocking scenario to be occurring in Victoria in 2025. I am very concerned about the expertise that is in our health system and the lack of supervision around the more experienced staff, and we know that those experienced staff are leaving. They have had it. They do not feel supported and they have had enough, and that is where we are having a breakdown. We need to acknowledge this and work through, ‘Well, how do we support those people and how do we support those clinicians that need that experience and expertise?’ That is a very important aspect that is required.

I know the minister last week put in somebody who I used to work with at the women’s hospital, Professor Mark Umstad. He was a bit of a gun in my day, an obstetrician, and some of the members in here might also know him – a very excellent obstetrician and an excellent clinician. He has been put in charge to look at Latrobe regional – only after these issues have been highlighted. It should not have taken till last week for somebody to be overseeing what is going on. But this is not just occurring at Latrobe. As I said, on the other list and at Ambulance Victoria – there are systemic issues within our health system where the systems are failing, and Victorians are sadly dying because they are not getting the proper, appropriate treatment and care. Mistakes are being made.

The AMA was so concerned after these reports as well – and I have been speaking to a lot of stakeholders around this – that they wrote to the minister in November and then to Safer Care in December. It took till January for the AMA, who wrote in November, to even get a response – months later. What on earth are the minister and the government and the department doing if they are not acknowledging these important pieces of correspondence relating to health care in this state, where doctors are highlighting the issues and raising very significant problems in the system? I find that just shows the chaos and dysfunction within government and within the department, and why nothing has been done.

And nothing has been done, even though the government says, ‘Oh, yes. After the child deaths of a few years ago, we put in place Safer Care for Kids.’ They did start that – I acknowledge that – back in 2023 after the horrendous issues that occurred in 2021 and 2022 where:

...we saw an increase in sentinel events related to patient deterioration, particularly in children and young people.

The government is acknowledging there was a deterioration, and they put in Safer Care for Kids. But lo and behold: nothing. They put in a couple of parts of what they recommended to be done, but nothing since August 2024 has been fully implemented, so they have stalled. Again, it shows the dysfunction and the hopelessness of implementing anything around this really important issue.

The Safer Care for Kids project aims to implement three recommendations – and they have done some, but if you go to their own website it says:

Phase two of the Safer Care for Kids project is now complete – but if you go on, there are no updates on progress:

Future progress updates relating to the three recommendations will be provided as they become available.

Well, they have not been available, and this goes back to August of last year. We have had more deaths and more mistakes and more issues that have arisen since those deaths. I want to just say to all of those people involved, the families of loved ones who have lost their lives in our healthcare system, that we need to do better. We must do better. There must be improvement in this. Certainly on this side we acknowledge the issues, and we need to do better, also for those staff, who are put under so much pressure. There is the wage theft issue I have raised, with the junior doctors – they are exhausted, they make mistakes. That was acknowledged in the commission's findings.

In the last 30 seconds I have on this motion, I would hope that the house would support it and that the government would immediately undertake a fully independent inquiry into the reporting and investigation of sentinel events, because currently the system is not working. It is broken, and it needs to improve. I hope that members can see the urgency and importance of this motion and give those people who have lost their lives and been impacted by sentinel events the respect to see that that occurs.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:06): I welcome this motion. I think it is always important to be accountable and to have a system in place to be accountable for all things that happen in our health system. At the outset I just want to start off by acknowledging and giving a big thankyou to those that work in our health system. Doctors, specialists, nurses, allied health practitioners, administrators, caterers, cleaners and educators all work together in hospitals and within our health system in a very complex environment, caring for our community, caring for sometimes some of the most vulnerable people in our community and at other times people that are experiencing their most vulnerable health experience. And 99.9 per cent of these team members across all of our hospitals work fantastically together. The systems in place support them to get the best that they can out of the system for their patients.

Every now and again there is not an ideal outcome, and in fact some people experience harm as a result of our health service system. That is what we are talking about today. It is called a 'sentinel event', when harm occurs, and that can be harm to someone's health. On very rare occasions someone may even die as a result. There is a program that accounts for these scenarios. It is called the sentinel event program, and it is a demonstration of our commitment to accountability.

A sentinel event is when something goes wrong with a patient's care that causes them serious harm or death. Health services must report all adverse patient safety events that result in serious harm or death of a patient while in their care. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care sets out 10 categories of sentinel events, and we have added another one to capture all adverse patient safety events resulting in serious harm or death. We are the only jurisdiction that reports on that category.

When health services review a sentinel event, they follow a process that helps them understand what went wrong and how and why. This is done by a group of experts, including an expert who does not work for the health service and a person representing the patient's family's perspective. They write a report, including recommendations to reduce the chance of something similar happening to someone else. We also report annually on sentinel events, investigations and recommendations. The most recent

report showed a 2 per cent increase in sentinel events from the previous year. 2022–23 also saw an improvement in the timelines of reporting of sentinel events. However, there is still more work to be done to improve health reporting and the timeliness of reports. Safer Care Victoria is working with health services to do that. The Minister for Health has also directed Safer Care Victoria to provide urgent advice on how reporting obligations can be further strengthened. Safer Care Victoria also continues to consult with the AMA on measures that can be taken to further improve our systems and processes. When I think of a sentinel event, my thoughts go to patients who have experienced harm or those who have lost someone. It is a very devastating experience, and I want to offer my sympathy and support to anybody who has experienced that.

As you can see from my summary of the sentinel event program, the safety of all patients in our health system is a priority for this government. The best way to maintain the highest standards of safety is to be open and accountable. There was nothing in place when we came to government. It was this government that introduced the accountability we have today. That is why Ms Crozier is able to bring up these figures, because we believe in the transparency of this program. This was clearly not a priority for the previous government, since they did not do it, even though that meant Victorians were less safe, problems were not addressed and those responsible were not held accountable. That is not the Labor government's approach. We listen, we review performance, we make hard decisions and we continue to improve. This is clear from our record.

We established Safer Care Victoria in 2017 as our independent safety and quality body. We established the annual sentinel events report, and we made it mandatory for health services to do the following: openly disclose to a patient and their family a written account, formally apologise for the harm suffered and provide a description of a health service's response to an event and the steps taken to prevent reoccurrence. We also created Victoria's first chief quality and safety officer. These requirements are on top of the mandatory reporting of all child deaths, which are independently reviewed by the Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity. The State Coroner also examines all reportable deaths when someone dies unexpectedly during or following a medical procedure.

On the specific matter of Latrobe Regional Health, Safer Care Victoria conducted a review into the service in 2023 following reports of quality and safety issues. Recommendations were developed and are being implemented. Safer Care Victoria are monitoring that implementation. Chief medical officer Professor Andrew Wilson has been appointed to the Latrobe Regional Health safety and quality subcommittee to provide additional expertise, support and oversight. This is our approach. We track performance and listen to concerns. We are transparent about issues and we respond.

Our Safer Care for Kids project demonstrates this commitment. Safer Care for Kids is a family- and carer-led project to improve health outcomes for children and young people in emergency care. It was formed in response to an increased incidence of sentinel events relating to patient deterioration. We proactively brought together more than 100 healthcare leaders, clinicians, patients and families to consider how we might improve the safety and quality of care for children accessing emergency health care in Victoria. This resulted in three key actions: mandating use of the Victorian Children's Tool for Observation and Response whenever children or young people have vital signs recorded; establishing an urgent concern helpline and implementing a 24/7 system of virtual paediatric emergency consultation; and strengthening sector awareness of the 24/7 paediatric consultation available via the Victorian virtual emergency department as well as the Paediatric Infant Perinatal Emergency Retrieval service.

In closing, I again acknowledge family members who have experienced harm in the public health system. I also want to acknowledge the hard work of our health professionals. When we seek health care it is reasonable to expect that the care we receive helps, not hinders, our health. I want to reassure health consumers that, thanks to Labor, we record and seek accountability for sentinel events. We now have a system to monitor, account for and prevent these types of events in the future.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (16:16): I rise to speak in support of this motion before us. There is a patient safety event in at least one in 10 hospital admissions in Australia, with many causing harm to patients. This is not unique to Australia. It happens across similarly resourced health systems around the world, as noted by the World Health Organization. These incidents result in significant economic cost to our community and can cause lasting harm and trauma to patients. I want to acknowledge at the outset all of those who have experienced such harms.

It is important to recognise that even in the very best health systems, like our own, things will go wrong and not all adverse events are preventable. But notably, at least half of adverse events are preventable. While clinicians do not ever set out to cause harm – in fact it is anathema to our very purpose – the reality is that health care, by its nature, is filled with risks. Humans are humans, and mistakes happen, but we should always be working harder to minimise risks and prevent mistakes. Understanding the root cause of clinical incidents is important to identify systemic changes that need to be made to protect patients from similar harms in the future. It is the very least we should do out of respect for those who have been harmed.

There are different ways of classifying clinical incidents, each requiring different levels of reporting and responses. There are near misses, which do not actually cause harm but could have. There are adverse events, which do result in harm – these are things like hospital-acquired infections. Then there are sentinel events. There are different definitions of a sentinel event. This is important, and it is something I will come back to because I think it is an issue that does need to be addressed and it is why I believe that a review is really warranted. According to Safer Care Victoria, in Victoria the term ‘sentinel event’ refers to an unexpected and adverse event that occurs infrequently in a health service entity and results in the death of or serious physical or psychological injury to – there is a certain category for that – a patient as a result of system and process deficiencies at the health service entity.

A sentinel event is the most serious type of clinical incident. It is not related to a patient’s pre-existing condition or disease. These are things like surgery on the wrong part of someone’s body or a death from a medication error. Serious harm is considered to have occurred when, as a result of a serious adverse patient event, the patient has required life-saving surgery or a medical intervention, they have a shortened life expectancy, they have experienced permanent or long-term physical harm or they have experienced permanent or long-term loss of function. These are really terrible events that we do not want occurring in our health systems.

When a sentinel event occurs there are certain reporting obligations on health services and certain investigations that need to take place. The point of reporting these is not to punish health services or their employees. This is really critical. It is to honestly and openly evaluate what could and should have been done differently so that we can learn from what has happened and we can look at how the system can be reformed to prevent harm to patients in the future. There are other ways we can look at for people to prosecute things through the legal system, but sentinel event reporting and investigation is not about punishment. It is not a punitive mechanism. However, the system in Victoria has been the subject of criticism following perceived failures to adequately identify systemic issues early in the process. There have been significant improvements over the years, which Ms Crozier outlined in the history of the establishment of Safer Care Victoria, and full credit to the government for putting these stronger systems in place. However, attention is on the system once again following a series of tragic events in several regional hospitals involving children.

The death of a child in any circumstance is unthinkable difficult, and when it occurs as a result of failures in the health system it is particularly devastating for families and their loved ones as well as for the health workers who are involved in these situations. My heart absolutely breaks for anyone who has been through this. Given the recent revelations, I do think it is reasonable to again question whether our sentinel events system is adequate.

I want to make it crystal clear that the Greens do not support unwarranted or unjustified criticisms of individual health services. We do not support commentary that singles out any particular health service

or is critical of how they operate. We acknowledge the work that has been done by the government and Safer Care Victoria and the work that they continue to do with hospitals to improve their processes. It is worth noting that services that have a higher rate of sentinel event reporting might simply be doing a better job of being transparent and reporting as they should. So having a higher rate of sentinel events does not necessarily mean that a health service is worse; it might actually just be much better at being compliant with its obligations under the current system. That also, though, does not mean there is not a problem, and I will come back to that.

We do not want to create any further disincentives for health services to report sentinel events. If they know that they are going to be dragged through the media or have their reputations trashed for doing what is right, all it will do is incentivise cover-ups and non-reporting. The whole point of a sentinel events system is to detect significant variations between services that might act as a signal that something is not right – either a particular service does need a closer look at because it is having an unusual amount of sentinel events, and that is a real thing, or there is something wrong with the reporting system which means that different hospitals are reporting in different ways. That too is something that really needs further investigation and looking into.

For example, it has become clear from concerns recently raised around the sentinel events system that we need to be looking at the classification of sentinel events and the system that is used here in Victoria. Currently there are two reporting frameworks for sentinel events. There is the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care *Australian Sentinel Events List*, which includes 10 categories of reportable sentinel events. They define a sentinel event as one that is wholly preventable. But in Victoria we also have the category 11, which covers all serious adverse patient events that do not fit into those 10 Australian sentinel events, and they are not all wholly preventable. They are meant to be reported within three days, but sometimes it is uncertain if one has occurred, potentially relating to confusion about which sentinel event definition should be used. These are issues that have been raised by the AMA on several occasions, and we agree that a review of the term ‘sentinel event’ needs to occur in order to determine whether we need to refine that system and provide greater guidance and clarity to health services.

I believe that it is important that all serious adverse events are reported, which is what the current Victorian system is trying to do but perhaps failing to do because of this confusion. Additionally, it is undeniably stressful for those involved in a sentinel event, including in the current investigation process. It is meant to be something that is different to a court hearing or a coroner’s investigation, but it can become overly legalistic and adversarial.

Healthcare workers need to be supported to provide frank information, but we cannot forget about patients and their families, particularly parents of children, who may be experiencing unimaginable grief and distress. Ensuring they are supported appropriately through this process and receive open communication and an acknowledgement of errors from health services is critical as part of their grief journey. This is an area where significant improvement could be made and more guidance and support provided to hospitals about how to do this. We want a system that aims for full and open disclosure. That is, when a mistake is made, the health service and workers discuss it openly so we can learn from what went wrong. A punitive system that creates fear and shame will not prevent adverse events from happening. Indeed, it will only make them more likely. We also need a functional system in place to support this and to identify where there may be broader system problems. These processes, these sentinel event systems, need to be adequately resourced both at the health service level and at the departmental level. Funding towards safety and quality improvement is enormously offset by the benefits. Even a 1 per cent reduction in preventable adverse events in our health service would save millions of dollars. Not only that, it would significantly reduce the human cost that is currently felt by too many patients and their families.

In closing, we will be supporting this motion before us today. We agree that a review of our sentinel event system is warranted. I am heartened to hear from the government that a lot of work is already underway in this space, and we look forward to continuing to see the outcomes of that.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:25): I rise today to address a very serious matter, and that is the alarming increase in sentinel events in Victorian hospitals. I thank my colleague the Shadow Minister for Health Ms Crozier for bringing this to the house's attention to enable us to have a respectful debate on what is a very serious issue with far-reaching and lifelong consequences for some families.

Noting the history – I came in here in 2015 – I think it was around 2015 or 2016 that there was the Bacchus Marsh scandal or the Bacchus Marsh sadness. Indeed Safer Care Victoria was born out of a number of sentinel deaths at that hospital, and there was certainly evidence that there was a health system in crisis that needed to have a forensic investigation and continuous improvement, as we often hear ministers talk about in this place, to stop preventable deaths.

Every statistic that we have spoken about so far represents a Victorian family that has been devastated by a tragedy that could or may well have been prevented. If we look at this and the data – I understand this is the most recent data, but it is old data from 2022–23 – again I concur with my colleague Ms Crozier that we do need the latest data. We heard from the previous speaker on the government benches about transparency. We certainly do need to see the most recent data. That would either provide a more positive response and outcome or it would mean that the government has to double down on its efforts and indeed accept Ms Crozier's very important recommendation at the end for an inquiry into how these events occur and her call for reporting and investigation of these sentinel events.

We saw that in 2022–23, 245 sentinel events were reported across Victoria, an increase on the previous year. It is certainly concerning that deaths increased to 167, up from 155 the year before. So sentinel events and then deaths had increased from the year before, and medical and medication errors skyrocketed by almost 100 per cent in just one year. Then only 23 per cent of these events were reported within a three-day window, again showing and reflecting the workload and stress occurring in our Victorian hospitals. The government absolutely needs to take responsibility for this and double down on the support for our healthcare systems, our hospitals and our nursing and specialist staff.

We saw that about 25 per cent of event locations were in the wards, 20 per cent in emergency departments and 10 per cent in operating, and in intensive care units again around 10 per cent. I want to be quite open about the discussion around Latrobe Regional Hospital. It is something that my family has used, as have so, so many of my constituents, because it is a catchment for basically all of Gippsland. We have used our Latrobe Regional Hospital over many years, and indeed there are some outstanding comments about tremendous quality of care, tremendous service and tremendous nursing and doctor support. There are some that are far less than that, and I am going to speak about some of those today. Latrobe Regional Hospital reported nine sentinel events to Safer Care over the past five years. We have again heard that this is one example of multiple hospitals that are facing these sorts of issues, so in one way it is a test case for our discussion today. Certainly these are not just stats. They are stats, but they are not just stats – they have humans and losses behind them. Four of the patients allegedly died due to delayed care and two patients suffered severe postoperative complications resulting in serious lifelong disabilities. Indeed there has been documentation that shows that in at least one of those fatal incidents somebody on the ward described the ward as being in chaos. We also have heard discussions from staff around understaffing and a lack of access to basic equipment like computers and pathology services, and medical professionals at Latrobe have raised serious concerns about inadequate clinical experience of staff, lack of education provided to doctors and insufficient training for medical personnel.

Ms Crozier has already read in some of the comments from patients regarding experiences at Latrobe regional that were provided to her under freedom of information. Some staff apparently were not interviewed who should have been interviewed, the contention is, by Safer Care Victoria. It completely suggests a potential gap in the investigation process. Why weren't these people actually interviewed, and their experiences and their suggestions and improvements taken on board?



There is a public statement from chief executive officer Don McRae, who I know is working very hard on every level, but I will put this on record for balance and transparency. Don said:

Seven cases were reviewed by Safer Care Victoria following a complaint. Four of the patients had died... None of the cases were considered a 'sentinel event', which is a preventable serious safety event resulting in the harm or death of a patient.

Each of the cases was reviewed internally by clinical committees at LRH, as is the usual practice. These reviews were undertaken to identify gaps in care and possible improvements.

A subsequent review and a site visit by Safer Care Victoria (SCV) identified the opportunity for quality and safety improvements in our surgical program. Many of these were already underway prior to the review ...

said Mr McRae. Then he goes on to finish with:

It also highlighted areas for improvement which we had not considered. These observations are beneficial.

He goes on to talk about continuous improvement. As I said, at the end of every one of these events is a grieving relative, and over time I have had conversations with some of them. For privacy I certainly will not be drilling down into our conversations, but I think there are also other broader issues in relation to protective services and how they operate, and the transfer of patients into hospital. My understanding, from some of the incidents that I have spoken with family members about, is that this is a completely overworked system – we have fantastic staff, but an overworked system. That is something that we can certainly improve – something this government must and should improve.

The Australian Medical Association of Victoria president Jill Tomlinson says Victorians:

...need and deserve transparency...

and that –

This type of data –

that we have been reviewing today –

needs to be readily available so that we can have the transparency required to achieve safe healthcare ...

That is what this motion today is about, and that is what this government should be focusing more on. She noted that members have frequently raised concerns about safety within the Victorian care system, and the government's silence speaks volumes about their priorities. Again I want to thank Ms Crozier. Behind every statistic is a Victorian family that has been devastated. Families need to feel trust. This whole system, this whole conversation, is around building trust – building capacity in the system so patients' families can have that trust and are not taking children and burying infants and loved ones. This needs to happen. This government should undertake an independent inquiry into the reporting and investigation of sentinel events, and I thank Ms Crozier for raising this very sensitive, very serious but very important issue in the house this afternoon.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:35): I am pleased to rise to speak on Ms Crozier's motion with respect to sentinel events and their reporting in Victoria and how we ensure that our healthcare system, particularly our hospital system, delivers high-quality patient care and that Victorians who need medical support, need medical attention and need health care have access to high-quality, world-class care delivered by hardworking, well-trained clinicians and support staff.

At the outset I think it is important to acknowledge that sentinel events, whether they are causing death or serious harm, obviously have significant effects on patients and their families, but they also deeply affect the healthcare workforce that are around and trying to support that patient. I do not think anyone who engages with a member of our hardworking healthcare workforce would in any way doubt that they are always striving to do their best to deliver the sort of health care that is going to make the patient in front of them better. That is why they go to work every day, and they are just as devastated by events when things go wrong as the families and loved ones. In the context of this debate, I think it is worth us acknowledging that too, that our healthcare workers – our doctors, our nurses and the rest

of the healthcare workforce – go to work to try and help people. Sometimes they are not successful in alleviating the conditions that are causing injury or pain. Sometimes they are not able to prevent death.

The sentinel events regime is designed so that the system can understand and learn from mistakes that are made. That culture of continuous improvement, that culture of learning and acknowledging how things could have been done better, how particular sets of circumstances led to serious and unfortunate outcomes, is critical to a high-functioning healthcare system – not just the quality of the care that is provided but the quality of the learning when something goes wrong.

In Victoria at a systemic level we have, through the work of Safer Care Victoria and the reporting that is done and through the structure of our sentinel events notification system, some world-class quality assurance and continuous improvement mechanisms. I also do not want to lose sight of that – at a system level we have got some of the best and most robust features to ensure that culture of continuous improvement. The culture of high-quality learning from mistakes that occur at a clinical level is translated through to the system level as well. That is what the role of Safer Care Victoria is designed to do.

We know that there are a range of things that happen in healthcare settings, particularly in our hospitals, that, when they go wrong, we need to understand why. There are 10 sentinel events that are notifiable under the national scheme, the *Australian Sentinel Events List*, such as surgical procedures that are performed on the wrong site resulting in serious harm or death, or on the wrong patient, or when the wrong procedures are performed. There is the unintended retention of a foreign object following surgery, or the wrong blood transfusions are used. There is suspected suicide in an acute psychiatric unit. There are medication errors resulting in serious harm or death. There is the use of mechanical or physical restraints resulting in serious harm or death. There is the discharge or release of an infant or child to an unauthorised person, and there is the use of an incorrectly positioned gastric tube resulting in serious harm or death. They are the 10 national events. In Victoria we go further. The Victorian system uses an additional measure to identify sentinel events that need to be reported. Already, at a systems level, our system is above and beyond where our national standards are. We have an 11th category for sentinel event notifications here in Victoria; they are all adverse patient safety events resulting in serious harm or death that are not included in the other 10 categories. I think that additional element speaks somewhat to the seriousness with which the Victorian system takes these matters.

We know that for every system we set up – and this system was established in Victoria after the terrible events that occurred in Bacchus Marsh – like I said, the system is learning, the system is trying to get better and to set up this sentinel events reporting regime. If there are some healthcare professionals and services that are not fulfilling their obligations to report sentinel events in a timely manner, that is of concern to us. The Minister for Health has directed Safer Care Victoria to provide urgent advice on how reporting obligations can be further strengthened and will continue to consult with the AMA on measures that can be further undertaken to improve our systems and processes.

We know that if you espouse the principles of continuous improvement at a clinical level and at a systems level, then you have got to back that up with action that results in those systems continually improving. Again, if we do have circumstances where there has been under-reporting, the minister very clearly thinks that is not acceptable and has asked Safer Care Victoria to provide urgent advice on how those reporting obligations can be further strengthened, in consultation with the Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity, particularly in relation to child deaths. The medical system does – and healthcare professionals, particularly doctors, do – go through a process of doing regular audit meetings of their work to understand and assess where they could have done things better. They do have, and high-quality clinical care does involve, the practise of using morbidity and mortality meetings for review, in an open, honest and collegiate space, where peers come together to admit where things went wrong and discuss how to make them better.

Both of those elements are important in the healthcare system. Every adverse event, every serious harm, is absolutely regrettable and should be avoided. When they are not, there must be a culture in our healthcare system of acknowledgment when something has gone wrong and a commitment to finding out what can be done to fix it. That culture breaks down when people are fearful of speaking up and speaking out. In the conduct of this debate more broadly about serious events, sentinel events, that occur in our healthcare system – and I am not suggesting that the content of the debate today has done this but just more broadly – we do need to be very, very careful in our words and careful in our attribution of blame, for want of better term, so that our clinicians always are supported to admit when they have made mistakes and to figure out what they can do better next time at an individual level, at a collective level, at a unit or clinical level, at a hospital level and at a system level. That is the kind of attitude and that is the kind of systemic approach to continuous improvement in quality that we need in our healthcare system. That is what is going to keep our patients safe. That is what is going to keep Victoria's world-leading, nation-leading healthcare system continuing to deliver exactly what it should for all Victorians, and that is high-quality health care.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:45): I rise to speak in support of my colleague Ms Crozier's motion. Firstly, I want to acknowledge that we have amazing healthcare workers that every day show up and give their absolute best – workers that are required to work in an overwhelmed and broken system. I also want to acknowledge that any loss of a loved one is absolutely tragic, but when a death is preventable it causes a different type of heartache that will not heal. Healthcare professionals cannot do the impossible, but what we are talking about here is what we can do from a systems point of view and a training and staffing point of view to make life a little bit better.

I also want to acknowledge that I will be talking a little bit about Latrobe Regional Hospital. As Dr Mansfield said, this is not reflecting on individuals or hospitals as such. It is about a system that is broken. I know that the nurses and the staff there are just really incredible people. My sister-in-law did her original nursing training at LRH, and two of my very best friends are nurses there. Latrobe Regional Hospital had three babies die in six weeks. It is absolutely tragic. They included two newborns and an 18-month-old girl with sepsis who did not receive life-saving antibiotics in time. The 18-month-old's condition was not identified by a junior doctor. The child died while being transferred to Melbourne, and this resulted in an absolutely heartbroken family and an absolutely devastated young doctor.

The 18-month-old's death was found to be a sentinel event, meaning that it was preventable. This is the latest in a series of deaths and adverse outcomes at LRH in recent years. LRH was investigated by the health watchdog Safer Care Victoria (SCV) over seven deaths at the hospital in 2023. These deaths were classified as sentinel and were reported to the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas in June 2023 and the Secretary of the Department of Health. However, Minister Thomas did not inform the community. One of the cases reported to Safer Care Victoria involved a patient with a ruptured appendix who was not operated on, even though it was a medical emergency, for over 24 hours after presenting to the ED. Another patient died without being seen by an on-call doctor, which staff believe contributed to their death.

In March this year the *Herald Sun* reported further whistleblower allegations, including negligence and suboptimal care; delays in receiving essential care; inaccuracies in diagnosis and treatment by medical staff; patients waiting 24 hours for surgery despite being in critical condition; concerns about postoperative care; deaths attributed to medical negligence and inadequate patient treatment; unqualified practitioners putting patients under anaesthesia for C-sections and surgeries; chronic understaffing; staff tasked with multiple responsibilities that were beyond their qualifications; millions of dollars spent on new theatres with no-one to staff them; substandard management and safety; and a pervasive culture of secrecy. These are the sorts of things we can be looking at. Whistleblowers have also claimed that more troubling cases, including deaths, have occurred since the original report was made to SCV in June 2023. In February 2024 the *Herald Sun* reported that LRH was having issues

hiring qualified staff and was so desperate for specialists that management was offering \$10,000 a day to fill shifts to keep its surgery program operational. This is a healthcare system at breaking point.

This suggests a planning failure by the government and a systemic resourcing and cultural issue. These types of systemic health system failures disproportionately affect regional Victoria. Other hospitals affected like this include Albury–Wodonga and Bacchus Marsh, but I do want to highlight that in my area and Ms Bath's area of the Eastern Victoria Region we are very much affected by –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Renee HEATH:** And yours too, Minister. We are very much affected by this. Urgent action is required to properly resource regional health and improve the quality of medical care.

I know so much has been covered in this debate, but one thing I do want to mention is some of the comments by Rural Doctors Association of Victoria president Rob Phair in his response to the situation here. Some of his thoughts are these:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The regional healthcare system is under extreme stress. This is not a new problem. It has been gradually building, and it has been exacerbated by COVID.

He also said:

There is a significant population shift to regional areas and this happened a lot during COVID, and the resources needed to cope with this growth have not caught up.

I have been talking about this often, not just the Latrobe regional area but when it comes to the Pakenham hospital. It is one of the fastest growing areas in the country, yet we have not had the healthcare infrastructure catch up with this, and people are really suffering because of it.

Anyway, back to the president of the Rural Doctors Association's comments. He said:

We want fair access for our communities to good quality health care. It is not just a matter of more infrastructure and beds, it is also a workforce need. Rural health advocates need to be consulted on their expertise, and it has to be valued by the bureaucrats in capital cities.

He said:

We need a strategic plan at a state and federal level. We need a workforce plan that involves training a local workforce. The kids who grew up in rural and regional areas are the future of our rural workforces. Otherwise we are working through incentives to try to attract overseas and city-trained doctors into rural and regional areas. This is an issue that we have seen, and it is simply not sustainable.

In closing I want to thank Ms Crozier for bringing this motion to the house. I think that it is an extremely important motion that is something that we surely all agree on, and I commend this motion to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:53): I also rise to speak on the motion which has been put forward by Ms Crozier today on sentinel events, a very serious topic, and whilst we will disagree – and I will go into a bit more detail shortly – I will acknowledge her for bringing this to the house today because this is always an important thing for us to be mindful of and for us to be talking about. It is a very serious issue.

As with other speakers, to begin with in my remarks I do want to also acknowledge all those people and loved ones of people who have experienced sentinel events. It sounds trite to say, but one instance of harm simply is too many, and it is an unthinkable thing to have to go through. I also do want to acknowledge that we do have an incredible health workforce, arguably one of the best in the world, a tireless health workforce from the very top to the very bottom, the people that work in our healthcare system, including in our hospitals, in our critical care settings, who deliver that outstanding care. Many of us have had recent or not so recent firsthand or at least second-hand experience with that health system and will invariably do so on a number of occasions throughout our lives. Those are the

moments when we are at our most vulnerable and when the quality of health care is so important, and that is where sentinel events can come in. We will be debating, potentially as early as tomorrow, a bill to further strengthen nurse-to-patient ratios. One of the earliest initiatives of the then Andrews Labor government nearly 10 years ago was to implement those critical nurse-to-patient ratios that are so vital in providing that health care to Victorians, in providing that safety and the quality of care, to take one less pressure off the risk of these events happening. The strengthening of those nurse-to-patient ratios I know is something that has been extremely well accepted by the nursing community and the healthcare community. I am very much looking forward to debating that bill in this place, as I say, potentially as early as tomorrow.

Sentinel events are an area – and I do acknowledge that Dr Mansfield acknowledged this in her contribution – that this government has taken very seriously, and indeed it has enacted several reforms. Noting Dr Mansfield's comments about the need for reporting for the accurate resolution of these events and how blame can be a corroding effect on that, it strikes me as rather ironic to see part (1) of this motion, which is a full-throated accusation of blame. I just take a moment to appreciate the irony of that when we are discussing something that is so important. But this is, as my colleague Ms Ermacora went through before, a topic where this government has invested significantly already. One of the ways we did that was through the establishment of Safer Care Victoria in 2017, the state's independent safety and quality body. There was nothing in place prior to 2017, so it was the actions of this government that set up the system which now is charged with responding to and, as far as it can, preventing further sentinel events in this state.

Since the establishment of Safer Care Victoria, we have also improved the reporting of health service sentinel events, which in turn improves quality and safety over time. The results of this have been published through the annual sentinel events report. It was also this government that introduced the statutory duty of candour reforms, which came into effect just a couple of years ago in 2022, which implements a recommendation from Targeting Zero. The reforms made it mandatory, following a serious adverse patient safety event, for the health service to openly discuss this with a patient and their family by providing and disclosing a written account to the patient or their family, to formally apologise for the harm suffered and also to provide a description of the health service's response to the event and the steps taken to prevent reoccurrence. Sometimes, in any profession, accidents will happen; sometimes they can have tragic consequences. But I think that third and final aspect of the statutory duty of candour reforms is so important, because when you talk to bereaved families in any situation, in any scenario, they are so often selfless. Their number one concern so often is, 'I want to stop this from happening to someone else.' So these reforms, as part of the statutory duty of candour, which as I say came in in 2022, go a great way to ensuring that families who do have to deal with those unthinkable situations have the benefit of a detailed description of what the health service is doing to stop that happening to someone else's family member.

We also created Victoria's first chief quality and safety officer, with powers to undertake safety and quality reviews. In addition, all child deaths are reportable and reviewed by the independent Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity. The Victorian coroner also examines all reportable deaths when somebody dies unexpectedly during or following a medical procedure. Together these mechanisms act as a combined, robust oversight mechanism of accountability, of safety, and a quality framework which is driving improvement as well as a culture of openness and continuous learning. Again reflecting back on Dr Mansfield's remarks, the importance of openness is so critical when it comes to preventing future sentinel events. There is an innate human instinct to want to blame, to want justice, and there are cases where that is the appropriate response. But when it comes to preventing further harm, that sense of openness is so very critical.

On top of these mechanisms, we are delivering significant reform through the Safer Care for Kids program. Announced in August 2023, Safer Care for Kids is a family- and carer-led project to improve health outcomes for children and young people in emergency care. In response to an increased incidence of sentinel events relating to patient deterioration, we also proactively brought together more

than 100 healthcare leaders, clinicians, patients and families to consider how we might improve the safety and quality of care for children accessing emergency health care in Victoria. This resulted in three key actions, which are underway.

The first is the mandated use of the Victorian Children's Tool for Observation and Response, otherwise known as ViCTOR, wherever children and young people have vital signs recorded. This includes refinements to emphasise assessment and family and carer concerns. The second pillar is the establishment of the urgent concern helpline, which provides an escalation process for patients and families of paediatric patients to escalate any concerns about a deterioration in health of themselves or a loved one when they feel that their concerns are not being heard. This has already been trialled at a few hospitals and started at Northern Health last year.

**Sheena Watt** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Yes, that will be of great interest to you, I am sure, Ms Watt. The third pillar is the 24/7 system of virtual paediatric emergency consultation and strengthening sector awareness of this system, which is accessible via the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department. That is a program that I know many in my electorate have benefited from – one of the many reforms we are putting in place. As well as the significant investment into the physical infrastructure of our healthcare system, which I could probably spend another whole 10 minutes talking about, the implementation of services such as the VVED is critical in relieving some of that pressure on our emergency departments.

To discuss the topic at hand today, sentinel events are an extremely serious and extremely tragic event each and every time they happen. I will conclude where I began, which is to again express the deepest of sympathy for people who have themselves suffered or have had close family members suffer a sentinel event. I also reaffirm this government's commitment to our healthcare workforce and to empowering them to do the absolute very best they can to deliver the world-class health care that Victorians rely on.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:03): Can I begin by echoing the sentiments of sympathy to all those families who have lost a loved one to a sentinel event in our hospitals. It is a tragedy each and every time but never more so than when it involves children. I will take some time to make some remarks here with what is left on the clock but also know that my thoughts are always with the families of those in our healthcare system as well as all our workers, because they must feel that tragedy very deeply themselves. Can I also say that the safety of patients in our healthcare system always will be a foremost priority. I do acknowledge that these are terrible tragedies and the tragedy of sentinel events and their impacts on patients and families should be known.

It is necessary, though, to oppose this motion as it fails to properly acknowledge the considerable progress being made by the Allan Labor government in ensuring accountability, transparency and quality improvement in Victoria's healthcare system. This motion calls for an independent inquiry, and I hold that that is redundant given the significant measures already in place to investigate and respond to sentinel events.

I, like many others in this house, remember the important work that was done by former minister Jill Hennessy, who created safeguards in our health system, and Victoria has established one of the most stringent oversight frameworks in the country, ensuring transparency and accountability in hospital operations through especially the creation of Safer Care Victoria in 2017, and that really did mark a significant step forward in strengthening patient safety. Yes, I was not actually serving in this place at that time. I had the good fortune to serve the Victorian people as a representative on the board of a hospital, in fact one that mostly dealt with children. The introduction of Safer Care Victoria is well known to me, and I do remember that it came from the really unfortunate tragedy at Djerriwarrh Health Services. I know that the government at that time responded very quickly with some very stringent governance improvements across the entirety of the Victorian system, with a particular focus on

clinical governance in the hospitals. It did mean that we had to make some pretty big improvements because there was a lot of work to be done that we inherited from the previous health minister.

But when, only a couple of years later, there were some reforms that came in place around the statutory duty of candour, I had the good fortune to make some contributions on that bill in November 2022, and that was something that I felt very strongly about because it did mandate that health services at that time disclose serious adverse events to patients and their families, provide a written account, offer a formal apology and describe, importantly, the corrective steps that had been taken. This initiative really promotes transparency and ensures that affected families receive direct communication regarding incidents, and it really did I believe continue to foster trust in the healthcare system.

There is a point that has been made about the increase in reported sentinel events. I would like to say that is not necessarily an indication of declining hospital standards. Rather I would suggest that it reflects improved transparency and a culture where healthcare professionals feel more empowered to report incidents without fear of reprisals. Victoria has expanded its sentinel event categories beyond the national framework and introduced an additional category that captures all adverse patient safety events resulting in serious harm or death, and it means that in this state, reporting mechanisms are broader and more comprehensive than those anywhere else, leading to a higher number of reported cases. This really is misleading, and I do want to call that out – to suggest that an increase in reporting equates to a decline in care standards when in reality I believe it demonstrates a commitment to learning from incidents and preventing reoccurrence.

Safer Care Victoria and the Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity have been actively reviewing and refining reporting obligations. The Minister for Health has directed those bodies to provide urgent advice on strengthening reporting frameworks, and there are ongoing consultations with the Australian Medical Association to further enhance systems and processes. The Safer Care Victoria-led review into Latrobe Regional Hospital following concerns about patient safety exemplifies the government's proactive approach to addressing issues. Furthermore I must say that the appointment of chief medical officer Professor Andrew Wilson to the hospital safety and quality subcommittee does provide expert oversight and ensures that corrective measures are implemented effectively. Any time we bolster board governance by the appointment of people with a background in and strong commitment to safety and quality in clinical governance it is always a good thing.

Beyond reporting improvements, we have undertaken substantive reforms to improve patient safety and reduce sentinel events. With that view, in August 2023 the Safer Care for Kids program was launched, and it demonstrated our commitment to improving paediatric care through introducing essential measures such as reporting the use of the Victorian children's tool for observation and response to ensure thorough assessment of vital signs in children, establishing an urgent concern helpline to enable families to escalate concerns about a loved one's health and implementing a 24/7 virtual paediatric emergency consultation service to provide remote support to healthcare professionals in emergency settings. There is so much that we have done, but I appreciate that there is more that we can do. That is why the collaborative approach that we are pressing ahead with does ensure that lessons are learned and that hospitals are continually refining their safety protocols.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the health professionals that have bravely stepped up and shared their concerns. We will continue to invest in workforce training and development to drive the enhancements in clinical competency and staff and further improve clinical governance across the entirety of the Victorian health sector. Thank you for the opportunity to make some short remarks on that.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:11): In summing up, I am pleased that most members in this place have realised the importance of this motion, because it does go to improvements in patient safety and understanding exactly the concerns of clinicians who have raised their concerns, as well as obviously looking at what is not occurring. Whilst there have been some moves made by government to further improve systems, there are still many problems. I have highlighted those in my

debate, but I am not sure that all government members heard the debate. In some of these areas – where clinicians are saying there is chaos on the ward, there is understaffing and they cannot access computer systems or pathology – there are systemic issues. That is leading to these mistakes and to terrible outcomes such as child deaths. That is an issue around what is happening in the system, and that is why we need to be reviewing and having a look at what is happening, why these systemic failures are occurring and therefore why these serious issues such as child deaths are occurring.

Unfortunately, I know that the government had a lot of speaking points from the department or from the minister's office or wherever to say what they have been doing, but these numbers are where there is a failure in reporting on time or an increase in numbers. Other members have spoken about the statutory duty of candour – well, that is not always happening either. There are real gaps in the system, and that is why we need to review and look at what is not happening in order to improve the system and to ensure that these adverse events, which often end up in terrible and tragic circumstances, can be minimised. As we have said, you cannot avoid all mistakes or every risk that occurs within hospitals. But when there are obvious issues around reporting or investigations not taking place by the authority that is supposed to be undertaking those investigations then you need to review and have a look at the system and why it is not working. That is what this motion is about. It is about understanding that there are many issues within the system that are not working. There needs to be a review into it so that those numbers that are trending up and increasing – the number of deaths that are occurring that could have been avoided; these are preventable events, let us remember – come down. They do not rise, as they are, they come down – that is what needs to occur in relation to what is happening within our health system.

I do make the point that when you have got clusters or you have got significant areas of concern like we have seen over recent months it is incumbent on the government to act. I do not believe the government has acted appropriately or to the extent that it could have or should have. I think they have been preoccupied with other matters, and they have not been focusing on these important issues. We know the department is in absolute chaos. It is dysfunctional. There is no leadership; our senior executives have left in droves. As a result, you are having a range of issues within the department and that is then obviously flowing out into the broader health system. That is why I say the government has dropped the ball. They should have been addressing this issue months ago. They should have responded to the concerns of stakeholders like the Australian Medical Association and not let them drift along for months at a time when they raised the concerns as well. That is lack of action. That is factual and correct. These things need to be addressed, and I would hope that members in the house would support this motion so that we can get an independent investigation and look into this very important area that affects our healthcare system and, importantly, affects every single Victorian.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024**

##### *Clerk's corrections*

**The PRESIDENT** (17:16): Under joint standing order 6(1), I have received a report from the Clerk of the Parliaments informing the house that she has made a correction in the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024. The report is as follows:

Under Joint Standing Order 6(1), I have made a correction in the Terrorism (Community Protection) and Control of Weapons Amendment Bill 2024, listed as follows:

Clause 55, as amended by the Council's amendment No 4 and agreed to by the Assembly, replaces subsection 10D(1) of the *Control of Weapons Act 1990*. I have omitted the double quote mark at the beginning of the insertion and inserted single quote marks at the beginning and the end of the insertion.

The corrections ensure that the words and expressions inserted by Council amendment No 4 are appropriately inserted into the Bill.



*Business of the house***Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:18): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Department of Premier and Cabinet***Victoria's Value Creation and Capture Guidelines*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:18): I rise to make a statement on the report *Victoria's Value Creation and Capture Guidelines*, which was developed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in 2021, and this was to enhance the impact of government investments across our state. Before I continue to talk about that I just want to put out there the definitions of what 'value creation' and 'value capture' are because I think it will be useful and helpful to some in this chamber to understand.

'Value creation' refers to actions or activities or policies that deliver enhanced public value or benefit above and beyond what would ordinarily be achieved as a direct consequence of government investment. 'Value capture' refers to actions, activities or policies by which government captures a portion of the incremental value created by a project. In that context we have – I know that I have – been talking about the Suburban Rail Loop as a fantastic example of how we can look at utilising value creation and value capture to realise broader public benefit as a result of a project.

But back to the guidelines. The guidelines provide a structured framework for project sponsors, delivery agencies and advisory bodies involved in public land development and capital investments. Of course with the Suburban Rail Loop what we are doing is looking at using public land, such as a public train station, to realise a broader benefit through development of housing. Again, the guidelines aim to support the stakeholders in applying the Victorian government's value creation and capture policy, which encourages, as I said, a broader value-focused approach to project development, ensuring that environmental, social and economic benefits are maximised. To achieve this, the guidelines outline key stages that stakeholders must consider, and that includes everything from defining a project and identifying the value creation and capture opportunities right through to evaluating outcomes, and each of the stages plays a crucial role in ensuring that value is created and captured efficiently and effectively. Of course all of this means that the public have a greater benefit as a result of some of these really incredibly important infrastructure projects that we are doing.

A strong foundation for any project is the establishment of objectives. Before the value creation and capture opportunities can be explored, the vision and goals of the project will need to be defined. In the SRL business case you can see these sorts of things have been given a strong force and voice. Then, back to the guidelines, the guidelines recommend that the objectives be developed through investment management workshops and consultation and that these sorts of things are done in consultation with the public. The process also requires broader thinking to ensure that all possible avenues for additional public value are considered. The identification phase culminates in a statement of intent and a strategic plan, which then sets out the value creation and capture objectives and the expected benefits for the community. These are the things that we have been talking a lot about particularly with SRL when we talk about the broader benefits not only with public transport but also housing that people will be able to live in close to public transport, so you can see those broader benefits that are going to be realised and they are quite real and tangible.

The guidelines also provide clear direction on the delivery of projects, emphasising that coordination across government will be essential to ensuring the alignment needed to achieve the value creation and capture outcomes. Any project sponsors or agencies are responsible for implementing detailed plans and any endorsed value creation and capture mechanisms, with progress integrated into regular project status reports. Once the project is completed, it must be evaluated to determine whether those benefits have in fact been realised. The assessment should be undertaken in consultation with relevant stakeholders for capital investment projects and should align with the gateway review framework to ensure a comprehensive evaluation. As you can see, these sorts of frameworks are already well in place to make sure that for any project the government does we can realise a range of value capture opportunities in order to make sure that the community that are going to benefit from these projects can clearly see those benefits come to light.

In the 50 seconds or so that I have left on the clock, I will conclude by saying Victoria's value creation and capture guidelines represent a significant step in ensuring that government investments deliver tangible and real benefits for our communities. By adopting a strategic, collaborative and value-focused approach, we can enhance the economic, social and environmental outcomes of public projects. That is one of the fantastic things that we can see unfolding right before our eyes, particularly with projects like SRL but also SRL East, which is in my region. I know people in my region are absolutely looking forward to not only being able to have enhanced public transport options right in their backyard but also the housing benefits that they will be able to access as well. I commend this report to the house.

### **Remembrance Parks Central Victoria**

*Report 2023–24*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:23): I rise to speak on the annual report of Remembrance Parks Central Victoria. I am speaking about their current annual report, the 2023–24 one, but I would like to speak across two reports because they were tabled together last Thursday, so the 2023–24 and 2022–23 annual reports. What we know is that this cemetery trust has been a problem for this government. It has been very poorly managed. The chair of the cemetery trust should not be there. She is not competent to manage this trust, and the trust is in deep, deep trouble under her guidance. Of these two annual reports, one of them was tabled more than 18 months late – it is probably more like 21 months late – and the other one was tabled nine months late, being tabled in March of this year instead of June of last year. The 2023–24 annual report shows that this cemetery trust had a net operating result in deficit of \$738,000.

It is a disgrace for a cemetery trust to be this far in deficit in just one year, and when we look at why this cemetery trust might be in these circumstances we see that over the past two years they have actually budgeted to spend \$334,822 on spin doctors – on public relations and media advice. That is an incredible amount for a cemetery trust. None of us even get that amount of money to run our whole office, employ staff et cetera. They spent \$334,822 on spin doctors to try and spin their way out of the problem that the current chair has them in.

Why were these two annual reports held back so long? I believe it was because the chair's tenure was up on 28 February and she had applied to be reappointed. The minister obviously has reappointed that chair and has held back these reports – that show the financial deficit of this cemetery trust and the fact that they are spending nearly \$335,000 on spin doctors – until after the reappointment of the incompetent chair. We know that the chair is a former Labor member of Parliament, Margaret Lewis. She is also the cousin of the current Speaker. There is no doubt that this is about protecting Labor mates and giving jobs to Labor mates. The annual report was reported in the *Bendigo Advertiser*, and they also talked about the fact that the trust had spent \$100,000 on WorkCover claims. Why were those WorkCover claims coming in? They were coming in because of decisions of the current trust that caused significant problems in the community. We know that there have been a number –

**Ryan Batchelor:** On a point of order, President, Ms Lovell made some reflections on the Speaker in the other place, saying that she was protecting her mates. I would ask for your ruling on whether you think that is unparliamentary.

**The PRESIDENT:** I did not completely grasp the commentary. I just warn members that any accusations made against a sitting member need to be done by a substantive motion.

**Wendy LOVELL:** I did not make any accusations against the Speaker. I just mentioned that this woman is her cousin. I do not know that that is an accusation against the Speaker.

There have been so many incidents under this cemetery trust that have caused significant distress to communities in both Bendigo and Shepparton because of the incompetence of this chair. They have caused significant distress for the staff as well – \$100,000 in WorkCover claims. They had never had a WorkCover claim in previous years. They also never made budget allocations for spin doctors in previous years. I have looked at the past three annual reports before these two and there was no actual claim against them.

As well as being chair, Ms Lewis is also a member of the audit and risk committee, the community advisory committee, the finance and investment committee and the infrastructure and transformation committee. When we look at her attendance at those committees it is appalling: 20 per cent attendance at audit and risk, 25 per cent at community advisory, 50 per cent at the finance and investment committee and only 25 per cent at the infrastructure and transformation committee. She does not take this job seriously and she should be sacked.

### Department of Health

#### *Review of the Operation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:29): On a different matter –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** No, this is not about a personal vendetta. This is about a matter of substance for the state. I rise to make a statement on the *Review of the Operation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017*, which was tabled in this place in February. The report marks a critical five-year milestone. It is the five-year review since this significant and nation-leading piece of legislation was passed through this Parliament in 2019. It is legislation and a legislative framework that has been compassionate in supporting people to choose the manner and timing of their own death. Voluntary assisted dying is about dying with dignity. It is about offering people a choice. It is about ensuring that people with terminal illness can ensure that they can take steps to make informed decisions about the time of the end of their own life to reduce their suffering.

The report affirms what families, healthcare professionals and advocates have consistently told us, which is that Victoria's voluntary assisted dying framework is operating safely, with integrity and with the utmost care for and sensitivity to all those involved. From June 2019 until the end of June 2023 more than 1500 Victorians have made the deeply personal decision to access their right to use these laws. Importantly, the five-year review confirmed that all the individuals who accessed the scheme were indeed eligible, affirming the strength of the safeguards currently in place.

The review noted that there are several issues that have emerged in the last five years. Obviously Victoria was first in the nation to pass these laws five years ago. Since that time other states have also legislated and there have been some developments in voluntary assisted dying legislation around the country in that time. We have made some recommendations seeking how, as a government, as the Parliament, we could take steps to improve the operation of the scheme and continue to support those Victorians who seek to access it.

These recommendations would improve access while preserving the strong protections around the scheme, and the government has announced it plans to make some additional changes, including the

removal of the so-called gag clause, which currently prevents doctors from initiating discussions about voluntary assisted dying with their patients. The study identified this prohibition as setting a barrier to Victorians engaging with the voluntary assisted dying process and preventing open and honest conversations between healthcare providers and their patients. Patients deserve full transparency when making these sorts of decisions, and I think this is an important step the government has announced.

A further change the government has announced that it will be consulting on is for patients suffering from neurodegenerative conditions. There is a recommendation to remove the requirement for a third medical opinion. The government has accepted that to streamline the process, reducing unnecessary delays.

The review demonstrates that Victoria's voluntary assisted dying laws remain an important part of our state. The recommendations in the report will ensure that voluntary assisted dying in Victoria remains accessible and responsive to the needs of the community. We continually have a responsibility as members of this place to listen to the community, to learn, to see how our laws are operating and to continue the process of policy reform. That work is never done. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to supporting Victorians with a framework to uphold the dignity, choice and care in how they end their lives.

### **Victorian Auditor-General's Office**

#### *Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024*

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:33): The report I want to speak on is the Victorian Auditor-General's Office *Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024* that was tabled in the Parliament recently. That was subject to quite a number of days of news stories, but I think today is an important day to recap and discuss why a lot of these blowouts are happening. We know that the government does not have the processes in place within the bureaucracy to be able to properly audit project performance. The recommendations for more thorough performance reporting were actually dismissed by the Department of Transport and Planning, the very department that is meant to be overseeing a lot of our big builds. Is there any wonder why we have had about \$50 billion of cost blowouts over the last 10 years when the department of the minister in charge takes such a lax approach to reporting on major projects. The report revealed that major project costs increased by \$11.66 billion, 53 of 113 projects collectively exceeded their original budgets by \$14.9 billion and there was an 8.7 per cent increase in total estimated investment required for 113 projects. The Suburban Rail Loop East blew out by \$300 million in the early works stage, and we were chatting about the Suburban Rail Loop earlier today.

We know that the report says that public reporting on major projects is not 'meaningful, reliable or comprehensive'. Internal analysis of project performance is often high quality and meaningful, but not actually publicly reported by this government. So if the government had a little more transparency and if the government opened the doors, we might not see the decay which we see on our construction sites today, and the Liberals and Nationals have suggested a standing infrastructure major projects committee of the Parliament to scrutinise major projects. Every taxpayer dollar lost to waste is a tax increase on hardworking Victorians, is a rent increase on renters, is a tax increase on rental providers and is a tax increase that goes directly onto your energy bills and that directly impacts the cost-of-living crisis we are facing now. Is it any wonder? With the antics we saw today, members on the other side blocked a simple call for a royal commission. We saw those opposite side with criminals and underworld thugs by blocking a call for a royal commission into alleged criminal behaviour on construction sites. We saw allegations in particular about the abuse of women, where women were beaten up by militant union thugs, locked in rooms and stomped on. When those women, at least three of them, went to report the behaviour of union thugs on construction sites to their women's officer, it was not taken further up the chain. The victims of these abuses were kicked off those construction sites and blacklisted from every other taxpayer-funded construction site. So if you report abuse, you lose your entire career.

The standard we walk past is the standard we accept, and the standard those opposite accept on our construction sites is an abysmal record of blowouts and failure. We see underworld bosses profiting from major projects – fleecing money. Even motorcycle gang members that were banned from construction sites and kicked off construction sites are still earning, through subcontractors, \$11,000 a week for sitting at home. This is what happens under this government. Again, we need more reporting on major projects, better project reporting and better scrutiny. We have announced we will bring back the construction code with construction enforcement Victoria to ensure we better manage our major projects and keep them away from this thuggery we have seen in the media in the past week and in the past year.

### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

#### *Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:38): I rise to speak on a report which was tabled in this place yesterday, the Legal and Social Issues Committee's *Inquiry into the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023*. This was a short, sharp inquiry conducted by LSIC looking into a very specific part of cannabis reform in this state. It was initiated by my region mate Ms Payne, who brought this bill into the chamber and subsequently this inquiry for referral as well. It was, I should note from the outset, a very narrow focus that we applied with this bill. We were specifically looking at the decriminalisation model of recreational cannabis reform, not a regulated market, and even more specifically looking at the ACT model, the territory which first decriminalised cannabis use for recreational purposes in Australia back in 2019. Victoria of course led the way with medicinal cannabis around a decade ago.

Those of us on the committee had the opportunity to engage through the inquiry and through meeting with various ACT legislators, health experts and police officers and benefited from many submissions, many other meetings and a day of public hearings as well. The ACT model fundamentally provides that people can grow their own cannabis in small quantities for personal use. It has various prohibitions, such as on sharing, on different weights and other quantities, but fundamentally that is what it does. The bill put forward by Ms Payne seeks to implement a slightly modified, slightly improved system of that model. Our inquiry benefited from a statutory review of the ACT legislation, which showed some very interesting results, as well as the Lambert review – a recent study that has been released. What we saw is that cannabis rates stabilised in the ACT following decriminalisation – if anything, they slightly decreased. We did not see an increase, as some may have expected. We also saw, very surprisingly, from the Lambert review that the THC levels in cannabis grown in homes was much lower than that found in black market-procured cannabis. We know that the black market is still flourishing in the ACT, and those who have been utilising the decriminalised system are still a distinct minority.

It is important to ask what the ACT model shows for us. In particular the committee had an interest in the health and policing aspects of the ACT model. The evidence, frankly, showed that there was not an uptick in ambulance call-outs or in emergency room presentations in the ACT, as has been seen in some overseas jurisdictions who went for the different full legalisation model. The decriminalisation model in the ACT did not appear to show that. However, it did show an increased need for those early intervention supports, such as alcohol and other drug services, which probably speaks to the breakdown of the stigma associated with decriminalisation.

We also had very productive meetings with ACT policing, who told us about the reduced pressure on their resources, although they did not report any reduced budget. Surprising, as well, was some data that they gave us on roadside testing. They found that despite a 17 per cent increase in roadside testing rates, which was concurrent with decriminalisation, they found an overall 7 per cent decrease in people who were found to be driving under the influence of cannabis – a very surprising result and encouraging.

There are a few shortfalls of the ACT legislation, many of which have been addressed in this bill and some others which have been addressed through recommendations in this report, specifically ones that go to an explicit penalty for those who allow people under the age of 18 to access their personal cannabis and also the implementation of a statutory review in the Victorian legislation. Given the wealth of data that we obtained from the ACT statutory review, that seemed a very sensible step.

The ACT did not approach reform in quite the same way we did, though. They previously had what was known as a ‘simple cannabis offence notice scheme’, which was already a step towards decriminalisation. I think it is important to note that one of the reasons that recommendation 1 of this report calls for any future reform to be government-led is because it can go through those government processes. We know that the ACT and Victoria are not equal jurisdictions. We have different population profiles, different demographics and a different history of drug regulation as well, and all of these things will need to be factored into any reform. But it is fair to say that the reforms proposed in this report provide a sensible, straightforward approach for drug reform in this state.

### *Petitions*

#### **Rainbow libraries toolkit**

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call the first speaker on this, and I hope the people in the gallery can hear me clearly, it is fantastic that people are interested enough in the proceedings of this Parliament to actually make an effort to come in here and listen in person. I have zero tolerance on audience participation to the point that previously I have just walked out, and the day is finished and the debate has not gone ahead. I thank you for all being here and being at our Parliament, but please if you could consider what I have said and let the MPs speak, who have a right to say things that you might not like, on both sides of the chamber, that would be fantastic. In saying that, I am saying to the members, when you do your contribution you do it to the Chair, you do not do it to the gallery.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:45): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

Last year I had the privilege of tabling a petition with 4733 signatures, resolutely opposing the introduction of the rainbow toolkit in Victorian libraries. The toolkit is a scheme to encourage library staff to avoid gendered language, wear pronoun badges and ask children as young as five what their preferred pronouns are. It pushes for books on gender diversity in children’s collections and doubles down on Victoria’s strange fixation with drag story time events. It is just another example of the gender ideology that has become a pervasive and toxic influence across the western world, an ideology which despite its outward-seeming success in capturing people’s minds is extremely hollow at its core. It is completely subjective in a world that is objective. What is a woman? An adult human female. What is a man? An adult human male. What is a little girl? A young female child. What is a little boy? A young male child. This toolkit is not just a quirky distraction, it is a deliberate move by Premier Allan’s government to prioritise social engineering over the real issues plaguing our state: a crumbling economy, a union-choked construction sector, an energy outlook that gets bleaker by the day and now criminals waltzing out on bail. Would not this expenditure be better directed at ensuring our children, regardless of their pronouns, learn how to read, write and add up?

I fundamentally reject this. It is behaviour policing dressed up as compassion, and it is nonsense. Minister Horne claims it is about ensuring LGBTQIA+ people can use libraries, saying the toolkit ensures all Victorians have a place in our public libraries, because libraries are a space that everyone should be able to access. Now, nobody would wish any library visitor, young or old, to feel unwelcome, but was that ever really happening? Were our libraries really staffed by ignorant, uncaring ogres who need government direction to make children feel welcome? A library is a library. It should be welcoming to everyone. But that does not mean tying ourselves in knots to cater for every identity under the sun. Treating people differently based on subjective labels is not inclusive, it is divisive. For every rare soul who might feel validated by pronoun questions, do we truly believe a five-year-old has

the faintest clue what these questions mean? I cannot help but feel that insecurities about identity popularised by this way of thinking contribute to the declining mental health of our young people. Our obsession with identity does not empower children, it plants seeds of doubt and insecurity. Parents should not have to worry that a trip to the library might leave their children questioning realities they are too young to grasp.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I just received a message from Sandy, who told me she is a grandma who can no longer take her grandchildren to the library after her four-year-old granddaughter saw a book with an illustration of a pregnant man. She asked Sandy if her daddy – that is, Sandy’s son – had a baby in his tummy. Do we really need books like this in our children’s libraries?

I was proud to table this petition. The 4733 signatures represent thousands more Victorians – parents, grandparents and everyday people – saying enough is enough. Actually, it only required 2000 handwritten signatures to qualify for this debate. So concerned were Victorians that they delivered over double that amount in under 30 days. Have no doubt: this toolkit is not about inclusion. It is a political weapon for ideologues to demonstrate their virtue, to identify opponents and to label them as bigoted, uncaring and unpleasant, all the while doing nothing for child welfare. Instead we should rely on the common sense and caring we have inherited from generations of parents, relatives and friends.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:50): I rise to speak on the disgraceful motion that has been put before us by Mrs McArthur today. This motion lacks charisma, it lacks uniqueness, it lacks nerve and it lacks talent. It also lacks facts. For one, there is no mention of five-year-olds in the toolkit. It is not some grand conspiratorial scheme to indoctrinate or to social engineer, as those opposite outrageously claim. It does not, for example, encourage or force children to use any pronouns they are not comfortable with. The rainbow libraries toolkit is, very simply, an optional resource that libraries may use that covers things such as database management, membership records, cataloguing processes and inclusive language. It also discusses security protocols that are only necessary because of the attacks on libraries that have occurred over the last couple of years, including threats of violence and threats that have been made against libraries merely for running rainbow-themed events.

This is about queer people being able to hold onto the same space as anyone else and being exactly as we are and who we are, because everyone deserves that. This petition is worded to sow division and to import Trump-style culture-war rubbish. Whatever its proponents will claim as they attempt to justify it, its effect will be to attack gay, trans and other queer people in this state. This is what the Liberal Party brings to this chamber today. Even John Pesutto said that a party he leads would not tolerate hateful and divisive rhetoric. This is a standard that has clearly been lost at sea. You can march in Pride and you can go on Joy FM, but if you support this motion today, you are slapping us in the face. We are at an inflection point on this motion today. We can choose intolerance, division and hate or we can choose tolerance, love and respect for individual liberties. I hope that we opt for the latter.

Today we are joined by members of our LGBTIQ+ community, including members of our trans community, many of whom have faced more hardship than I can comprehend. Their strength and their tenacity inspire me. I am proud of them and I am proud to stand with them. I also stand with Premier Jacinta Allan when she says:

Hard-right extremists who want to take notes from the MAGA movement will have to first contend with me ... and with the vast majority of Victorians.

I utterly oppose this lamentable motion, because in Victoria equality is not negotiable.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:53): I am going to be quite direct here. What we are debating is a proposal to provide less support to libraries and to offer fewer inclusive spaces and services for rainbow families – and for all families, for that matter. In my contribution from the Greens here today I instead suggest that we should be focusing on what more we can be doing here in

this state to make sure that queer and gender-diverse young people feel safe and welcome everywhere in our community.

Libraries are wonderful places. Librarians do great work out there in our community. The rainbow toolkit came about because library staff were increasingly being targeted. People were protesting and harassing their innocent, entirely age-appropriate drag story time and other rainbow family events. Libraries were receiving hate calls and harassment, and they needed these tools to deal with this behaviour and to make sure that they were making libraries welcoming for the LGBTIQ+ community and for young people and their families. I wholeheartedly support this toolkit to further assist them in this work.

So often we hear mention of these terrifying pronouns. In case there is confusion about what these are, let me assist: I, she, him, you, whom, thy, ye, thine, whomst; each other – that is a reciprocal pronoun; everyone, nobody, anyone – these are indefinite pronouns. Now, I am wondering which of these we need to prevent library staff from using when talking to young people. Personally, I would vote ‘ye’ – that is ‘ye’, not ‘yeet’. Asking a young person, or asking anyone, actually, how they would like to be referred to is an entirely reasonable and respectful thing to do. Providing books to children that reflect all types of families benefits kids in rainbow families, but actually, it benefits all children.

Offering events and celebrations at our libraries enriches our whole community. Two in three LGBTIQ+ people still experience abuse just for being who they are, so displaying rainbow flags, running queer family friendly events and respecting diverse gender identities are still vitally important things to do in our state. And libraries should absolutely be playing a role in providing these things. Let us make our community one that is more inclusive. Let us celebrate each other for who we are – everyone, anyone, thy, thine, whomst.

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (17:56): I thank my colleague Bev McArthur for bringing this petition to the house. It is incredibly important that this issue is debated. I have been contacted about it quite a lot, and I know Mrs McArthur has as well. But I first want to address some comments that were made by the Minister for Equality this morning on the doors with regard to this petition. She made comments saying that my party have not supported me since coming out, and I refute those comments utterly and completely. I have never spoken to this minister before. I would not even know her to talk to. She has never contacted me, and I wish she had reached out to me before trying to speak on my behalf or label me or incorrectly criticise my colleagues, who, like me, do not put identity politics above logic and reason. Maybe she dislikes the fact that there are people in the LBGTIQA+ community that disagree with her views. Here is a fact for the minister – not all people in the LGBTIQ+ community think the same. The minister and indeed the government are not the sole advocates for LGBTIQ+ people. We are individuals – stop grouping us all together – which is why I am supportive of this petition.

Conversations around gender and sexuality are for families to have at a time of their choosing. Rainbow toolkits are designed to equip library employees with the skills to talk about inclusivity, plan inclusive events, make library spaces visibly inclusive, and change book collections to ‘better meet the needs of diverse rainbow communities’. That is according to the August 2024 media release from the government. Let me say this categorically: discussions about sexuality, gender and identity are conversations for families, individuals and qualified professionals. They are not for library staff, especially as a first point of contact.

Libraries should be safe spaces for everyone, and for goodness sake, they are places where you might want to borrow a book, use the computer or undertake research. I understand there are people from the LGBTIQ+ community who are in extremely difficult circumstances regardless of if they are out or not. This might be due to family, cultural or religious reasons, and I fully accept that. But if you want to support those people that are under significant challenges, wouldn’t it be better to offer perhaps medical assistance, counselling services or even crisis housing support, especially for those escaping those difficult challenges?



Why has the government decided to equip libraries with toolkits? It is the wrong solution to the wrong problem. Public libraries are accessible to all people, including children as young as five – young children. The government wants to enable conversations about sexuality and gender diversity between library staff and young people. If nothing else, don't you think that is a little bit strange? The best thing you can do to support LGBTIQ+ people is to not make sexuality and gender identity more of an issue than they need to be. So what if somebody is a lesbian or gay or trans or straight? Who actually cares? The more the government makes of this issue with programs like this, the more it becomes an issue. Leave private matters to be private. Let people just be people. Libraries should be just normal, neutral buildings like any other building that anyone else goes into. The government always says that equality in Victoria is non-negotiable. I can tell you right now: equality in Victoria is entirely negotiable. If you accept that everyone in Victoria is diverse, with variances in language, religion and indeed sexuality, nobody can be truly equal, and the government should not try and force it. People are people. Let us be who we are. Get out of our lives, get out of our libraries and let us get on with our lives as we choose to.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (18:01): In my inaugural speech in this place I referred to my librarian and just how much I thought of her and how I think of her so frequently even now in my late 40s, and in making my contribution today it is with love and respect to every librarian who has ever helped someone like me, a little kid like me who wanted to make a space, create a space and find a space that was safe and inclusive. With that, *My Shadow Is Pink*, written and illustrated by Scott Stuart. Do we need books like this in libraries, Mrs McArthur? Yes, we do.

For Colin. You are loved, exactly as you are.

My dad has a shadow that's blue as can be, and there's nothing but *blue* in my whole family tree.

But mine is quite different  
it's not what you think  
For mine is *not blue* ...

*My shadow is PINK!*

My shadow loves ponies and books and pink toys, princesses, fairies, and things *not for boys*  
*But* there's one thing it likes most I have found ...

It loves wearing dresses and dancing around!

It *spins* ...

and it *sparkles* ...

and it *twirls* through the air!

Then stops as my dad walks in with a glare.

It will turn blue one of these days

Don't worry ...

it is *just* a phase.

Dad's shadow is *blue*, it is *big*, it is *strong*. But when I stand with it I just feel so wrong.

I wish mine was blue like all of the others, I wish mine was blue like my Dad's and my brothers.  
I'd be part of the group, of that there's no doubt, but I cannot fit in when my shadow *stands out!*

Now things are all changing and that is not cool. I'm ready to start *my first day at school*

**YOU'LL NEED:**

- pencils
- and books
- and lunch you must bring.

**DRESS UP**

with your shadow! (in its favourite thing)

My heart skips a beat as *I put on a dress* and I look at my Dad who is anxious and stressed.

He takes me to class and I turn to say bye. His face is all worried, there's *fear in his eyes*.  
So I step in the doorway and puff out my chest ... One thing is clear ... I'm not like the rest.  
I try to say *hi* but my voice is too quiet.

The kids turn around and the room, it goes silent.

I run out the door and I push past my Dad  
I run to my house feeling angry and sad.

If my shadow was blue I'd be there making friends. I'd be laughing and playing and drawing with pens.

I rip off my dress throw it down to the floor. I won't wear it again. *Not ever. No more.*

Just then at my door came a soft little knock ...  
It's my Dad walking in and I look up in shock.

Both he and his shadow *in dresses they stood!*  
With *shimmering seams* and *pink sparkling hoods!*

He speaks in a voice that's quite soft but is stern.

*Pick up that dress!* You must listen and learn.

Your shadow is pink. *I see now it's true.*

It's not just a shadow, *it's your inner-most you.*

He showed me the photos of parents and brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and others.

We've all had a shadow that's hidden from eyes.  
Sometimes our shadow, *it lives in disguise.*

His shadow loves *painting* and *fashion* and *art*.

Her shadow loves *engines* and *powerful cars*.

His shadow loves *dance* with its *turns* and its *twirls*.

Her shadow she hides it, her shadow like *girls*.

His shadow loves *theatre* and *acting* and *plays*.

Her shadow loves *science* and *planets* and *space*.

Your shadow is *YOU* and pink it will be,  
so stand up with your shadow and yell *THIS IS ME!*

And some they will love you ...  
and some they will not.

But those that do love you *they'll love you a lot.*

So put on that dress and get back to school,  
if someone won't like you then *THEY are the fool.*

My heart nearly burst and my shadow *it soared!*

I picked up the dress and wore it once more.  
We ran out the door, this time holding hands.

My Dad and our shadows,  
*together we stand.*

I stride in my class and I puff out my chest,  
I may be different but *different is best.*

I join a small group, though in I don't blend, they look up and smile.

*Will you be our friend?*

This was written for Colin. It was written for Scott's child. Children everywhere need and deserve space and opportunities to find themselves, to find universes, including in libraries, that create that

space. I was one of those kids. I found space in libraries. Librarians change and save lives every day. This toolkit is to assist them in doing that work.

We had a drag story time here at Parliament a couple of years ago because there was no space for drag artists to undertake that work in the broader community, because it had been shut down by people who do not think there should be space. It was here in this Parliament that books like this were read. It was here in this Parliament that debate and passage of legislation occurred to make and create and sustain space and safety.

Mrs McArthur, I will come back in my closing to one of the sentences in your contribution: do we really need books like this in our libraries? And the answer, Mrs McArthur, I would say to that question, is ‘Absolutely’.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:06): I rise to speak to this motion today. Last night I spent a bit of time going through a hard copy of the rainbow toolkit. I am a little perplexed as to why we are here today. I do not believe that the other side has actually read the toolkit, because what is in there is not anything that is referred to in this petition. This is quite perplexing to me.

The petition requires that the government withdraw the rainbow libraries toolkit rollout from Victorian public libraries. Again, I find this fascinating, because surely as the employer of libraries the government is required to provide guiding materials to allow employees, in this case librarians, to perform their duties to the best of their ability and to ensure that they are providing a safe environment for people accessing services. I want to make this comparison: is this any different to any other public institution? Is it any different to a hospital staff member being provided training on culturally safe practices for CALD community patients? I would argue it is not. It is no different.

The reality is rainbow families are part of our community, and they are a growing part of our community. They should be celebrated, and the children of rainbow families should feel safe going into a library and they should see books that include them. This goes without saying for people who are culturally diverse; they should see books in libraries that represent who they are as well. Women, we should see books in libraries that are our stories. This is the reality of the society that we live in.

The rainbow toolkit came about because library staff were surveyed as to what their needs were. The outcome of that and the feedback that was provided was essentially what is in this toolkit. Also, community members and organisations were provided the opportunity to provide advice as well to encourage information on what made them safe and welcomed. But I must also emphasise that this was following the protest against drag story time events and it was in response to staff and patrons feeling unsafe. In particular in the area I represent, in the south-east, we saw events shut down in Casey and Monash. A Chelsea cafe is no longer there because it decided to host an Easter egg story event and that got shut down.

But I will reflect on some of the media that was reviewing those events during that period of time. It astounds me that it turned into violent threats. It astounds me that several events were forced to be shut down because families and children were threatened with violence. The particular event that I am referring to here in the media was around the Oakleigh library and Monash council, and it was on a specific day, 18 May, which is IDAHOBIT – the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. I just find it astounding. If you are not wanting to take your children along to these events, simply do not take them. But if rainbow families in particular want to have an opportunity to have a safe space for family to be celebrated, they should have that opportunity to celebrate, particularly on a day that is so pivotal to our community. The bottom line is that is that no-one should feel unsafe at work, and that is where this feedback came about.

Just to hurry myself along, the next part of the petition refers to people feeling ‘uncomfortable, insecure and confused’ by being approached in a library by potentially a librarian who is wearing a pronoun badge – I am quite unsure of that. But I do say in response to that that looking at the toolkit, all I could find in there was gender-neutral language like ‘Hi, folks’ instead of ‘Hi, Sir’ or ‘Hi, Madam’ – I hate

being called ‘madam’. I do not know about you, Mrs McArthur, but I would rather have someone greet me with ‘Hi, folks’. Essentially I just want to reiterate: who is this hurting? Because it is not really hurting anyone who is going into these libraries and experiencing that. It is as simple as wearing a badge or having those conversations around, ‘Who are you here to see today?’ and not making assumptions about people. I would think time would be better spent going into Kmart and demanding that they take bikinis off the shelves for five-year-olds, because I think that is more indoctrinating than a library toolkit.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:11): It is no secret that this Labor government is so ideologically driven that it is completely out of touch with regular Victorians. The latest institution it has politicised is public libraries. The government’s controversial rainbow toolkit shows the basic lack of understanding of the essence of public libraries and a disrespect for the role they play in communities. Public libraries funded by the taxpayer should be centres for exploration, discovery and learning, places where people from all walks of life can access information on a wide range of topics, with various perspectives on offer in a politically neutral environment.

The toolkit corrupts these principles. It guides library staff to inject deeply personal issues of gender identity and sexual orientation into libraries through LGBTIQ+ orientated conversations, resources, language and activities. Among its guidelines are recommendations to ask staff and people, including young children, what their gender pronoun is, keeping in mind that that can evolve from visit to visit. It directs library staff to avoid gendered language, so the words ‘boys’, ‘girls’, ‘he’, ‘him’, ‘she’, ‘her’ are discouraged. It also encourages more books on gender diversity and rainbow themes and the promotion of highly controversial drag queen story time events. This politicisation of libraries to suit the government’s obsession with all things sex and gender undermines the essence of what public libraries should be.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:13): I thank everybody for their contributions today. I particularly thank my colleague Joe McCracken, who gave a very powerful contribution about his place in the world as a gay man. I know these things are difficult, but I thank Joe for understanding what so many people who remain silent about this are thinking. I also thank my friends Michael and Harriet. I loved you reading out that poem, Harriet. That was very powerful, so thank you. But libraries should foster curiosity and a love of reading, not serve as testing grounds for radical agendas, so I stand with the silent majority, the thousands who signed that petition – some watching at home now, some in the gallery – and I urge Parliament to scrap this counterproductive nonsense.

Let children be children, free to explore the world without being prodded about pronouns or sexuality before they can even tie their shoes. Let parents parent, and let libraries be libraries. I reject any notion that this is about intolerance or indifference or hate, and to allege that is disingenuous. We all care for everyone. Libraries need to be safe places, yes, but quiet places of reflection where children especially can read and learn.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (14):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

*Business of the house***Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:22): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 884, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills***Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Enver Erdogan:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:23): You can see what a political exercise this is just by the title of this bill: the Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025. Titles of bills are not places for political slogans from a Premier desperate to save her job. This is not about community safety, this is the Premier's own job safety protection racket. That is what this bill actually is. We have seen farce after farce when it comes to bail laws – and I will go on to the crime on our streets later – but particularly in the process behind these bail laws. We had the part-time Attorney-General fail to give us the bill prior to a bill briefing. I mean, how pathetic – how disrespectful to crossbench colleagues and to the opposition that need to get their heads around legislation. I am guessing it was very disrespectful to Labor backbench members as well, because they would not have had a copy of what was in the bill either. I think it is quite disrespectful to this chamber of Parliament and to that chamber of Parliament that the government was not forthcoming with the bill, so we did not know what was actually in the bill in the first place.

It is no wonder the part-time Attorney-General was so reluctant to provide us with a copy of the bill. The more you look, the weaker this bill gets. The fact that they have used the word 'tough' in the title of the bill – they are kidding themselves. It will not kid Victorians. Here is why Labor's bail changes do not do enough to keep Victorians safe. Firstly, the so-called toughest bail test for repeat serious offenders is not in the bill, not that the backbench members on that side would have read it. The Allan Labor government has failed to deliver on this promise and is now saying this change will be delayed for months. It will instead introduce laws across two different bills, meaning some promised new measures might not come into effect until later this year. They include a new bail test for repeat offenders that promises to make it harder for serial offenders to be released and get back on the streets. Instead that measure will be addressed in a second bill, despite a lot of criticism that the government has reneged on its promise to immediately deal with the crime crisis. They cannot. And why? Because they have run out of money. They do not have the resources. They need to pad it out.

Secondly, the offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail is being reinstated, but it will have no impact on raising the actual test for bail – something I have spoken about, my colleagues have spoken about and the Shadow Attorney-General has spoken about over and over and over again. It will not have an impact on raising the test for bail. Previously a person charged with an offence faced an uplifted test to stay on bail. This is not in Labor's bill, and any change will be delayed for months. We are not going to see a difference.

The Premier wants to say on Thursday or Friday, when the crime stats come out, 'Oh, we've introduced and passed the toughest bail bill.' It is not tough. It does not reverse the changes that this government made to bail that weakened our laws, that resulted in four deaths, that resulted in crime on our streets. Repeat offenders are continuously getting out, laughing on social media about going into the cop shop and being out within 90 minutes. They are laughing at you. This is not tough; this is

pathetic. It is pathetic the government weakened the laws in the first place, and this bill that they have brought into this place is pathetic.

The offence of breaching bail conditions is being reinstated, but in a weakened form as contravention will not result in the offender facing a stronger bail test. People under 18 years will face no criminal sanction for breaching bail conditions, undermining why bail conditions are being imposed. No-one wants to see children in prison, but I think we have to accept the current realities of the situation plaguing Victoria. Whether it be places like Greenvale, Craigieburn or Kalkallo in my electorate, Bendigo in Mrs Broad's electorate, Glen Waverley in Mr Welch's electorate or Geelong in Mrs McArthur's electorate, they are being plagued by repeat offenders out on bail committing heinous crimes. There have been several stories of kids out on bail having been involved in high-speed car chases, stealing cars and on crime sprees, travelling from Mrs McArthur's electorate to the Western Metro Region, to the Northern Metro Region and to the North-Eastern Metro Region and back again, stealing about three cars in the process. This is the result of the government's weakened bail laws.

Serious offences, including burglary and robbery, are not listed as schedule 1 or schedule 2 offences, meaning alleged offenders receive a presumption of bail and have the weakest test to receive it. If someone on bail burgles your house or robs your store, they are out again, even though they have committed an offence whilst on bail, which is now considered a summary offence. This is just ridiculous. It is laughable. The only thing that has got tougher in this bill is the name of it. That is all. That is literally the only thing that got tougher. The uplift has been separated, so the only thing that is tough is the actual name – because you put it there. Well, I say to the Premier: the public are not buying your spin. The public have had enough.

Labor have refused to reverse their cuts to Court Services Victoria, including a \$19.1 million cut this year and a \$58 million cut in 2027–28, which are contributing to trial delays and seeing more alleged offenders offered bail. The best that Labor can do on bail laws is come up with a bill with the word 'tough' in the title. Victorians know that this is no substitute for strong and smart bail changes that will put the safety of the community first. This is just ridiculous.

We know the government. I was here in March 2023 as they weakened the bail laws and I was here again about six months later, before those changes came into effect, actually, discussing this and discussing some of the impact they would have in March 2024 when they came into effect and what it would do and what the changes would mean by lowering the test.

I know many on the other side of the chamber, and on this side of the chamber hopefully as well, know that I do not overlook *Hansard* when putting together speeches on these kinds of matters. So let us stroll down memory lane and see what colleagues in this chamber thought about the changes in the Bail Amendment Bill 2023. Ms Shing said:

The reforms we are now introducing seek to ensure that all members of the community are protected ...

There should be consequences for breaching bail, but it is clear that the current consequences are too harsh and too broadly applied.

...

I want to emphasise that accused people must comply with their bail conditions, and that alleged offending while on bail is a serious matter.

Ms Shing said 'alleged offending while on bail is serious matter' in 2023. It is a serious matter, sure, but that is just words. Does it result in an uplift in the test to get bail again? No. Does it result in any serious criminal charges? No.

Mr Berger said:

Its purpose is to address and solve the problems with the current bail laws while ensuring there remains a focus on community safety ...

These reforms are designed to make Victoria a safer state, and individuals who have been proven to have no regard for the continued safety of the community will in turn be dealt with appropriately.

Was the offender who received bail over 50 times dealt with appropriately, Mr Berger? Probably not. Ms Ermacora in her 2023 contribution said:

These are the toughest bail laws in Australia.

That seems to go against the title of this bill. Jacinta said almost two years later that this is the toughest bail bill in Australia. I would love to see an explanation, perhaps from Ms Ermacora, of what the difference of opinion is. Was that just less tough and this is more tough, or was the previous bill more tough – the previous bill which we know the government has had to reverse and which the government has apologised for? The government apologised: ‘We got it wrong.’ In 2023 Ms Ermacora said that it was tough. Mr Batchelor says that:

This legislation will make our bail laws fairer for vulnerable and disadvantaged people while continuing to take an appropriately tough approach to those who pose a serious risk to Victorians.

Well, I reckon there are a lot of people out there who pose a serious risk to Victorians, particularly people who continuously steal cars. One car is stolen about every 8 hours in the city of Hume, and a lot of them are stolen by people that are out on bail. I do not think this makes it fairer. I do not think it has resulted in the changes they thought it would. Mr Batchelor said that these changes to the Bail Act 1977 would:

... ensure that our bail laws protect the community ...

Well, they have not. The Premier literally had to apologise for them – for terrorising suburbs. But we know Mr Batchelor and others were part of the same crowd that just dismissed crime in their community – in the Southern Metropolitan Region, no less. They pretended like crime in places like Brighton and Malvern was a case of ‘nothing to see here’ and it was just a fascination of the rich and wealthy influencers; the same influencers dismissed rudely by the former Premier Daniel Andrews, the same influencers that Jacinta Allan is trying to get Eddie McGuire to broker a meeting with – those ones. He has thoroughly failed in his duty as a member for Southern Metropolitan Region to look after his community and acknowledge the serious impact that crime is causing that community.

Mr Galea – I know I mentioned him previously, but he was the only one who really spoke about machetes previously, and he criticised our position on machetes, but he also spoke on the Bail Amendment Bill 2023, so I was not going to leave him off. He said the bill:

... will implement reforms to significantly improve our bail system, ensuring appropriate and proportional decision-making that does not needlessly harm vulnerable people or compromise community safety.

Well, it certainly has compromised community safety. We know that. We know that the changes when they weakened the bail laws compromised community safety.

I was not going to go through this big, long list without leaving off Mr McIntosh. I did keep his speaking notes from 2023, when he was still using speaking notes – he has come a long way. He said that:

... Victoria currently has some of the strictest bail laws in the country ...

But he was not gloating about us having the strictest bail laws in the country. He said the Bail Amendment Bill 2023 gives us an opportunity to make things right. So we know that in their bleeding heart of hearts they actually want weaker bail laws. That is what they want. They know they want that. They are only coming here now with a political fix because of the Premier’s poll ratings and poll numbers, not because they actually care about community safety. Mr McIntosh said:

It will create a bail system that is fairer and more flexible for our decision-makers to consider the circumstances of offending.

Well, it actually did not. The fact that you can go 20, 30, 40, 50, almost 60 times breaching bail – committing an offence whilst on bail – shows that decision-makers have no power to consider the offending. When it is a last resort for decision-makers to keep them on remand, their hands are tied when it comes to their decision-making. I am looking forward to, as the rest my colleagues are, hearing about Mr McIntosh’s ‘come to Jesus’ moment, where he discovered that this was an issue and that

strict bail laws were not bad anymore. I know that he spoke of strict bail laws with negative connotations in 2023, so he will scrap the word ‘strict’ from his speaking notes and he is going to use the word ‘tough’. Tough is really important. The word ‘tough’ is the only thing tough about this bill.

Ms Watt said that they are recognising there is a problem and, importantly, acting on it. She said:

The bill ... demonstrates very clearly that we are getting on with the job.

Ms Symes, who called the previous laws an unmitigated disaster, said that this was a priority of hers and that:

... it is somewhat surreal to know that we are so close to making some significant reforms.

She said this government are of the view that they:

... strike the right balance between ensuring people are not unnecessarily remanded and seeing that we have sufficient safeguards to maintain community safety.

We now know that there were no safeguards to maintain community safety – none. She said:

I do want to ensure that bail is not used to unnecessarily lock up people who do not pose a risk to community safety.

She went a bit far on that one, because we did not lock up a lot of people that were very unsafe to the community. That resulted in several deaths, and that resulted in violent crime on our streets. I have spoken to victims of crime in my electorate, particularly victims of crime by people that have been on bail. I hosted Brad Battin at a crime forum last year in Mickleham, in the growth areas of the outer north, and I also hosted our shadow police minister David Southwick a month ago at a crime forum in Greenvale and Craigieburn. The message from the community is that they have had enough. They are exhausted. They are sick of having their cars stolen. They are sick of having their homes broken into. They are sick of what is going on in our streets. They are sick of the tobacco wars. But they are particularly concerned about community safety in a way they have never been before. Many migrant families have come to Victoria to achieve the great Australian dream but also to live safely in a peaceful and harmonious community. At the moment that is not the case because of the crime crisis that we are seeing in our community.

I do have a number of amendments to the Bail Amendment (Tough Bail) Bill 2025, and I ask for those amendments to be circulated.

#### **Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.**

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** The first amendment is that the short title of the bill be amended to ‘Bail Amendment Bill 2025’ and the ‘tough bail’ slogan deleted wherever it appears in the bill, because as I explained, there is nothing tough about this bill. Everything tough about it has been either weakened or moved off to another bill. Even the toughest bail test is not in the bill.

Our second amendment will be the reinstatement of the offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail, which should have the effect of uplifting the test for remaining on bail as it used to – that is, the reinstatement of breaching bail conditions (a) should be an indictable offence and (b) should have the effect of uplifting the test for remaining on bail.

The exemption for minors for the offence of breaching bail conditions should be deleted and the offences of robbery, burglary and arson should be listed as schedule 2 offences. I am happy to speak about those later, but as I discussed, this bill does not actually go a long way to ensuring that it is actually tough. So the least we can do is to be honest. When people have really suffered as a result of the crime crisis we are seeing on our streets, the last things that should be contained in legislation are political slogans. This government does it all the time, but we are not going to cop that, particularly for a bill that does not actually increase its toughness.

I want to speak quickly on the Bail Amendment (Indictable Offences Whilst on Bail) Bill 2024, because I also had a read of the speeches on that bill. On that bill, which was just reintroducing the



offence of committing an indictable offence whilst on bail, Mr Galea said that they had the balance right on community safety – they did. He said:

Getting that balance right is something that you do not just do in a flash of a brainwave before a sitting week because you are trying to fill out your agenda.

...

I am not saying that they deliberately sought to make bail worse, but that is what happens when you try and amend complex legislation on the fly, and it is what we see right here today.

So he accused us of making complex changes to bail ‘on the fly’, but here we are debating an urgent bill we only got a copy of late Monday night. So I do not think it is us making complex changes on the fly. It is this government making very complex changes on the fly. He said:

But that is not how this government crafts our laws, and it is not how any serious government crafts our laws.

That is exactly what they did! You make it too easy, guys. He also said:

We know how important it is to ensure that our criminal justice system is prepared with a clear and comprehensive view of what the consequences for Victoria will be, rather than to simply be seen to be doing something, to grab that headline on the front of the *Herald Sun* or on 3AW or on Facebook or on TikTok or wherever it is that you seek to promote it. It is not just about putting that headline forward, it is about serious work that has serious implications for everyday Victorians.

And he said:

So for them to say ‘This is an issue; we’re fixing it’ completely flies in the face of all logic ...

Jacinta Allan has basically said the same thing: ‘This is an issue and we’re fixing it.’ She does not think it is an issue for the community, but she thinks it is an issue for her leadership. We know that she has apologised for getting it wrong. I would like to hear an apology from all the members opposite for getting it wrong. If they were serious they would support our amendments as well. We know that for a long time the Premier, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police dismissed our calls that this was an issue. We know that the Allan government ignored Shane Patton’s advice and plan to fix the state’s failed bail system, and that was put to her two weeks before he got the chop. So you put advice, you get dismissed. That is what happens under this government:

... whistleblowers say the then-chief was told by a senior official that the government did not have enough cash or prison beds to implement the proposal.

This came as:

... repeat offenders being released into the community up to 55 times

and pressure grew for an overhaul. Isn’t it ironic that the very next day the Premier rushes to announce changes to bail. ‘The Premier finally put Victorians’ safety first with tough new bail laws after public outcry at crime crisis; – there is your *Herald Sun* headline, Mr Galea, that you were goading us about. I remember; I was sitting right there. He was goading us that we were just after a headline in the *Herald Sun*. Look how low you have stooped. We know that these are not Labor values, but you have got a Premier who is desperate to hold on to her own job. We will pretend she cares about community safety, but really we know she only cares about her own job. If she cared about community safety, she would have supported our previous bills or amendments or done something a lot earlier when the crime stats started to increase to record levels. But she did nothing about it.

There are a lot of questions to answer in terms of today. We know that Premier Jacinta Allan, the police minister Anthony Carabines and acting police commissioner Rick Nugent have been accused of corruption and misconduct in public office over the axing of the state’s two top cops. Ousted deputy commissioner Neil Paterson has filed an explosive complaint with IBAC alleging that he and dumped chief commissioner Shane Patton were the victims of an unlawful conspiracy. Mr Paterson has called for an investigation into whether the government approached Mr Nugent to take over the role of chief commissioner before moving to ditch Mr Patton.

**Jacinta Ermacora:** On a point of order, Acting President, I am not sure if what is being raised now is actually in the bill.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Mr Mulholland, I will draw you back to the bill for the duration of your speech.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** That is all right. I was talking about the fact that two weeks after his suggestion of bail changes he got the sack. I think there are questions to answer in regard to that and the changes that he proposed.

We know that the Premier has apologised, but we know that this bill does nothing to solve the crime crisis that we are seeing on our streets. Somehow we have ended up with a botched bill, and that is because the government has not taken the time to get this right. They are drafting legislation on the fly. They are cutting Court Services Victoria. They have cut rehabilitation services here in Victoria and cut correctional programs to get kids on the right pathways.

I think one of the most interesting things in this debate has been the attempt by the Premier to blame the weakening of the bail laws on the former Premier Daniel Andrews. Despite her attempt to rewrite history, I remind the Premier that it was her government and her Attorney-General and her Treasurer that got us into this mess. You are personally responsible for this. We have been unwavering in our position; the member for Malvern has been unwavering in our position. We have bought amendments and bills to this chamber several times. The opposition will not be opposing this bill, but we will try to make it better.

**Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:53):** I am proud to speak on this bill. We have listened to community. We have read the crime data and responded to a changing dynamic and to a range of other issues that have emerged since we last legislated in this space. Earlier this week I spoke about the government's vigilance to any changes to threats facing our community. This bill is another example of that vigilance. The number of youth offenders on remand increased following the changes in 2024 to target serious repeat offending, but more changes are needed. Our Premier has acknowledged that with honesty and dignity and without hubris, without arrogance and without derision, unlike the other side. It is unattractive, really. There are a range of issues that are emerging that we are responding to after a period of research and consultation, and I am going to speak on those issues.

The current system, based on the numbers that I just quoted, is not tough enough and does not set strong enough boundaries for young people – which, by the way, I did talk about in 2023, that young people need boundaries, no matter their circumstances – and it does not reflect the expectations of victims or the public, so reoffending remains a serious problem. Males in their mid to late teens make up the most alleged aggravated burglary offenders by far, with 64 per cent under the age of 20. I know some would say that some people never grow up, but we do know scientifically that young people's brains are still developing right through to the age of 25, so mid to late teens are still developing and clear messages need to be sent to these young people, and that is what this bill is going to do.

The tough bail laws, again, squarely target the risks from these younger serious offenders. The government will make sweeping changes to reduce the risk of someone on bail reoffending in the community. The tough bail bill that has been introduced is the first of a tranche of reforms that will see Victoria having the toughest bail laws in Australia, and that is a fact. This bill will put community safety above every other consideration in every decision on bail. It will toughen the bail tests for serious offences.

There are a number of other things it does. It provides clarity to the judiciary, and it accounts for what we can see is happening amongst children. The remand of a child is currently the last resort, and that will be removed with this bill. There is some perception that this has been misinterpreted or not implemented in the way that Parliament originally intended. Targeting high-harm offences is what is going to increase our community safety and get these young people off our streets, which will increase

safety, as I said. This bill brings back the offence of committing an indictable offence while on bail, which is very important in the circumstances that we see today.

There will also be a statutory review of the two bills, to be completed in a couple of years time, so there is a built-in assessment of whether or not they have been effective. That is an important thing, because circumstances change and crime statistics ebb and flow – we see them go up and we see them go down – and the profile of the population of young people committing offences also changes. But what is important for today at this point in history is that this will ensure that there are consequences for breaking the rules when on bail. This is just the first of our reforms to bail laws, with more changes to come in the middle of the year. We are bringing this bill today to deliver on our commitment to act with urgency to ensure Victorians feel safe and are safe in their homes, on the roads and out in their community. We will ensure that our system responds to the risks posed by repeat offending, and we will ensure that the system reflects the expectations of Victorians. With this bill we are putting community safety as a paramount consideration in bail decisions, and we are removing the principle of remand as a last resort.

We are bringing in new bail offences to ensure respect for the rules. We are applying a strict test – as strict as possible – for getting bail for the worst offences. Those worst offences are armed robbery, aggravated burglary, home invasions and carjacking involving the use of force. People charged with these offences must show exceptional circumstances to get bail. That is an extremely strict test.

We are also introducing a presumption against bail for a range of high-risk offences on their first offence. That will apply to serious firearms offences; serious arson; aggravated home invasion; burglary; carjacking; committing an offence involving a controlled weapon, including machetes; theft of a vehicle involving conduct endangering life; conduct endangering persons; failure to stop; and possession of a prohibited or controlled weapon.

So, contrary to what has already been already stated, this is definitely a tightening up of the bail provisions in this state, and it responds to changing trends in crime data specifically. I commend the bill to the house.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (19:02): I rise to speak in opposition to this bill today, and I do so with deep concern that we are going back to a system that was a failure and a system that was very, very harmful. The government claims that if this bill is passed, it will mean Victoria will have the toughest bail laws in Australia, and this is said in celebration. But it is my view that it is something to be deeply ashamed of.

The government says that this is about putting community safety above all, but I think that if we had any interest in putting community safety above all, we would be doing things that properly address the root causes of crime, such as investing properly in systemic issues that result in crime and reoffending, such as housing, accessibility to education, mental health services, family violence services, Aboriginal-led community programs and employment.

I should say as well, as a woman that has spoken very extensively about my concerns in relation to gender-based violence, that sexual offences and family violence offences are not included in this reform despite a lot of reoffending while on bail. The government is now classifying carjacking as a schedule 1 offence under this bill, meaning that it is actually considered more high risk for bail than a charge such as rape or other sexual offences. It kind of exposes how many of us feel, that women are of little value in this state and that, according to this bill, cars are valued more highly than our very own safety. Much like many of my colleagues, as was discussed very vigorously in here last night, I share the same concern that, despite differing policy perspectives, this bill has been very rushed. The government sent it to us on a Monday night. They announced it the week before. We did not get to see the detail until Monday night. We did not get to see the detail until the very, very last minute, and it allowed us no time for proper consultation on and scrutiny of this bill.

To remove the last-resort principle for youth offenders to be remanded is simply unacceptable and flies in the face of longstanding evidence that imprisoning a child only further entrenches their isolation and disadvantage. This often actually leads to a life of crime, the thing that we are trying to avoid. This has obviously come about from a lot of headlines and commentary from influencers and from shock jocks, and it is incredibly disappointing that we are listening to the people who are reacting to this rather than the longstanding evidence that shows that this is not the solution. For the overused, misinformed tough-on-crime approach for young offenders to sway the political agenda shows nothing but disregard for the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The true reality, despite what people may say throughout this debate, is that crime in Victoria has generally decreased over the last decade. According to the ABS, Victoria has one of the lowest rates of youth crime in the entire country.

**Enver Erdogan** interjected.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you, Minister. Tyler Cawthray, who is an assistant professor of criminology and criminal justice at Bond University, has said:

... when factoring in population growth, the overall crime rate is still lower than it was in 2016.

It is just that we are now more visibly seeing these offences on our social media feeds, in news headlines and on the radio, and it is making us respond to it in a way that is simply irresponsible.

The government has said continuously throughout the past week that this bill is a result of listening to Victorians, but as others have covered off, it is clearly an attempt by this government to win back votes and to make the lives of vulnerable people in this state a political football, and the statements that have been thrown out have been, frankly, bigoted and incorrect and really appeasing of this right-wing agenda. All of the evidence has been put in front of them that this bill will not reduce crime, yet they continue to run with this rhetoric. None of us should be fooled that this will see a reduction in youth crime. In fact it will only increase the long-term impacts and cost taxpayers money for locking more children up. Victoria actually has the lowest incarceration rate in the entire country, and this is something that we should be incredibly proud of and continue to build upon by focusing on rehabilitation and reducing recidivism, which is exactly what this bill goes against.

It is an extension of legislation passed in this place late last night when we were all here and spoke about the impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who will be racially profiled and will grow the rate of incarceration in these communities. Just yesterday we were on the steps of Parliament for a rally opposing these laws, where we learned that yesterday would have been the birthday of Veronica Nelson. I am sure everyone in this place has heard her story. She was an Aboriginal woman who died in custody in 2019 after being denied bail for allegedly shoplifting, a very, very low-level offence. Ms Nelson died as a result of the then Labor government's tightening of bail laws in 2018, which was then somewhat addressed in reform last year. Now we find ourselves here again today going back to the status quo that was proven to simply not work. We are winding back reform, and we are returning to a system that puts our most marginalised and vulnerable communities under a very, very serious threat.

The statistics and the evidence show that First Nations people are more likely to be locked up than non-First Nations people for minor offences. This is a real example of the racism that exists every single day in this country. Nerita Waight of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service says that locking people up should never be a measure of success. It is in fact an indication of failure, as evidenced by the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Elena Pappas of the Law and Advocacy Centre for Women says Australia is home to the most disproportionately incarcerated people in the world – that is, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These proposals fly in the face of the significant work towards truth-telling and justice currently underway through the Yoorrook Justice Commission and ignore the recommendations of the recent parliamentary inquiry into Victoria's criminal justice system.

If the Allan Labor government is truly committed to justice, they must take meaningful steps with adequate consultation that are not a kneejerk reaction, informed by the lived experience of both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people to ensure that any changes to our bail laws do not perpetuate the very cycle that I have been speaking about of overincarceration and harm that disproportionately affect certain communities. The lives of adults and young people in this state should not be up for grabs as part of a 2026 election strategy. Nonviolent indictable offences will be captured, and they do not warrant incarceration, which comes with very, very serious risk of ongoing harm. We know that police always charge with indictable offences and that people will be remanded for crimes that they likely will not be committed on.

There are a number of recommendations that were endorsed by over 92 Aboriginal, social, family violence and legal organisations that I just want to run through quickly. They are do not amend bail laws for children or adults until a full statutory review can take place in 2026 that considers longitudinal data and assesses the systemic impact of Victoria's bail laws; ensure any bail reforms align with Poccum's law; immediately make further investment in therapeutic bail support options which will improve community safety; do not reinstate double uplift, to ensure people are not locked up on remand for offences unlikely to result in imprisonment; exclude nonviolent and summary offences from any legislative changes that further restrict access to bail; expand the jurisdiction of the Koori Court to hear bail applications; ensure any amendments to existing bail laws do not prevent children and young people from accessing therapeutic and rehabilitative supports within the community; adopt the caution model in the Youth Justice Act 2024 for adults as a mechanism to address alleged offending connected to poverty, mental health, disability and homelessness; and listen to and implement the recommendations of significant previous inquiries, including the *Yoorrook for Justice* report and the Commission for Children and Young People's *Always Was, Always Will Be Koori Children, Our Youth, Our Way, In Our Own Words* and *Out of Sight* reports as a matter of urgency.

To address driving factors of reoffending, the government must effectively fund and invest in intensive bail supervision and support, including Aboriginal-led models to support alleged offenders to successfully fulfill their bail conditions and address the causes of their reoffending, and Aboriginal-led therapeutic and specialist family violence supports and services, including access to legal supports that are based within communities. I think it is really important that the Parliament and the government consider these recommendations before making such extreme, rushed and serious decisions that will impact the lives of so many vulnerable Victorians, including many, many children.

The reality is that bail saves lives. I will not for a second deny that there is a fear in the community right now that needs to be addressed, but this is not the solution. This is not the answer. We are going back to a system that has been proven to fail. On that note, I will not be supporting the bill before us today.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:14): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.**

### *Adjournment*

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (19:15): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Electricity infrastructure**

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (19:15): (1521) On Monday I attended a community rally at Ballan, where passionate locals gathered to talk about the government's plans to push transmission lines across many communities along the Western Renewables Link from Sydenham to Bulgana. I

was proud to join my colleagues Bev McArthur MP and Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources David Davis MP, along with the federal Liberal candidate for Hawke Simmone Cottom and the federal Liberal candidate for Ballarat Paula Doran. The mayor of Moorabool shire Paul Tatchell, along with other councillors, also attended. No Labor representatives bothered to turn up. This included both state and federal members who seek to represent Ballan and surrounds. All were invited, but two responded – what a disgrace.

The clear message from the meeting was simple: we will not give up. We will not hand over land that will be used to divide communities. We heard from a passionate CFA volunteer who detailed the pain that he had felt in his local brigade. Crew members have literally been pitted against each other and communities bribed and friendships broken. The CFA's capacity to field teams to respond to emergencies has been diminished as a result. We heard from locals who are sick and tired of being pushed around by a government that promotes itself as caring and kind and committed to consultation but that cannot be bothered listening to locals, particularly the people that provide food, fibre and world-class products for local consumption and export. It has been almost five years since the announcement of Labor's transmission towers and five years of harassment, intimidation and even unlawful attempts to gain property access, which locals have had to put up with.

The action I seek from the minister is simple: listen – genuinely listen. Listen to the communities along the Western Renewables Link. Listen to their stories, because communities are made up of people: people who are suffering from mental health concerns and people whose lives have literally been put on hold as they continue to stand against this mean and brutal push by this Labor government. Stop bulldozing your way through properties and livelihoods in some vain attempt to build your big ugly transmission lines. They are not wanted – get the message. The government says it stands for the things that matter; people matter. You are not standing with the people of my electorate; you have abandoned them. It is about time that ministers start to care about the country communities that bear the brunt of their policies, not just the ones that stand to benefit in Melbourne.

### **Energy policy**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (19:18): (1522) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio. As Victorian households face cost-of-living pressures, decreasing energy costs for families makes a significant difference to budgets. Victoria's wholesale prices are consistently the lowest in the nation, and they are forecast to remain lower in the future because of our leading investment in cheap, government-owned renewable energy – the cheapest form of new-build energy. My request for the minister is to provide details of how much less Victorians will pay to private energy companies on their bills compared to other states following the Victorian default offer draft decision on 13 March, which is from the independent Essential Services Commission.

### **Family violence**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:19): (1523) My adjournment is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is the establishment of community taskforces to address the family violence epidemic in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. We recently celebrated International Women's Day. This year's theme was 'Accelerate action', emphasising the importance of taking swift and decisive action to achieve gender equality. One of the many issues that would benefit from this kind of urgency is the issue of family violence. I have pushed for the Victorian government to introduce coercive control laws, address staffing shortages and provide greater protections for victim-survivors dealing with those who repeatedly breach family violence intervention orders. Unfortunately, family violence is an issue that is alarmingly prominent in parts of the South-Eastern Region I represent. The Casey area was recently the highest ranked local government area for the number of family violence incidents, with a total of 5564 reports in the year ending March 2024. Frankston and Greater Dandenong were also in the top 10. Statewide there is a

family violence offender arrested every 90 minutes. Last year we saw Victoria Police undertake a five-month-long family violence blitz in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region that led to 2700 arrests.

While it was promising to see family violence being taken so seriously, a law-and-order response often means an act of violence has already occurred, and it does little to proactively address the drivers of family violence. For this reason I encourage this government to invest in lived experience family violence taskforces that are embedded within local communities and directly assist government decision-making. Taskforces like these help break cycles of abuse and foster inclusive and supportive communities that reject family violence. For a future free of family violence these things are essential. We have already seen the gender equality taskforce in Casey do great work on the prevention of violence towards women. However, dedicated taskforces must have a direct relationship with government decision-making to ensure that local lived experience meaningfully informs government decision-making. So I ask: will the minister commit to establishing community taskforces to address the family violence epidemic in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

### Police resources

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (19:22): (1524) I rise this evening with an adjournment matter for the Minister for Police. It is regarding the men and women who put on the blue uniform and serve, endlessly risking their lives for us and our community to keep our community safe. The matter I raise is a tragic pattern that is emerging in the Victoria Police workforce that has been raised with me by serving and former officers. It includes issues involving mental health challenges, illness, stress, workload management and even bullying. The action I seek from the Minister for Police is to outline the work being done by the government to address these layers of concerns impacting the ability of these hardworking men and women to undertake their duties.

As many of you might know, I served in the police force for almost three decades. In my time in the police force I regularly witnessed severe stress-related work injuries among my colleagues and saw the cause of the burnout men and women experienced in their daily duties and many of the good people that left due to a lack of support. Unfortunately, I am hearing of these tragic issues far too often, even of people taking their own lives as a result of that stress and overload and burnout. Most recently the deputy state coroner ordered coronial investigators to examine further what events transpired in the lead-up to the deaths of 35 Victoria Police employees who ultimately decided to end their lives by suicide.

It breaks my heart to even raise this matter, but it is important I do so. I know the stress and exhaustion. I understand what it is like to go to work and see dead bodies or horrific accidents, limbs torn apart on the deceased, or process a body, overdosed, and then deliver the sad news to the loved ones that someone has passed away in their family or witness family violence when you are going to incidents. No-one forgets these challenges. They are a confronting aspect of the job. It takes its toll. PTSD is real. A study of serving Victoria Police officers in 2017 found 9 per cent of employees report being diagnosed with PTSD and 60 per cent meet the symptom criteria. Coupled with this, 90 per cent of those reported experiencing burnout in their jobs. I can only predict these numbers have grown in recent times. These feelings are real. I urge the minister to outline what work has been done to help men and women in this space.

### Early childhood education and care

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (19:25): (1525) My adjournment matter this evening is to the Minister for Disability, and my ask is: Minister, what metrics is the government using to monitor and report on participation rates of children with disabilities in early childhood education, and how will these metrics drive progress towards greater inclusion?

The 2024 Productivity Commission inquiry *A Path to Universal Early Childhood Education and Care* found that children with disabilities in Victoria face systemic barriers to early childhood education. Families reported long waitlists, inconsistent funding for support staff and a workforce that lacks

necessary training to provide inclusive education to our most vulnerable young learners. Of the estimated 20 per cent of children that have learning difficulties, developmental issues or disabilities, only 5 per cent attend childcare-subsidy-approved early education services. This indicates significant gaps for children with disabilities in our early childhood education systems. Families say services use different tactics to discourage or prevent their child from enrolling or attending. This includes making them feel unwelcome, claiming they do not have the funding or resources to support the child or limiting attendance hours. Many families also struggle to access outside-school-hours care, making it even harder for them to stay in the workforce.

The shortage of qualified early childhood educators has only exacerbated these challenges. The *Victorian Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2022* projects teacher demand will outpace supply by 2028, with demand rising 12.8 per cent and supply only 10.6 per cent. When services are stretched, it is children with additional needs who are often the first to miss out, but the reality in Victoria is that too many children with disabilities are being left behind because our early childhood education systems are under-resourced. Culturally and linguistically diverse families face additional barriers in identifying disabilities, literacy and developmental delays and accessing support services. Without adequate translation and interpreting services, many families struggle to navigate the system.

Minister, we need urgent action, and this must include increased funding to support inclusion, professional development and disability-inclusive education, and that is ongoing for each early childhood teacher, and workforce incentives to attract and retain skilled educators in the sector. Without these changes, Victoria risks continuing a cycle of exclusion and disadvantage for children with disabilities.

### Manufacturing sector

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (19:27): (1526) My adjournment matter for the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing – a minister who seems to want to do himself out of a job, actually – is about addressing the devastating impact the Victorian Labor government’s energy policies are having on our manufacturing sector. The most recent blow came just this month when Keppel Prince in Portland, our last wind turbine tower manufacturer, mothballed its operations. Unable to compete with subsidised Asian imports, this closure marks the latest victim of policies that prioritise ideology over industry.

Keppel Prince is only the latest in a string of failures. Oceania Glass in Dandenong, our only architectural glassmaker, collapsed on 3 March 2025, shedding 261 jobs. CEO Corné Kritzinger wrote on LinkedIn:

Australia lost another critical manufacturing capability – architectural float glass.

He noted:

The closure ... was a quiet event, attended only by employees.

That is unlike its grand opening 51 years ago.

There was no media coverage, no public acknowledgment – most Australians remain unaware that an entire industry has disappeared from their own backyard.

Oceania Glass had a proud heritage serving Australia, having sold its very first glass in 1856 and being the last remaining architectural glassmaker in Australasia. Its glass graces iconic buildings like Parliament House, yet it could not survive Labor’s energy regime.

Kritzinger wrote:

Certainly, for us as glass manufacturers, there are no real current alternatives for glassmaking outside of natural gas or other carbon fuels ...

High energy costs, up 25 per cent last year, crippled its 2000-tonne furnace, leaving us reliant on imported glass. Qenos, Australia’s sole plastics manufacturer, closed last year, its production halted



by unsustainable energy bills. Redflow, a battery maker, failed in December, leaving customers with defective products and useless warranties. These are not isolated incidents. Victoria saw 223 manufacturing closures in 2024 alone, the highest in Australia – 223 businesses, thousands of jobs and critical capacity lost, all while Labor pushes for 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035, driving blackouts and unaffordable bills. Our \$31 billion manufacturing sector employing 260,000 Victorians is being hollowed out, so the action I seek from the minister is a change of direction – that he stands up for his portfolio and actively advocates for his cabinet colleagues to rewrite Victoria's energy strategy. This list of recent manufacturing closures is devastating.

### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:31): (1527) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Burwood with me to inspect the progress of the Suburban Rail Loop East station and discuss its positive impacts not only for the local community but for people who reside in my region. The new SRL station at Burwood will provide a long-awaited direct train connection to Deakin University, enhancing the access for students and staff while opening up improved transport options for local residents. The station will feature a 94-metre-long platform with central escalators, ensuring efficient passenger movement. A dedicated pedestrian overpass will connect the station to the northern side of the Burwood Highway and Deakin University, improving access and safety. The station precinct will include ticketing and customer facilities, potential retail tenancies and central operations infrastructure. Additionally, the area will benefit from a dedicated pick-up and drop-off zone with 11 bays, a new bus interchange on Sinnott Street and 750 bike parking spaces. A 3-metre-wide shared cycling path will connect Gardiners Creek Trail to Bennettswood Reserve, with a cycle crossing at Burwood Highway linking to Deakin University.

Importantly, the SRL East project will support vibrant local communities, delivering 70,000 additional homes and 230,000 new jobs across all station precincts. Draft structure plans and planning scheme amendments shaped by extensive public consultation involving nearly 10,000 submissions are now open for feedback. These plans aim to ensure development projects encourage sunlight over parks and inviting streetscapes and foster thriving neighbourhoods like Burwood. With construction progressing across all six station sites and tunnel-boring machines arriving later this year, I believe the minister's visit to Burwood with me would provide valuable insights into this transformative project. I urge the minister to join me onsite to see firsthand how SRL East will enhance connectivity and community outcomes in Burwood and beyond.

### **Mansfield road safety**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (19:33): (1528) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for 80 kilometre speed limit signs to be installed on the Mount Buller Road at Mansfield as promised. In September 2024 the Department of Transport and Planning announced the lowering of the speed limit on the Mount Buller Road and Mansfield–Woods Point Road intersection in Mansfield after successful lobbying by the Mansfield Shire Council. The council raised this issue after a tragic fatal car and truck crash in April 2024. The lowering of the speed limit from 100 kilometres per hour to 80 kilometres per hour is for the safety of all road users. This road is frequently used by locals and tourists alike. During the busy snow season Mount Buller Road is a hive of activity with motorists making their way to and from the snowfields. Minister, for the safety of all Mount Buller Road users, install the long-awaited 80 kilometre-per-hour speed limit signs as promised in September 2024.

### **Energy regulations**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (19:34): (1529) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it concerns the fires that have occurred around the countryside at a number of solar and other installations. The Sungrow Australia power group has had five of its places close down, at least temporarily, and this shows there is a need for a

proper, thoughtful review that ensures that facilities, batteries, solar and all of the low-emission technologies that have the potential to cause fire are properly regulated, and it is far from clear that that is the case at the moment. These facilities have already got a legal obligation to minimise risk, but this does not seem to have been properly exercised.

The Sungrow group has five locations: Raywood, Goornong, Stawell, Ledcourt and Moolort. These have been shut down by Energy Safe Victoria, and this is not the first time that these sorts of fires have occurred. What is required here, as I say, is a proper, thoughtful review with experts that makes sure that bushfire risk in particular is properly managed. We cannot have a situation where an important facility is sparking a bushfire risk. We have to have proper arrangements in place. It does appear that in some of these place with solar arrangements it has been because vegetation has not been managed properly. Fires starting, vegetation that is not managed properly – this seems to be the sort of risk that can be properly managed, and it ought to have proper regimes around it. That is not the case at the moment, and we need to ensure that it is. The minister needs to act on this and act on this quickly.

### **Veterinary workforce**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (19:36): (1530) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with the regulation of veterinary nurses and technologists working party. The government said in 2021 they were undertaking significant work in this space and acknowledged the high suicide rate, the shortage of vets and the mental health conditions suffered from working in this sector. Yet four years later we have not seen the fruition of the government's significant work.

Last year I raised in the chamber the need for a vet nurse practitioner model similar to the human nursing model. The response that I received from the minister exposed this very issue – that only vets are regulated under the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and therefore the government has no oversight or governance over vet nurses and vet technologists. The regulation of veterinary nurses and technologists working party, formed under the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council and the Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia, is calling for the regulation of the industry to maximise the skills and knowledge of vet nurses and technologists, address the shortages and protect the titles of these positions. We hear time and time again of the dissatisfaction of vet nurses and technologists, which leads to their resignation, due to underutilisation and lack of career progression. Every veterinary practice differs in what tasks vet nurses and technologists are performing, with some merely relegated to cleaning duties when they could be performing, for example, diagnostic tests and minor procedures in which they are trained.

Legislating the definition of vet nurses and technologists would empower vets with the confidence to delegate more of these tasks, freeing up appointments and reducing patient costs. It is an anomaly that vet nurses and technologists are not part of a regulated industry. Paramedics transitioned to regulation in 2018, which the government would be very familiar with. Western Australia already has this regulation in place, as has the UK, Ireland, South Africa, Japan and most of the United States. It was also a recommendation that came out of the New South Wales parliamentary inquiry into vet shortages just last year. By defining these titles we will be ensuring that the vital skills and knowledge of vet nurses and technologists are being fully utilised, their tasks are expanded to reflect their qualifications and, most importantly, improving job satisfaction and addressing the shortages that exist within the industry, particularly in regional areas. I kindly ask that the minister meet with the working party to learn more about how this can be achieved right here in Victoria.

### **Rainbow libraries toolkit**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:39): (1531) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Equality. Minister, Daniel Andrews once declared Victoria the most progressive state in the nation, but like much of the newspeak terminology of the Ministry of Truth, progression in Victoria has proven to be radical regression – a lack of community consultation, criminals roting our taxes for industrial construction sites and our children struggling with mental health, with delays

in learning to read. While this is a Labor government that loves to put on their hard hats and roll out bulldozers to demolish the longstanding values, principles and norms that our society is built upon, this Labor government has executed a coordinated agenda to confuse the next generation. Here are some examples. In 2014 the Andrews Labor government introduced and expanded the Safe Schools program created by the LGBTIQI activist. It was not a typical sex ed program that focused on explaining human bodies and reproduction. No, this was a fully-fledged political campaign for children, promoting ideas like sexual pleasure and preferences, gender fluidity, identity and transition, and in some material children were encouraged to keep sexual secrets with adults.

Then in 2020 the government passed the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021. While we all agree that harmful practices against the LGBTIQI+ community must be stopped, this legislation was an overreach. It strips individuals of their right to consent to private practices, such as counselling or prayer, and forces only gender-affirmation care, forcing parents, medical and professional counsellors from appropriately offering other reasons for personal distress, confusion and social isolation, and this can prevent diagnosis of other causes. This act now enforces penalties that are draconian in scope, including jail sentences of up to 10 years. In this lawless state of Victoria you could face a lighter sentence for violent crimes if you indeed received jail time at all.

Today we debated the government's latest initiative, the rainbows libraries toolkit, which encourages public libraries to adopt inclusive language, inquire about visitors' preferred pronouns and promote gender-diverse literature. I extend my support to Bev McArthur's petition and the community's petition, which has garnered the signatures of nearly 5000 Victorians who oppose this latest instalment in the government's social agenda. I have received an overwhelming number of concerns from my constituents calling for the program to be withdrawn from our libraries. In this program children as young as five years old will be quizzed by library staff on their preferred pronouns. At this stage children are just learning to recognise letters and starting to speak basic sentences. Their intellectual capacity is in its infancy, and they simply do not have the ability to grasp political ideological concepts, nor do they understand the life-transforming decisions that asking them about their gender identity is going to cause. It is not education – *(Time expired)*

#### **Rainbow libraries toolkit**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:42): (1532) I also wish to raise an adjournment this evening for the Minister for Equality, Minister Ward. In light of the previous contribution – and I am still not convinced, Mrs Hermans, if you have actually ever read the rainbow libraries toolkit – you would have heard in the debate today what this very simple resource does and does not do. It is a practical optional resource for libraries. The action that I seek of the minister is to clarify her comments this morning. We had a contribution earlier this evening in that debate from Mr McCracken, who made some comments about what Minister Ward had allegedly said in a press conference. As I was standing next to the minister at the time, I am fairly sure that it was a bit of a misrepresentation. I just ask that the minister clarify exactly what she said in that press conference.

It does also lead me to once again just briefly note the bravery and the tenacity of the people, many of whom we saw here in the chamber tonight, in the face of these relentless attacks by some members opposite. It is, as one other member called out, the irrelevance of the modern Liberal Party. It is a great shame to see that on such fundamentally basic issues we do not enjoy that bipartisan support from those opposite. If you come to march in Pride, if you want to go on JOY FM and extol all your virtues, your votes speak for themselves. Very sadly, those members who were in the chamber tonight and voted in favour of a petition which, aside from that it risks spreading hate towards the LGBTIQI+ community, is also deeply misinformed, as I referred to in my contribution earlier. It is a great shame indeed to see the supposed modern Liberal Party doing that. I genuinely, genuinely hope that things will change. I do not want to be arguing with members opposite on such basic things. It does not help the LGBTIQI+ community for us to be arguing over such simple things, and I hope that those across the aisle who do see things from a bit more of a moderate perspective can prevail in their arguments because it was very disappointing to see what we saw tonight in the chamber.

The contributions from Minister Shing, from Ms Payne and from Mr Puglielli I will take a moment to acknowledge were excellent.

Very simply, the action that I seek is for the minister to update and clarify her comments that she made to the press this morning.

### Dental services

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:45): (1533) My adjournment matter tonight is to the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that she increase investment into public dental health care in Victoria. People have shared with my office their experiences of getting dental health care in this state. Their stories are important.

#### [QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I have a broken tooth that requires a reconstruction I cannot afford, so I fill it with temporary filling putty every day myself and work through the pain. I work two jobs to pay my rent, but it is getting harder on my health, especially without my medication supporting me.

I am in my 20s and I have already lost two molars due to being unable to access affordable dentistry.

The budget has never fixed my teeth. The budget has never provided me with medication. The budget has never improved my quality of life or ability to work. The government has the money to provide free health care but chooses to hoard it for the sake of the budget. Damn your self-gratifying budget.

I am sure many of us here fondly remember the joy of eating a Roll-Up during lunchtime at primary school and spending the next class getting all the sticky bits out from between our teeth. I wish that these stories that I have just read were that cute and that simple, but they are not. These are real human stories of people's health being compromised because they cannot afford to see a dentist. We have a Medicare system in this country that for whatever reason does not see teeth as part of the human body, and so we see people in our community living in pain every single day. So let me say this clearly: dental care should be free. Dental care should be included in Medicare. I know that that part of the problem is for your federal counterparts, but I beg you to push them to do this. Properly fund public dental care in our state. We need it. Poor dental health affects so many aspects of people's lives. I cannot believe I have to lay it out this simply, but universal health care must include teeth.

### Yan Yean Road upgrade

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (19:47): (1534) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide a full timeline for the commencement and completion of each section of stage 2 of the Yan Yean Road upgrade and the funds allocated to each section, and to confirm the final design for the intersection with Bridge Inn Road. Residents of Doreen, Mernda and surrounding areas have been waiting a long time for Yan Yean Road to be fully upgraded, and now it seems that they will have to wait even longer for stage 2 of the upgrade after the Allan Labor government's latest announcement. Labor promised to fast-track the project back in 2015, but here we are a decade later in 2025 and the upgrade is still stuck in the planning stages.

In the 10 years that local residents have been waiting for construction to start the condition of Yan Yean Road has degraded significantly. It is riddled with potholes that damage cars, and the single lanes are chronically congested every day. With each year that passes the need for this project becomes more urgent, but it is perpetually delayed by an incompetent Labor government that cannot deliver road projects on time or on budget. The latest announcement from Labor on the Big Build website says that the upgrade will now be done in sections. It does not say how many sections there are, but it does say they will start at the northern end with the intersection of Bridge Inn Road and Yan Yean Road. Locals are now genuinely concerned that parts of the upgrade will be pushed back indefinitely or, worse, never completed at all.

Residents are right to worry that building the road in sections is just an excuse to further delay the upgrade when Labor runs out of money after spending billions of dollars on the Suburban Rail Loop. The Labor government is once again using smoke and mirrors with this announcement. How many sections are there? The Big Build website does not say. How long will it take to finish? No-one knows. How much funding is required and available for each section? It is a mystery. Labor claims a preferred contractor has been selected to build the new intersection, but this is meaningless until a tender has actually been awarded and the contracts have been signed. The minister must give clarity to local businesses and residents by providing a full timeline for exactly when each section of the upgrade will start and finish. The government has not finished acquiring the land for the project and will not confirm if the intersection design has actually been finalised, so the promise to get construction started in 2025 is shaping up to be another broken Labor promise.

There is significant community opposition to the government's preferred design for the intersection, which is the most expensive option and would make access to the Doreen business precinct more difficult, hurting local retailers. Both Nillumbik and Whittlesea councils have urged the government to instead go with option C. This project is now surrounded in doubts and uncertainty because of Labor's delays and confusing messaging.

### **Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:50): (1535) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Attorney-General and is related to the review of the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021. When we debated this act in the last term of Parliament I consulted with many groups about it and gave it a lot of consideration, choosing to oppose it out of concerns that its scope was so broad that it limited or risked limiting many legitimate activities and consensual interactions. I have also been contacted by several groups and individuals who expressed concerns about the operation of the bill and how it might be impacting other policies and general mental health care for young people. By this I mean I have had reports of youth mental health professionals that will refuse to continue working with any children or young people that raise issues of gender distress or gender nonconformity out of concern that they may inadvertently fall afoul of this legislation.

One of the aspects that I did support in the bill was a statutory review. The legislation included a requirement for the Attorney-General to initiate a review into the legislation two years after it came into operation, with the review to be concluded within six months of this review commencing. I asked several questions of the previous Attorney-General about this review, with a response in March 2024 indicating that careful consideration was being given to the timing of a review and a response in June 2024 indicating that finalisation of the review was underway.

My request for the Attorney-General is firstly to provide an update on the progress, but the main request is, if this review has not commenced yet or is still underway, to ensure that there is an opportunity for public submissions for relevant stakeholders and interested parties to participate in the review.

### **Ringwood electorate funding**

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:52): (1536) Well, we are approaching a very interesting period, and that period of course is the budget. We are now some two months away from the next state budget here in Victoria, so it is an opportune time for me to raise on behalf of the local community in the Ringwood electorate a number of matters with the Treasurer. So my matters for the Treasurer are two specific matters, and my sincere hope is that the Treasurer in her considerations in the next eight weeks, because we have eight weeks now before the state budget is handed down, turns her mind to two aspects in particular. One of those aspects is in respect to the Maroondah Hospital. We all know that for way too long those opposite and previous governments, for that matter – that long ago, back in 2018 – have promised the people of Maroondah, Ringwood, Nunawading, Mitcham and further afield and nearby, including Warrandyte, Croydon, Wantirna and Bayswater, a new

emergency department for children at Maroondah. Well, that was in 2018 – seven long years ago. Of course that never happened; it was never, ever delivered. Well, fast-forward to the last election, and 2022 came along and the government, those opposite, promised a new Maroondah Hospital at the Maroondah Hospital site. Well, sad to say, to this very day there has not been a single cent in any of the previous budgets or in the forward estimates for that new hospital. It is somewhat of a cruel hoax, and I am hoping that for this new Treasurer there is an opportunity for this government to turn a new leaf, to turn a new page and to include in the new budget significant money to ensure that the people of Maroondah have the hospital they deserve and the hospital they have waited very, very many years for.

In addition to that, I hope the Treasurer can also turn her mind to Marlborough Primary School. If we want our state schools to succeed, we must fund them, and there is no better example perhaps in the electorate of Ringwood than Marlborough. Marlborough is a beautiful school with a small school community, and unless we invest in it now; unless we are prepared to invest in new buildings and new facilities, some beautification work, some beautiful amenity that helps new parents as they drive past and look at and choose a school for their children; and unless it helps them select that school, then my great fear is that the school will not succeed. So when the Treasurer turns her mind to the budget and the many items in the budget this May I hope that she is looking for a line item for Marlborough Primary School at the very least. So for both Marlborough Primary School and Maroondah Hospital, if the Treasurer can turn her mind to both of those things and deliver both of those then I will be the first to praise her.

### Responses

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (19:55): There were 16 matters today: Mr McCracken to the Minister for Emergency Services, Ms Ermacora to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Ms Payne to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Mr Luu to the Minister for Police, Ms Gray-Barberio to the Minister for Disability, Mrs McArthur to the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Ms Terpstra to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Mrs Tyrell to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Davis to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Ms Purcell to the Minister for Agriculture, Mrs Hermans to the Minister for Equality, Mr Galea to the Minister for Equality, Mr Puglielli to the Minister for Health, Ms Lovell to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Mr Limbrick to the Attorney-General and Mr McGowan to the Treasurer. I will pass all those on for an appropriate response in line with the standing orders.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:56 pm.**