

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 2 April 2025

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Wednesday 2 April 2025

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Wendy Lovell) took the chair at 9:31 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Committees***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Membership*

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (09:33): I advise the house that I have received a letter from Mr McGowan resigning as a participating member of the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee effective from Tuesday 1 April 2025.

*Petitions***Residential planning zones**

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 77 signatures:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, respectfully urge the Legislative Council to note:

- the Allan Labor government has announced 10 high-rise high-density planning zones in the municipalities of Bayside, Boroondara, Brighton, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Hume, Kingston, Monash, Moonee Valley, Stonnington, Whitehorse and Whittlesea where planning rights will be stripped from councils and communities, high rise development will occur as of right and planning control will be exercised undemocratically by the state government;
- that, in addition to a central activity district with as of right 12 storey development, these zones contain enormous “catchment areas” where planning protections will be removed, where 3 and 6 storey development can occur as of right, where municipal heritage overlays and designations will be overridden resulting in the destruction of thousands of irreplaceable heritage properties and where canopy tree protections will be overridden resulting in the loss of neighbourhood amenity and the exacerbation of heat island effects; and
- these plans are not accompanied by proper health or education service plans or plans for additional open space despite proposed massively increased local populations.

We therefore call on the state government to desist and recommence proper discussions and consultation with local communities and councils and heritage peak bodies in all 10 affected zones prior to taking any further planning actions to implement the announced high-rise high-density zones.

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

Auditor-General – State Trustees’ Financial Administration Services, April 2025 (*Ordered to be published*).

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under section 32(4)(a)(iii) in relation to the Australian Code for the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road and Rail (*Gazette S151, 1 April 2025*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rules Nos. 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

*Production of documents***Wildlife protection**

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 1 April 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 5 March 2025 on the motion of Dr Mansfield relating to the review of the Wildlife Act 1975. The government has identified two documents within the scope of the order. A claim of executive privilege has been made over these two documents in full. I further table a schedule of the identified documents.

Duck hunting

The Clerk: I table a second letter from the Attorney-General dated 1 April 2025 in response to a resolution of the Council on 5 March 2025 on the motion of Ms Purcell relating to the review of the native bird hunting 2025 season. The letter states that the date for the production of documents does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I would just like to acknowledge that we have in the chamber a visiting delegation from the Hanoi People's Council. Welcome to the Victorian Parliament.

Motions

Middle East conflict

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) since the collapse of the ceasefire in Gaza on the night between 17 and 18 March 2025, intense military activities and hostilities have continued, killing and injuring hundreds of people and further damaging and destroying what remains of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals;
 - (b) over 180 children were reported killed on 18 March 2025, marking 'one of the largest single-day child death toll in the last year' according to UNICEF;
 - (c) on 19 March 2025, two UN guesthouses were hit by an explosion in Deir al-Balah, killing one United Nations Office for Project Services team member and injuring six more United Nations staff, some of whom sustained life-altering injuries;
 - (d) humanitarian aid and supplies have not entered the Gaza Strip since 2 March 2025, when the Israeli authorities imposed a siege;
 - (e) this siege has now lasted over three weeks, surpassing the duration of the total siege first imposed in October 2023 when the war started and as a result, critical humanitarian supplies, including food and medical aid, are rapidly depleting;
 - (f) on 24 March 2025, the United Nations Secretary-General stated that they have 'taken the difficult decision to reduce the Organization's footprint in Gaza' ... 'However, the UN is not leaving the Gaza Strip and "remains committed to continuing to provide aid that civilians depend on for their survival and protection"');
- (2) does not support the State of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza; and
- (3) supports calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Country Fire Authority

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:48): Today marks the 80th anniversary of the official formation of the Country Fire Authority on 2 April 1945, although volunteer fire brigades had been active in Victoria from well before that date. Over the past 80 years the CFA has grown to encompass almost 27,000 members across more than 1200 brigades, and they attend more than 37,000 incidents annually. The CFA is one of the most trusted brands and organisations in Victoria. Its volunteers are highly trained and professional in every duty they perform, and they are the heroes of some of the darkest days our state has faced. I thank every single volunteer and career member of the CFA for their

service over the past 80 years and look forward to CFA members and brigades continuing to serve our communities into the future.

CFA/VFBV Firefighter State Championships

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:49): Over the past two weekends the CFA Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria state championships were held in Mooroopna. The championships bring together senior and junior brigades from both urban and rural brigades where firefighting skills are used in competitions that require both skill and speed. These events improve the skills of our volunteers and build the camaraderie between brigades that is beneficial to all on firegrounds. Mooroopna in district 22 has been the venue for the past six years, and our community has greatly benefited from the economic boost it has brought to our region.

Western Metropolitan Region schools

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (09:50): In stark contrast to those opposite, I rise to celebrate the Allan Labor government's ongoing commitment to funding Victorian schools, particularly in the Western Metropolitan Region. Investment in public education is one of the most important responsibilities of any government, and our government's investments have made a real difference in ensuring students receive the resources they need to thrive. This funding has helped deliver state-of-the-art learning facilities like new classrooms, upgraded facilities and additional support staff, ensuring that students and teachers have the highest quality learning environment.

In the seven years between 2019 and 2026 we will have opened a whopping 34 brand new schools in Melbourne's west. Our government is investing in the education infrastructure Melbourne's west deserves. This year we opened Barayip Primary School in Tarneit and next year we will open five new schools in Western Metro – Plumpton primary school, Toolern Waters primary school, Cobblebank secondary school, Point Cook South P-9 and Point Cook South specialist school. Over the past nine years the Victorian government – wait for it – has invested over \$14.9 billion into building and upgrading our schools, ensuring that every child, regardless of their background or where they live, has access to high-quality education for the future of our state. I encourage the government to keep building on this record of investment in Melbourne's west.

Women's health services

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:52): Over the summer break I had surgery to have my copper IUD removed after it had lodged itself in my uterus wall creating a perforation risk. In order for it to proceed, I had to have the procedure at a non-religious hospital. All over Victoria there are hospitals conscientiously objecting on religious grounds to all reproductive healthcare services for women and gender-diverse people. Shockingly, they are receiving taxpayer funds but can still legally deny services. Since sharing my experiences I have been contacted in droves by people all over the state with similar or worse experiences – women who were denied contraception after giving birth, women who had to terminate wanted pregnancies for medical reasons forced to seek out another hospital to accept them and women who were hospitalised for emergencies and denied their prescription birth control while in the hospital bed. In the public system, where patients cannot choose their provider or are literally zoned to them due to location, hospitals should not be allowed to deny essential and sometimes life-saving healthcare services. In fact medical care should never be shaped by any imposed religious faith. Like other members have in this place before me, today I reiterate the desperate need for the Victorian government to end institutional conscientious objections and ensure fair, equal and compassionate access to health care for every Victorian across our state.

Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:54): I rise to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, which commemorates the 110th anniversary of one of the gravest horrors of humanity. An estimated 1.2 million Armenians, 500,000 Assyrians and

350,000 Greeks were persecuted and murdered from 24 April 1915 to 1923. The Armenian genocide is said to have started when 250 intellectuals and community leaders were arrested and executed. In September 2023 I visited the ancient land of Armenia as part of an Australian parliamentary delegation and had the opportunity to learn more about the atrocities firsthand at memorials and museums. In January 1925, 100 years ago, in an old mechanics institute hall in Frankston, Professor Atkinson's lecture helped Victorians learn about the persecution of the Armenians in mass executions, crucifixions, forced marches, rape and starvation, resulting in everyday Aussies raising funds and clothing to help displaced Armenian refugees. Today the Armenian community play an important part in the South-Eastern Metropolitan region, with the Armenian General Benevolent Union in Rowville, the Armenian language school and sporting youth and women's groups meeting regularly in Springvale. As we stand with the Armenian, Greek and Syrian communities – and I note that community-minded Greeks and Assyrian families also live in the south-east – we recognise the horrors of these persecuted Christian people and affirm our commitment to justice and truth, ensuring that genocides and tragedies like this are not dismissed or forgotten so they may never happen again.

Warrnambool Community Garden

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (09:55): Last week I visited Warrnambool Community Garden to review their latest upgrades on behalf of the Minister for Regional Development Jaclyn Symes. I have visited the garden a number of times over the years, and it is so inspiring to see how the passion and hard work of its members and volunteers have paid off. There are over 50 rented garden plots and an increasingly large community plot, a bush food garden, a commercial kitchen, a huge chook pen, a gorgeous children's area and a weekly produce market. I am very proud of the Allan Labor government's contribution of \$100,000, in this case used to purchase a brand new tractor and a shed for storage. These tools create a safer and quite frankly less backbreaking environment for the 170 volunteers and members and 30 volunteers. I also attended the community garden's first harvest festival a few days later. It was amazing to experience the festival in their new amphitheatre, created from what was a weed-filled quarry. Congratulations to convenor Courtney Mathew and all the committee members and all past committee members of the community garden on such a vibrant and innovative place.

Cannabis law reform

David ETTERSANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:57): It is nice to be reminded that the work we do here can make a positive difference in people's lives. Legalise Cannabis Victoria's amendment to the Road Safety Act 1986 came into effect on 1 March, allowing magistrates to exercise discretion in sentencing for medicinal cannabis patients who test positive for THC in roadside drug tests. I want to read a message I received from a grateful constituent this week. They wrote:

Hey David. Just want to say a massive thankyou to you and Rachel and the team at Legalise Cannabis. I have ADHD. It means I am either thinking of too many things at once and struggling to concentrate or I am stuck buffering on the one idea. A simple job like the dishes can take days. I sit on the couch thinking about it, but it does not seem to do. Then there's the hyper focus side. My bosses love me because I am a machine. I do get lots done but in a very untidy fashion. My morning dose of cannabis is enough to slow my mind so that I can actually complete a task before moving on to the next one. My dose at night helps with the buffering so I can get things done, like the dishes. Things are just better now without the anxiety of thinking that I am going to be pulled over and fail an oral test for THC. David, I guarantee you I don't get ripped and go out driving. I am just a normal bloke who just needs a slight adjustment in a very mild way. So thank you for all your hard work and the dedication in supporting us average Aussies.

Level crossing removals

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): Recently I had the privilege of joining Minister Williams and Mr Tarlamis for the opening of the new McKenna Drive bridge in Beaconsfield, marking the 85th level crossing removal under this Allan Labor government. We are building things. It is terrific to see this new piece of local infrastructure supporting what is going to continue to be the growing population of Beaconsfield, with new estates in Berwick to the south of

the station precinct. This new level crossing removal is helping to make local traffic smoother and safer. Indeed we know that these crossing removal projects are having an impact. In 2019, for example, there was an average of 11 road, car and train incidents at level crossings per month. As of 2024 that is just two incidents a month. So these projects are making very significant congestion but also safety improvements for everyday Victorians such as those constituents of mine in Beaconsfield. I thank all those Beaconsfield residents who have been so engaged with the process, including by assisting me with a small community reference group. I really appreciate their input.

Knox United Soccer Club

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): Also I wish to just briefly acknowledge and celebrate a terrific local sporting club in my electorate, Knox United Soccer Club, who recently secured, just yesterday, a very significant funding announcement from the federal member for Aston, Mary Doyle. I thank her for her support for this terrific local club, and I look forward to continuing to work with the club to support their future growth.

Oil and gas exploration

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:00): ‘Protect southern sea country from seismic blasting and oil and gas exploration’ – that was the message from hundreds of community members who I joined on a wild and windy weekend on Gunditjmara country at Koontapool Yakeen, or Logans Beach. We listened to the powerful stories of whale dreaming custodian Yaraan Couzens Bundle, who told us of the deep connection between First Peoples and sea country. It was a beautiful gathering filled with music, art and positive connection. Organisations including Southern Ocean Protection Embassy Collective, Otway Coastal Environment Action Network, the Australian Marine Conservation Society, Fight for the Bight Port Fairy, Surfrider Foundation and many others all came together for a common cause. Oil and gas companies are plundering our oceans, destroying marine life with seismic blasting and exploration, fuelling the climate crisis all just to line their pockets. Governments, including Victorian Labor, have sold out their communities and sold out our futures to the gas companies by continuing to approve new gas projects. But communities coming together like this can stop them. We have done it before and we will do it again.

Federal election

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:01): I rise to make a brief statement about the increasingly toxic and radioactive presence of Peter Dutton in Victorian and Australian political life. I have got to tell you, Mr Dutton’s history of creating division in our multicultural communities is well known. His infamous claim that people in Melbourne were too afraid to go out to dinner because of so-called African gangs was not only baseless, it was dangerous. It inflamed racial tensions and targeted communities who deserved respect, not vilification. It was met with ridicule by Victorians returning to a vibrant Melbourne night-life. His toxicity extends to First Nations people. Mr Dutton refused to attend the national apology to the stolen generations – a moment of national healing that he chose to ignore. Even now he continues to undermine efforts towards reconciliation.

On climate action Mr Dutton’s stance is equally poisonous. He has spent years delaying, denying and ridiculing meaningful steps to address the climate crisis, blocking progress when urgent action has been needed. And now he has gone fully radioactive, literally, with his push for nuclear energy. It is expensive, outdated and unwanted by Australians. Mr Dutton’s brand of politics is not leadership; it is division, delay and denial. Australians deserve better than the fear and toxicity that he represents.

Supermarket prices

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:03): To follow up – vegans, I have heard you, and I will never complain about the cost of Danish feta again. Vegan feta is \$45 a kilogram, double that of dairy-based cheese, and it is also a very tasty cheese. At a time when everyone is struggling with the cost of groceries it does seem pretty unfair that those who are choosing to stick to a plant-based diet for animal welfare or environmental reasons, for example, should be hit with an even bigger

price shock. And it is not just the cheese. If you need oat milk for your lattes, if that is what you are drinking, it is two or three times the price of milk from a cow. It is steep to buy these products at the supermarkets. Plant-based products should be more affordable, because whether we are vegan or not we should be all be aiming to eat more of the good green stuff for our health, for the animals and for the planet. Coles and Woolworths are price gouging everyone, and tbh it is even worse if you are vegan.

Community safety

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:04): It was a long night last night, but in the early hours of this morning we passed a very important piece of legislation to combat hate and hate speech in our community. I know many in the community of the Southern Metropolitan Region, particularly in the Jewish community, wanted us to pass that bill, and I am glad that the government with the support of the crossbench managed to get it through. I am deeply, deeply disappointed that the Liberal Party voted against legislation to combat hate speech in our communities. I know that the significant Jewish community in the Southern Metropolitan Region wanted that bill to be passed, and Labor has delivered it for them. On Monday I was talking to the president of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria. He reiterated the importance of that bill being passed, and I am glad we have delivered. Just last Friday I was visiting the Adass Israel Synagogue community at their temporary synagogue facilities that have now been established following the devastating fire last year, which showed where hate in our community can lead. It is a powerful demonstration of why we have always got to stand together, united with strong laws against hate. That is what this Parliament did yesterday. That is what Labor did yesterday, and I cannot understand why the Liberals were opposed to it.

Bills

Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:05): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the **Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025**.

In my opinion, the **Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025**, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The Bill amends the Wrongs Act 1958 to make certain organisations vicariously liable for the abuse of children by persons akin to employees of those organisations and to consequentially amend the Victoria Police Act 2013 and for other purposes.

Human rights issues

Protection of Children

Section 17(1) of the charter provides that ‘families are the fundamental group unit of society and are entitled to be protected by society and the state’. In respect of children, section 17(2) provides that ‘every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child’s best interests and is needed by the child by reason of being a child’.

This Bill makes certain organisations vicariously liable for the abuse of children by persons akin to employees of those organisations.

The Bill recognises that children are especially vulnerable to abuse and need to be afforded the strongest possible protection, particularly by those entrusted with their care. This Bill also recognises the need to address limitations in existing law and the difficulties plaintiffs face when recovering compensation where an organisation may be liable for child abuse perpetrated by its members.

This Bill supports the right of protection of children under section 17(2) of the charter.

Conclusion

I consider that this Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Rachel Payne MP

Member for the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Legalise Cannabis Victoria

Second reading

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:06): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

A schoolboy at a religious boarding school, a youth volunteer at a railway organisation, an attendee at a church Sunday school and a youth member of the guides association.

These young people were all victims of child abuse at these organisations and they have all been denied access to justice simply because their perpetrator was not technically an employee.

They are just a handful of the many thousands impacted by recent developments in the High Court relating to the law of vicarious liability.

Late last year, in the case of *Bird v. DP* the High Court held that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ballarat could not be held vicariously liable for known historical child sexual abuse, because the perpetrator Father Coffey was not an employee. This reversed a 2023 decision of the Victorian Court of Appeal.

This decision puts Australia at odds with many other Commonwealth jurisdictions including the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada.

Because of the High Court's reluctance to establish vicarious liability outside of the strict employee–employer relationship, there is now a second class of victim-survivors who will struggle to access justice.

Where there is still comparable authority, control and power given to a perpetrator because of their position in an organisation and the perpetrator takes advantage of that to perpetrate the abuse of a child, the title of employee is arbitrary.

These people are already up against a legal system that has historically made it unnecessarily difficult to recover compensation from organisations for child abuse they suffered.

This High Court decision puts victim-survivors in limbo – with many cases indefinitely halted, unless reforms are made.

In their judgement, the High Court noted that any reformulation of the law would be the responsibility of the legislature. Following this, there have been broad calls for legislative reform.

In the past when making similar reforms, the government has alluded to the opportunity for common law to develop and give child abuse plaintiffs access to justice with a retrospective effect.

Now that this opportunity has been shut down, we understand that the Attorney-General is leading work with the Standing Council of Attorneys-General on a national response.

Many victim-survivors take decades to come forward and make a disclosure. We cannot make them wait any longer.

We know that Victoria has never been afraid to lead the way when it comes to responding to institutional child abuse. Proudly, we were the first jurisdiction in Australia to remove civil limitations and create a fault-based legal duty to prevent child abuse.

This work was informed by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the *Betrayal of Trust* report.

Both of these emphasised the need for statutory intervention to ensure that organisations are held to account and to minimise the risk of abuse that arises due to the relationships of trust for which they are responsible.

We believe these relationships of trust are not strictly confined to the employee–employer relationship.

Accordingly, the Wrongs Amendment (Vicarious Liability) Bill 2025 will make certain organisations vicariously liable for the abuse of children by persons akin to employees of these organisations.

The bill clearly specifies the circumstances in which an organisation will be considered vicariously liable for abuse of a child by an employee of the organisation. This section does not affect and is in addition to the common law as it applies with respect to vicarious liability.

The bill provides for when an individual will be akin to an employee of a relevant organisation. It is arbitrary and unjust that existing laws allow some but not all victim-survivors the opportunity to pursue relief through vicarious liability, simply because the perpetrator was not an employee.

The general nature of this new section and the regulation making powers are intended to ensure that claims are not inadvertently excluded from scope due to a novel or unexpected category of relationship. This will allow courts to flexibly respond to the circumstances of each case, remedying the deficiencies and uncertainties in the current law.

The bill applies to all organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children. This broad application draws no distinction between the kinds of organisations in which child abuse may occur. Organisations will continue to not be liable for abuse committed in circumstances unrelated to the organisation's care, supervision or authority over children.

Victoria was the first jurisdiction in Australia to abolish the Ellis defence. This defence prevented victim-survivors from accessing compensation because it allowed unincorporated organisations that used trusts to conduct their activities not to be sued.

In recognition of the difficulties with attempting to sue non-government organisations with complex or uncertain legal structures, the bill provides an ability for organisations that are not capable of being sued to nominate an appropriate defendant.

Finally, and very importantly, the bill will apply to child abuse that occurs before, on or after the proposed commencement date.

While there have been a number of positive legislative reforms to help victim-survivors access justice, all too often these reforms do not have a retrospective effect.

While this may be appropriate in some cases, when legislating past reforms, this government has alluded to the potential for vicarious liability to offer retrospective justice pending changes in the common law. As the window for such change has been closed, we consider a retrospective legislative change necessary.

In introducing this bill, I want to acknowledge the many thousands of victim-survivors across Victoria and Australia.

We hope this bill makes the all too difficult fight to access justice that little bit easier.

Today, we stand with you on the road to justice.

If you or someone you know needs support, you can call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

I on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria commend this bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:12): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

*Production of documents***Department of Education air purifier program**

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:13): I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, by 30 June 2025, all documents in possession of the Department of Education relating to the 2022 rollout of high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) purifiers in Victorian government and low-fee non-government schools, including but not limited to:

- (1) the timeline of procurement and delivery of devices;
- (2) Samsung warranty and fault reports and department replacement requests, detailing unit functionality and school usage;
- (3) outcomes of ventilation assessments conducted in schools;
- (4) evaluations, studies, or data assessing the impact of HEPA filters on air quality, health outcomes, or absenteeism in schools;
- (5) guidelines provided to schools; and
- (6) any advice received from the chief health officer and any other internal or external experts, including related to the expansion of the program in 2022.

This is a fairly simple motion that requires the Leader of the Government to produce documents relating to the rollout of high-efficiency particulate air filters in government and low-fee non-government schools. There was much talk yesterday about the money wasted on the Commonwealth Games that we did not have in Victoria, but another thing that has been concerning me for some time is the amount of money that we spent on HEPA filters for schools. My understanding is it was somewhere in the order of \$190 million, and I have concerns about whether this actually did anything at all helpful for schools. So what I am especially hoping to get from this are any evaluations that were done on the effect of these HEPA filters, whether they were actually serviced and whether there were faults and warranty claims. My understanding is that some schools did not want to pay for the maintenance on them – that replacing the filters on some of them cost upwards of \$250 a year and the schools decided that it was not worth it – so they just sit there doing nothing.

Another thing that I understand with the HEPA filters is some of the guidance that was given to schools during the time, during the pandemic, was to keep the windows open in the schools to help with ventilation. However, if you read the instruction manuals on these HEPA filters, which I have done, they say they do not work with the windows open. I am very curious to see what effect these HEPA filters had. These documents will hopefully shed some light on what has actually happened with these filters in schools. It is a fairly simple motion, so I will keep it short and leave it there. I hope that people will also want to look at whether this was an effective use of taxpayers money.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:15): I am pleased to rise to speak on Mr Limbrick's motion seeking documents in relation to the use of HEPA filters in Victorian schools. These purifiers were rolled out and the program was implemented in response, obviously, to the COVID-19 pandemic and the very real consequences for our community, for children in our schools, of airborne viruses and infection caused by airborne particulates. I think in many forums over many years now, particularly since that pandemic, the science on the dangers of respiratory-based illness caused by airborne particulates is pretty well and comprehensively documented. I do not think we need to go through them again. We understand and believe the science on this side of the chamber.

In response to that pandemic, the school system, the Department of Education, set up the Victorian ventilation technical advisory panel to give advice to the Victorian government on ventilation matters in our classrooms. We know that there are classrooms in our school system that are more than 150 years old and there are classrooms in our school system that are months old and we needed to have a look at the range of settings and circumstances that students in this state are under, so we set up a technical advisory panel to provide advice to the government on ventilation matters, particularly to reduce the risk of airborne infectious disease transmission.

Working with that panel, the education department has undertaken analysis of the data collected through the ventilation assessment program at 100 sample schools as well as 40 early childhood settings, including CO₂ monitoring data and detailed thermodynamic modelling, providing insights into airflow and air change per hour in school spaces – detailed, rigorous assessment. As part of the program 18,000 rooms were audited and 3400 CO₂ monitors were installed in a sample of schools and early childhood settings. The assessment found that most early learning centres and schools rely on natural ventilation, and the government has responded by providing additional air purifiers to reduce the transmission risk of airborne viruses in settings where natural ventilation is less available, and particularly less available in winter. One of the issues that we have obviously in those seasons where the risk of airborne infectious disease is higher – during winter – is that if we open windows to provide natural ventilation it lets cold air in, and students understandably are not particularly enamoured with having cold air brought into their classrooms as a way to reduce the risk of airborne viruses. So what the government has done is provide ventilation systems, filtration systems, to help with that process.

We are, as always, concerned to make sure that the settings that our students in this state learn in are ones that are safe from preventable risk. We now as a community have a much greater appreciation of the risk that airborne infectious diseases pose. We much better understand the settings that we all live and work in, and I think it is an entirely appropriate thing for the government to do to get technical advice, to get scientific advice, to get health advice and to act to make sure that the settings that we educate our children in and that this state under law forces them to be in are as safe as they possibly can be. Obviously the government will, as is our convention, not oppose the documents motion. We will look through the process diligently. But I will never resile from supporting government initiatives to try and keep our kids safe, and I will never be party to any sort of explicit or subliminal campaign that suggests that we should not be taking that kind of action. I think undermining that kind of an approach, whether explicitly or subliminally, is a huge risk to our community, and we must constantly guard against it no matter what we see happening on the other side of the world.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:20): I am very pleased to be able to rise and speak to Mr Limbrick's motion. It is a very simple motion, a documents motion. In the interests of transparency he is seeking from the government an understanding about the high efficiency particulate air – or HEPA – purifiers that were provided to government schools and low-fee non-government schools. They were rolled out through the pandemic, and I think at the time there was huge fanfare by the then education minister saying, 'This is the biggest investment in our schools to protect students, staff and school communities.' I note that the program ends at the end of this year, and listening to Mr Batchelor and what he was saying, you would wonder why these purifier contracts are not extended – given what he was saying about the importance of viruses and air ventilation. We all know that the best ventilation is an open window or an open door. The Spanish flu told us that. You do not have to be a medical expert or a scientific expert to understand the benefits of ventilation.

Certainly there were so many issues around the COVID pandemic that I and Mr Limbrick and others have spoken about ad nauseam, and most of those on the other side were not here at that time when we wanted greater transparency and understanding about the impacts of the government policy decisions. As Mr Limbrick has said, what he is concerned about – given this program, which was implemented by the government at close to \$200 million, I understand – is the issues around these purifiers, around the warranties, around replacing the filters. Is that being done, and what is the cost to those schools? Can schools afford that? They are under so much pressure as it is. These are the issues that we need to understand around: really, did this program provide a benefit to children, as the government were saying at the time? If you look at the Department of Education website, where they talk about this policy initiative, they say:

Schools are strongly encouraged to fix windows that are designed to be opened but do not open ...

Well, that is on the government. Where are these maintenance programs, when windows that need to be opened cannot be opened?

It is a pity Mr Batchelor was not down at the St Kilda Primary School with me on Monday with the parents and children who were honking the government, wanting to have a community hall. Talk about ventilation – they have got to have their assemblies outside. They do not even have a sports facility, and they need to have a community hall that is fit for purpose in 2025. Nevertheless the government is not investing in that. I digress slightly, but the point I am making is that there is a failure by the Allan Labor government to be providing sufficient maintenance for schools and sufficient capacity for schools, especially in my electorate of Southern Metro and at the St Kilda Primary School, which is in desperate need of that community hall – and I have raised it before.

But Mr Limbrick's motion is obviously very succinct. It is very reasonable; it is not asking anything. I heard Mr Batchelor say, 'We'll look through it in due course.' Well, I would urge the government to do so, given the failures in what the government did through COVID – no royal commission, which we were asking for in the interests of transparency and understanding for the Victorian community. Look at the 2009 bushfires and the royal commission that was held and what they said: we need to understand what happened so that we can prevent such a tragedy. Well, there were so many tragedies during COVID.

But with this expense that was provided by the government, has the program worked and what are the issues, as I said, around the replacing of the filters, the cost to schools – is that happening, is it not happening – and the warranties? What is going to happen to the HEPA filters? Are they just going to lay dormant? Were they positioned in the right places? Again I say there are basic issues around maintenance, about fixing windows that need to be opened. I think that is the best form of ventilation for our schools, and I would urge the government to get on and identify those areas. I commend Mr Limbrick for bringing this documents motion, and I urge the government to support it and get on and release those documents.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:25): As I rise in front of an air purifier, I look forward to making a brief contribution on this subject today. I am disappointed that Ms Crozier has decided to leave the chamber immediately, but I am sure you will make up for the lack of volume, Mrs McArthur.

I do rise to make a few comments on what is an important subject and affirm again, as Mr Batchelor has, that in line with convention the government will not be opposing this motion which has been brought for us today by Mr Limbrick. It goes to an important subject, and that is the rollout of these HEPA purifiers across schools in Victoria. It was a \$190 million investment that this government was very proud to make because it is a government that has consistently put the health and wellbeing of all Victorians, and indeed all students, at the forefront. We know that a total of 110,000 HEPA purifiers were procured for schools, which was enough to cover every classroom, staffroom, gym and so on in eligible schools. I understand that of that number, 107,000 were delivered across 2021 and 2022. If Ms Crozier were here, I might actually agree on one little point with her to say that, yes, obviously ventilation is the best form of air purification, but we cannot always do that. It is not always weather appropriate to do that either, and that is why HEPA purifiers are so very important. There have been things that we have learned through the pandemic, and not just for COVID of course but for all sorts of other nasty bugs and viruses. These air purifiers are a great thing, and they are one of the tools that we should all be using insofar and as much as we can. Whether it is getting our flu shot, I know I got my flu shot last sitting week down here along with Mr Luu from the other side, and I hope many other members did too. I hope you did, Mrs McArthur.

Bev McArthur: I'm over vaccines.

Michael GALEA: Well, I will make sure to stay away from you in the peak of flu season then, Mrs McArthur, in that case. They are a very important tool, despite what some members opposite say. Vaccines are actually a very important tool, as are air purifiers. Indeed we have seen many investments by this government during the pandemic, and having air purifiers in schools is obviously something that goes to the heart of state administration. But we also saw this government having to step repeatedly

into areas of federal responsibility when there was a complete dereliction of duty by the former federal Liberal government, a complete failure to invest, whether it was in quarantine or whether it was in primary health care. We saw the establishment of the 25 priority primary care centres by this Allan Labor government as a direct response to the then federal Liberal government's complete failure to invest in and support primary health care in this state and across the nation too.

But this is a government that will not back away from putting Victorians first, even when a federal Liberal government does so – even when that is the case, Mrs McArthur. I hope that you will be joining me in supporting the return of a second term of Anthony Albanese so that we can continue to have a federal Labor government that does not ignore Victorians, that actually gets on with it and that wants to invest in Victoria – whether it is railway infrastructure that your lot want to rip out, whether it is the health services, whether it is increasing those Medicare rebates, whether it is the Medicare urgent locals, the new names for the priority primary care centres. There are all these things in the space of health, and of course we are talking about education, with the full 25 per cent quotient of federal funding, which has been delivered after significant lobbying, I will say, from the Victorian Minister for Education Minister Carroll. It is great to see that only a federal Labor government is actually stepping up to deliver that, to match that and to finally give Victoria its fair share.

Even though there is some work to do in some other areas, at least with ongoing outputs we are seeing that investment from the federal Albanese Labor government. It is a great thing to see, and it is something that we certainly would not have seen under that chaotic shambles of a federal Liberal government. Certainly we would not be seeing much more investment in Victoria under a Peter Dutton led Liberal government. He would be spending all his money trying to build nuclear reactors across the state and across the whole nation, I am sure, and there would be no money left for anything else, let alone air purifiers, schools or anything else. There would be no money to support any of the, for example, 2200 major school upgrades or other upgrade projects that this government has undertaken over 10 years, including the 85 level crossings that have been removed. Indeed we know he is not going to support Sunshine or the airport rail link or the Suburban Rail Loop, so he is going to rip funds out of Victoria all for his nuclear fantasy. Instead, on the other side of the debate, we have a federal Labor government that actually knows where Victoria is on the map and is prepared to continue to invest in the state of Victoria.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:30): I think we have heard it all today. Mr Galea said this government – I do not know, was it the Andrews Labor government, the Allan Labor government, Carroll or Williams? We do know who is coming next – put the health and wellbeing of the people of Victoria first. No, you did not; you locked them down like no other country in the world. If you had only let people out in the fresh air, they might have been saved. Think of the children that had to be locked up at home. They did not have an air purifier in everybody's house. They were locked inside more than anybody else in the world, never mind an air filter that you spent nearly \$200 million on. Now it will end up in landfill. If you really wanted to do something, why didn't you fix the windows and the doors at schools? Why didn't you give them an air conditioner? You are a monumental disgrace, you lot. And what about the advice the health officials gave? We understand that it may not have been taken up by Mr Andrews in the correct way.

We all know about your incompetence at rolling out big-ticket items – take the east–west link or yesterday's Commonwealth Games report. You cannot roll out anything. You are a total failure. What about the fridges you delivered to everybody? They ended up in landfill too – and you talk about being concerned about the environment. You are just a disgrace.

How many HEPA filters were needed in Sweden, which had the best results during the COVID pandemic with how many lives were lost compared to the population? They did none of this. They did not need a HEPA air filter.

We need transparency in this government. Mr Limbrick's motion is absolutely right: we need every document relating to this \$200 million rollout. Victorians have a right to know where you spent the

money, how you spent the money and why you spent the money and a cost–benefit analysis as to whether it did save one child’s life. Think of the children that committed suicide because you locked them up. That was a total disgrace as well. So you need to provide all these documents that Mr Limbrick is calling for. He is absolutely right. Transparency in this government would be a new phenomenon for the whole lot of you – you would not know what it meant. Mr Limbrick’s motion needs to be supported.

Motion agreed to.

Electricity infrastructure

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:33): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the government has not made public the submissions to the:
 - (a) regulatory impact statement on electrification;
 - (b) Victorian energy upgrades strategic review;
- (2) 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:
 - (a) the submissions to the regulatory impact statement on electrification and the Victorian energy upgrades strategic review;
 - (b) all documents relied upon or drawn upon by the Essential Services Commission during the granting of a transmission licence in February 2025 to Transmission Company Victoria, a subsidiary of the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO);
 - (c) documents submitted to AEMO by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) in 2024 and 2025 concerning the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) project and the Western Renewables Link project;
 - (d) formal communications to AEMO since 30 June 2024 by the:
 - (i) Minister for Energy and Resources;
 - (ii) Minister for Climate Action;
 - (iii) DEECA; and
 - (iv) secretaries or deputy secretaries of the department.

This is a straightforward documents motion in many ways. It falls in a couple of parts. The first relates to these public submissions to the regulatory impact statement on electrification and the Victorian energy upgrades strategic review. The RIS on electrification is a highly impactful set of regulations the state government is proposing. There have been an enormous number of submissions – detailed submissions from industries that are going to be directly impacted and detailed submissions from members of the public as well. These are not public and they should be. There is every reason that these should be seen, and the community can actually make up their mind on the veracity of many of them. I have seen a number of them because certain industries have actually directly provided those to me and some have provided their submissions to the press as well. But many are not yet available.

In the case of the energy upgrades strategic review, we know what a dog of a project the Victorian energy upgrades scheme has been. We all remember the dozens of fridges that were delivered, with some businesses getting six or eight fridges delivered to their business. We can all understand the purpose of one or two fridges at a business, but it was very hard to see the purpose of six or eight fridges being delivered to those individual businesses. There is obviously a very significant cost to this scheme, and that scheme is sheeted directly home to those consumers, either households or businesses, across the state. It is a cross-subsidy that is paid by every energy user in the state. It is not very transparent for people; it is well over \$100 a year now. The Victorian energy upgrades scheme is a bit of a catastrophe too in the way it is operating with the high price of abatement that is done through that scheme. It is high compared to other jurisdictions in Australia. It has been running at somewhere around \$120 to \$130 a tonne, very different from the figures in other jurisdictions.

The energy upgrades strategic review is being undertaken. I notice the Victorian energy upgrades bill is in the lower house but the strategic review has not been completed. We think that this should be completed and made public as fast as possible, but we also think that the submissions to this process should be made public so that people can see them. We note the government is legislating on this now before the review is completed. I also make the point that the legislation is there before the review has been completed and the review is being undertaken by the department itself, so the department is reviewing its own homework. I imagine it will give itself a good mark. It will say, 'I've done very well as a department. I'll do my own review and I'll give myself a big tick.' That is what I think they will do; I am making a prediction here. I think it is very amusing. Anyway, they are doing this review in secret. They are not doing it in a way that is transparent. The submissions that have come forward are not available.

In terms of the recent decision to give Transmission Company Victoria, a subsidiary of the Australian Energy Market Operator, a transmission licence, it is not a transmission company; it is a construction company that is doing the work of AEMO in constructing a particular set of lines. But it has been given the licence as a transmission company to go onto people's properties at will, and we think the set of documents that lay behind the decision of this government body and its subsidiary TCV ought to be in the public domain. We think the documents submitted to AEMO by DEECA over the last year or so concerning VNI West and the Western Renewables Link should be in the public domain too. We know that AEMO is a particularly secretive body. It is a body that is a national body. It is a body that is not a transparent body, and this will help with transparency. It is the state government documents that have gone to AEMO.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:39): Mr Davis stands over there and talks about transparency and all these sorts of things. I tell you what, the Victorian people have not seen an energy policy out of the Liberals for a good decade. They have no policies, nothing to bring to the Victorian people. Instead Mr Davis spends his time talking about publication of submissions to a review that closed a number of weeks ago. All these submissions will be made public for Victorians to see unless people have made it clear they would like their submission to remain confidential. But this is the best Mr Davis can stump up; this is the best the Victorian Liberals can stump up.

I have said it before and I will say it again: when a party are underpinned with no values, when there is no value set, when they did not know why they get out of bed every morning, when people in the Liberal Party do not know why –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, this is a straightforward documents motion that picks up these points here. It is not an opportunity to attack the opposition gratuitously and widely in a way that has nothing at all to do with the motion.

Michael Galea: Further to the point of order, Acting President, this is a motion requesting documents regarding energy. Mr McIntosh is well within his rights to discuss the topic at hand as the lead government speaker.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I think what we will do with the points of order is just bring Mr McIntosh back to the documents motion.

Tom McINTOSH: I am going to double down here: Liberal Party policy on energy is an absolute disgrace. It has been for years, whether it was federally – their revolving door of energy ministers and media advisers; every time there was a new media adviser there was a new media policy –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, this is a narrow documents motion. It has got nothing to do with federal matters or leaders. It has got nothing to do with media advisers, which is where he was heading. I am sorry, media advisers have got nothing to do with this motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I ask Mr McIntosh to come back to the motion.

Tom McINTOSH: Wow, the Victorian opposition energy minister has just said that federal –

David Davis interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: What are you? Shadow, sorry – shadow indeed. He just displays how little he understands about energy, how little he goes into detail and how Fly Davis operates on the fly. Here we are again. He is asking for submissions that were submitted only a couple of weeks ago rather than coming to Victoria and saying what their plan is on energy.

We know they have no plan. The Liberals are nothing but negative. They bring negative, nasty opposition to everything. They have stood against renewables for decades. Victorians have shown the Liberals they want solar on their rooftops and that is exactly what they have done. Now Victorians are showing the Liberals they want batteries in their homes and that is exactly what they are doing. They have shown they want hot water that is cheap and affordable, with heat pumps, and the Liberals again stand there and naysay. I want to ask the Liberals what their is position on the tens of billions of –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, again, it is a narrow motion. It is not for the member to ask the Liberals a set of questions. We are talking about this very straightforward, narrow documents motion.

Michael Galea: On the point of order, Acting President, Mr Davis is attempting to debate in what is a point of order. That is not a point of order, and I ask Mr Davis to stop making frivolous points of order in order to debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is 2 minutes, 43 seconds left. I ask Mr McIntosh to stay with the motion.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: I will get to the point: the Liberals have no energy policy, and that is exactly why they come in here with these ridiculous motions asking for submissions to be released that were only submitted in recent weeks. If Mr Davis was serious about his role, he would be standing up and saying to Victorians that one of the most important things for this state is electricity for our businesses, for our homes, for our government services. It is absolutely crucial to this state. It has been crucial to the success of this state, to things like the automotive industry – which you guys scrapped, if you do not remember that –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, we are now diverting again from the motion. We are now talking about the automotive industry. I put it to you that the automotive industry has a very, very tangential link to this motion.

Michael Galea: On the point of order, Acting President, Mr McIntosh has not been speaking for 3 minutes, but he has been interrupted four times now by Mr Davis. I ask for him to be allowed to continue his contribution.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I bring Mr McIntosh back to the motion.

Tom McINTOSH: The Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources has now said that energy has nothing to do with manufacturing in this state. That just shows how little he grasps the concept of how important it is in this state, and that is why Victoria cannot afford to have the Liberals in power, because they have no values, no policies, no idea on how to power this state. That is why we see cheap stunts. And that is why I was talking about media advisers, Mr Davis, because you do not have in-depth policies –

David Davis: On a point of order, Acting President, he is diverting now to talk about media advisers, which has nothing to do with this motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I will bring Mr McIntosh, for 1 minute and 38 seconds, back to the motion.

Tom McINTOSH: If the Liberal Party would come to this place with an idea, with a chestnut of an idea on anything, but let us say energy, one of the key things that underpins this state, we could sit here and we could debate ideas, we could debate investment.

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, I would just like to bring up Mr McIntosh's favourite point of order, which is that it is unparliamentary to point.

Tom McINTOSH: I was holding a pen. How can I be pointing? The key point here –

Bev McArthur: On the point of order, Acting President, Mr McIntosh's pen in his hand is clearly a weapon of destruction.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is no point of order. I will bring Mr McIntosh back to the motion, please.

Tom McINTOSH: The only weapon the Liberals are setting up in this state is a nuclear reactor that could be used as a weapon against us. I will again come back to the fact that if we are going to discuss energy in this place, if we are going to discuss the most important thing to this state, we need to have serious, fair dinkum conversations. I want to know, Mr Davis: what is your position on the tens of billions of dollars of investment in offshore wind in this state? What is your position on continuing to see Victoria's renewable energy generation grow? It is now 40 per cent. From day dot, you said it cannot be done. You say everything cannot be done, because that is all you do. So where are you on offshore wind? You are against the jobs, you are against the investment and you have got fairytale ideas on nuclear that are never going to amount to anything. It is up to this side to ensure the generation capacity, the storage capacity, the ability for Victorians to generate their own power at home or to have a generator going into the grid so that we have assured, reliable, affordable energy in our grid. I am absolutely proud to be part of a Labor government that takes it seriously, unlike a joke of an opposition who run their energy policy through their media advisers.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:48): This opposition – the opposition over there; that is what they are – are absolutely in opposition to anything that requires transparency in government and accountability in government. You would not know what it meant. It is a secret state you are operating over there. Mr Davis's motion requires publication of all documents relied upon or drawn upon by the Essential Services Commission during the granting of a transmission licence in February 2025 to the Transmission Company Victoria, a subsidiary of the Australian Energy Market Operator, or AEMO. As I have said before, this decision is a complete fiction. It is a travesty, ignoring not only the consultation responses Engage Victoria sought from the community but the letter and the spirit of the rules. TCV has no intention whatsoever of transmitting electricity; it cannot and it will not. In fact as a wholly owned AEMO subsidiary, it would be completely inappropriate if it did. This is simply a decision of convenience, one which bends the rules purely to allow TCV to exploit existing law to force access to 250 farms in our region potentially affected by the VNI West project. These things matter. When the laws in this area were created, it was understood that private property rights are vital and that to override a landowner or a home owner and force access could be permissible only in the most vital circumstances. For the same reason, the power is granted only to a small number of essential agencies, those actually involved in transmitting power and ensuring its safety.

Instead of changing this law, however, this government's agencies are simply ignoring it. That is why we need every document that Mr Davis has called for here. Granting the licence to an organisation not involved in delivering power is subverting the original intent of the Parliament that passed the legislation – get that into your heads. Section 93 of the Electricity Industry Act 2000 details the powers. They are clearly granted to an electricity corporation, elsewhere defined as 'an entity which holds an Essential Services Commission (ESC) licence'.

We absolutely need these documents – we need every single one of them – and if you are absolutely a responsible government, you will readily supply them. What have you got to hide? You are forever hiding behind a secret veil of government operation, which is just fundamentally disgraceful, and the

Victorian public deserve better. We need full disclosure of how this travesty of a decision was cooked up behind the scenes, behind closed doors. You will not tell anybody anything. The Victorian public, especially the landowners, and everybody associated with the rollout of transmission towers in this state deserve to know exactly what is going on behind the scenes in this place. Why wouldn't you want to provide them?

The ESC's licence award to TCV is far from the only questionable thing about VNI West. VNI West is a generation-defining potential infrastructure development. Serious questions remain about its necessity, its resilience and the fact it will result in us becoming net importers of energy from New South Wales. The least we need to know is what the government is saying. What are you saying behind the scenes to roll out this operation that you are trying to roll out? I might say that you have been such a failure you have not got one spade in the ground for the Western Renewables Link project, which was meant to be finished last year – a total failure. You want to run roughshod over the lives and livelihoods and the environment of every single person in this state when you are rolling out the transmission operation in this state. We need every document that Mr Davis has called for.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:53): Mr Davis, you are all wind and no turbine. What a ridiculous motion we have before us today. You are asking for documents – submissions to an inquiry which will be published. I know that Mr Davis has a hard time understanding things like staffing timelines and things like that. No wonder he is putting forward a six-week select committee this afternoon. He has clearly got no comprehension of workload of committee staff and of staff in other agencies as well, because this government has been very clear that we will be publishing these submissions, the ones that Mr Davis is calling for, which goes to the point of, again, the ridiculous motion that we have before us today. What do we expect from the party whose best policy is the \$600 billion nuclear fallacy that Mr Davis and his friends want to inflict on Victorians?

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Suburban Rail Loop

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (10:54): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) Infrastructure Australia's recent report raised serious concerns about the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) East project;
- (2) in the 2025–26 Australian federal budget announced on 25 March 2025, the Commonwealth government failed to provide the additional \$9.5 billion needed to deliver the SRL East project;

and, in light of this new information, requests the Auditor-General to update their 2022 report to examine the SRL East project.

This is a very simple motion. Of course the chamber cannot refer investigations to the Auditor-General, but given what we now know about the Suburban Rail Loop, this chamber has an opportunity to politely request the Auditor-General do some further work on the Suburban Rail Loop. We know, at least from the Infrastructure Australia report – a quite damning report that was looking at the Suburban Rail Loop East project – they used a discount rate of 4 per cent when they should have used a discount rate of 7 per cent. The Victorian Auditor-General actually found the same thing and condemned the government for the same thing that Infrastructure Australia did. We of course know that the projected cost escalations that have occurred since the release of that business case in 2021 are based on 2021 construction costs. And we know from the government's own budget papers – I am looking forward to hearing an explanation from those opposite and the speakers that will parrot the Premier's private office talking points – there has been a 22 per cent increase sector-wide in construction costs. Yet the government has failed to factor in any cost escalations for the SRL East project – none. It believes, as was revealed in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last year, that the SRL would somehow be immune to cost blowouts.

We know that Infrastructure Australia completely obliterated their business case for the SRL East project, particularly their value capture assumptions. I will put it to you this way: they believe that amount is extraordinary, but they also believe the real cost in nominal terms will actually far exceed the \$11.5 billion in the long run to offset the upfront cost. We know their value capture taxes are a fantasy. They have ruled out residential homes being captured by the value capture taxes, so what they are looking for and taxing is commercial property and commercial uplift. If you are running a business and looking to start a commercial enterprise – I know Mr Welch had a few of those in his past career before coming into Parliament – why would someone choose to invest in an area where they are going to be slugged with an enormous amount of additional taxes? And why is it that the both the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and the Premier refuse to rule out taxing Monash University and Deakin University? How much will students' HECS debts increase because of the government's decision to not rule that out? We can only assume they are going to be taxing them. Why is it that it is Monash University and Deakin University that are being asked to pay but Melbourne University will get a brand new Parkville station? They were asked to pay nothing. Why the double standard? Why is it students at Deakin and Monash universities that will be obviously slugged extra on top of their HECS debts in order to pay for the Premier's vanity project? It is a vanity project.

In 2022 the Auditor-General found that there was a real risk the value had been overstated and the benefit-to-cost ratio of the SRL may really be around 51 cents for every dollar spent. It also said the economic value is overstated and that:

The business case DoT and SRLA provided to the government for the SRL program did not support informed investment decisions.

The government calls it a business and investment case; it really is an investment case. A business case looks at all options, including not proceeding and looking at other pathways.

The business and investment case did none of that. There is a reason why Infrastructure Australia call it an investment case, because it is not a business case. With a business case you start off looking at all options, all options on the table to make it stack up; an investment case is once you have already made a decision. So they are trying to firm up their Suburban Rail Loop with a business case which is extremely flawed. As I said, the Auditor-General found similar to what Infrastructure Australia found, wondering why the government was using a 4 per cent discount rate when the Department of Treasury and Finance's recommended rate is 7 per cent. So they are cooking the books; they have got unverified cost assumptions and unbalanced value capture projections – that is what Infrastructure Australia has said on the Suburban Rail Loop. We believe it is time to cancel this project. It is time for the Premier to cancel this project.

We see reports today that the Allan government is preparing to ink the most expensive contract for the Suburban Rail Loop East within months, despite further funding threats and a black hole even from your federal Labor colleagues. Both Catherine King and Clare O'Neil and others have said the Victorian government has more work to do regarding value capture and regarding what was stated in the Infrastructure Australia report. We know that the government has said that now Treasury and Finance are looking into value capture; well, the problem with the value capture modelling and modelling mechanisms is what you do when you are working out how much you could get in value capture. You do not go from a set figure and work backwards. \$11.5 billion is just an enormous amount. You do not go from \$11.5 billion and work backwards, and that means that Victorians will be paying increased taxes; they will be paying increased taxes because of the flawed process of value capture. I will just point out – because obviously they are having a bit of trouble correcting their homework on this – and I will take you through a bit of a history lesson regarding the city loop. Up to 25 per cent of the Melbourne city loop was expected to be funded by benefit area levies, so value capture, by Melbourne City Council rates over 53 years, because they would obviously benefit from the city loop. CBD businesses and non-residential landlords who benefited from accessibility created by infrastructure contributed to the cost of the project. The levy managed to raise the intended contribution sum of \$20 million in just 32 years; however, due to massive cost overruns, this diluted

the amount to 3 per cent of the final project cost. So you can see what has happened here, and we know that Labor cannot manage money, and they certainly cannot manage major projects. There is not one single major project that has not blown out, but they are expecting the Suburban Rail Loop not to blow out as we have seen with other blowouts like \$4 billion on the Metro Tunnel and massive blowouts on the West Gate Tunnel. Originally North East Link was a \$10 billion project, then it was a \$16 billion project and now it is a \$26.9 billion project. So we know on these massive projects you can never trust the Labor government not to blow out its costs. Its assumptions, we know, are completely flawed. We cannot trust them to get this right. So we know even if they would have said a third of the project is value capture, it is highly unlikely that that is going to fund a third of the project. So who is going to fund it? Victorian taxpayers, and we are seeing huge increases of taxes pass through this Parliament. We almost have one a week these days, increase in taxes – and we know it is because Labor cannot manage money. So we have got a government looking to ink billion-dollar contracts on the Suburban Rail Loop without the additional \$9 billion from their federal Labor colleagues – without the additional \$9 billion. We know what Standard & Poor's said –

Sonja Terpstra: They will continue to fund it.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I will take up the interjection. We have got a confirmation from across the chamber that Anthony Albanese will continue to fund the Suburban Rail Loop.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Mulholland is misleading the house. This whole contribution by Mr Mulholland has been a litany of misleading the house, and I ask that if he is going to continue to mislead the house, this be taken into account, and if it continues I would ask that he provide a personal explanation. And by the way, Mr Mulholland, if you want to make accusations about people, you should do so in a substantive motion.

Richard Welch: Further to the point of order, Acting President, if there were any items that misled the house, could Ms Terpstra please provide examples of them, if they are making that accusation?

Sonja Terpstra: Further to the point of order, Acting President, Mr Welch should not abuse the standing orders by making frivolous points of order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I ask Mr Mulholland to continue on the motion.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I actually was asked to put a substantive motion on the Minister for the SRL misleading the house, and I did exactly that. So if Ms Terpstra would like to go ahead with that, I would welcome that.

We know this government cannot manage money – whether it be the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report on major projects reporting, which does show a pricing reset. We have yet to see the details of that pricing reset for the Suburban Rail Loop, but we know the government is looking at inking contracts when it is quite clear that Victorians do not support this project. In fact there was a recent SEC Newgate Australia poll which found that more people supported 'None of the above' than they did the Suburban Rail Loop – just 16 per cent of people around Victoria supported the Suburban Rail Loop as a priority. But we have got the Premier and the Minister for the SRL looking to ink contracts without federal funding from their federal Labor colleagues and without any modelling or detail on value capture assumptions, which means Victorians are going to be paying the price for this. We know Standard & Poor's, our credit rating agency, have warned that without additional Commonwealth investment Victoria risks a credit rating downgrade. And we know on this side of the house that the consequences of that will be dire for Victorian families and investment and jobs in Victoria. It will make it harder to do business in Victoria. And if the Premier cannot now, after all we know from Infrastructure Australia, from previous Auditor-General reports and from the national audit office – then her colleagues need to tap her on the shoulder and develop an exit strategy for her. Infrastructure Australia recommends the Premier develop an exit strategy. I believe the Premier's colleagues need an exit strategy for the Premier. We know this, because we saw in the *Age* today:

Two senior state Labor figures, speaking in confidence to discuss internal party matters –

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, on relevance, Acting President, I do not know what an article in the newspaper on polling has to do with this motion on the Suburban Rail Loop that we are debating today, and I ask that Mr Mulholland be relevant to the motion and be brought back to the motion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): Noting that first speakers do have more leeway, I ask Mr Mulholland to refer to the motion.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I was just about to get to the word ‘SRL’, which would have put me in relevance. I will repeat the whole quote again, because I think it is important for this chamber to know:

Two senior state Labor figures, speaking in confidence to discuss internal party matters, said the state government had to rid itself of the SRL but may need a new leader to make the call.

It is quite clear the Victorian government need to develop an exit strategy for the SRL and the Premier’s Victorian Labor colleagues need to develop an exit strategy for the Premier, because this Premier is not for turning on her massive vanity project. She wants to tie herself to Daniel Andrews – good luck to her. We know this was developed in a locked room at PwC.

Members interjecting.

Evan MULHOLLAND: It was. It was released, and that PwC analysis said that it would cost \$50 billion from Cheltenham to Werribee – the whole thing would cost \$50 billion. That announcement came before the 2018 election in a Facebook post on Daniel Andrews’s Facebook page. Jacinta Allan was one of the only ones that knew about it. State cabinet colleagues did not know about the announcement of this supposed \$50 billion project before it was released – how disrespectful. We know that many of the Premier’s cabinet colleagues do not support the Suburban Rail Loop. How would you feel if you were a member in the western suburbs?

Members interjecting.

Ann-Marie Hermans: On a point of order, Acting President, I really cannot hear what is being said with Ms Terpstra constantly interjecting in the background, and I ask that you keep the chamber quiet please.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): I am happy to say I could hear Mr Mulholland very well, but I will ask Mr Mulholland to continue without assistance.

Evan MULHOLLAND: How could the Premier possibly proceed with this project with what we know? Victorians were not told of the massive cost. They were told it was going to be \$50 billion from Cheltenham to Werribee in 2018. But now we know through Infrastructure Australia just the eastern section alone is going to cost around \$50 billion – just that section for one part of Melbourne. They were not told about massive high-rise developments coming to their neighbourhoods before any election regarding the Suburban Rail Loop. Those draft structure plans only came out for consultation after the last election, only recently. I will tell you what, many people in communities like Cheltenham and Box Hill are very, very upset at these plans that have been sprung upon them, and now we know that the SRL comes at a massive cost to these communities. But how would you feel if you were a member in the western suburbs knowing that even if the government were successful across the entire SRL and Albanese tied himself to Jacinta Allan and funded all of the federal contribution for all parts of the Suburban Rail Loop, given all those assumptions and if they do not have any delays, it would not get to Werribee until 2067.

Our growth areas are absolutely starved of infrastructure – the growth areas in the south-east and in the northern suburbs, definitely. Just look at the neglectorate of Greenvale, who get no funding for infrastructure, or places like Wallan and Kalkallo – no funding for infrastructure. Gab Williams was on Donnybrook Road providing no funding but welcoming an announcement to blow up a roundabout

the state government only just rebuilt in 2023. These areas are neglected, and it is quite clear that the priority project for this Premier is the eastern suburbs at the expense of everywhere else.

This is a very simple motion. It respectfully requests the Auditor-General update their 2022 report to examine the Suburban Rail Loop East project, and I hope this motion is supported.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:14): I rise to make a contribution on this motion standing in Mr Mulholland's name, which calls on the house to note Infrastructure Australia's recent report about the Suburban Rail Loop, makes some commentary around the federal budget allocation and then asks the Auditor-General to update their 2022 report. The government's position on this is that the government opposes this motion.

I might just start with the bottom part of this motion first, the last premise, which is calling on the Auditor-General to update their report. Anybody can ask the Auditor-General to undertake some inquiry into anything, so moving a motion in this house about this is nothing more than a stunt. I have had the benefit of listening to Mr Mulholland's contribution, and it really is, quite frankly, a fact-free zone over there on the opposition benches. As a member for the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region and as a member in that region who will see the first tranche of the Suburban Rail Loop be built, which is SRL East, I can tell you that in the federal electorates of Menzies and Deakin but also in the state electorates of Warrandyte, Croydon and Bulleen there are plenty of families who have talked to me about Suburban Rail Loop East and have said to me they really cannot wait for their child, who wants to access university, whether it is Deakin University or Monash University, to be able to get down to Box Hill, to get on the Suburban Rail Loop and to get to those universities without having to drive their car, if they can afford one. I was looking at data on this the other day, and the number of young people who are applying for their licences is declining. That might be for a number of reasons, but I certainly know that if you are a young person and you are in insecure employment and you may not be earning a lot of money, perhaps buying a car might not be within your remit, and certainly being able to pay for insurance may not be in your remit. Therefore you are going to have to catch public transport, and at the moment you might have to catch four buses down to Deakin University. If you live in the Manningham LGA, you are going to have to get to Box Hill, perhaps, to get onto other buses. The Suburban Rail Loop East will provide a real alternative for those people who will be able to get on public transport with SRL and catch one seamless train down to either Deakin or Monash University, and that is not there right now. I know parents in the top end of my electorate are telling me they cannot wait for that.

In fact people in Victoria voted twice for this project. It is a good opportunity for me to correct the record, because again what we are hearing from those opposite, and particularly Mr Mulholland, is all the negativity around this and just denying and not acknowledging the fact that people voted for this twice and people want this project. When I am out in my electorate talking to people, they are not talking about what you are talking about, they are talking about how they cannot wait to see it get built. They have got lots of questions about what it is going to mean for their children.

It is about not only the public transport aspect of being able to get on a train but the homes that are going to be built, the 70,000 affordable homes that are going to be built around these station precincts, because I know plenty of young people are telling me they want affordable homes.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: You do not live or have representation in my electorate, Mrs Hermans. Mrs Hermans would not know what I am talking about. She does not have constituents in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. What I know is I have got parents saying to me, 'My child wants to live where they grew up – that is what they want.' Those opposite can deny it as much as they like, because they will be in electoral oblivion when it comes to an election and people get a third chance –

Members interjecting.

Sonja TERPSTRA: You are already in electoral oblivion. I cannot wait to tell people in my region how often the Liberal–National coalition talk down our public transport projects, because we know that those opposite never did anything, never built anything. They have never put a shovel in the ground for anything. They have never done anything. In fact they closed schools, closed hospitals and have never built a public transport project in their lives.

I note that the federal opposition leader Peter Dutton was out announcing their policy for them without them even knowing – that he is going to oppose SRL and wants to prioritise airport rail. Well, guess what, we are doing both. We are going to do both, because we know that when we are governing for all Victorians, we govern for all Victorians, and that means that people in the western suburbs are going to get the public transport upgrades that they need and deserve. That is why we are upgrading Sunshine station, because there will not be an airport rail unless you upgrade Sunshine station, because you have to fix that. The benefits that are going to go and flow from that will be immeasurable. I was talking to my lower house colleagues just yesterday.

Jacinta Ermacora interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: No, I don't think he's ever been out to Sunshine, or Greenvale for that matter. I was talking to my lower house colleagues about what this means for them in the western suburbs, and I rely on Minister Stitt –

Members interjecting.

Sonja TERPSTRA: No, he was not. I rely on what Minister Stitt said this morning in her members statement about the schools and the investment in infrastructure and roads that is happening under our government. But again those opposite do not want to acknowledge it, because all they want to do is talk down the investment this government is making. All the Liberal Party can do is be negative and spread disinformation. You are talking to yourselves and nobody is listening, particularly young people. If you want to talk about polls, Mr Mulholland, I can tell you young people are not listening to you. Young people are not listening to the Liberal Party. What they are looking for is an alternative that provides housing relief. They want to get into the housing market. Suburban Rail Loop, might I add, will provide 70,000 affordable homes for young people to actually buy into. Not only that, we are providing jobs. By 2026 we will have 4000 workers on the ground, from construction workers to engineers, human resources and comms people – a whole bunch of people. Those opposite do not want to invest in jobs for Victorians – absolutely not. They do not want to do that. All they want to do is do give shout-outs to their rich mates and make sure they make profit off of projects. It is absolutely outrageous.

What I know is this government has been fighting hard for a long time for its fair share of federal infrastructure funding, because we know under the previous federal government Victorians and this government were duded. We did not get our fair share of federal infrastructure funding. Now we have a willing partner in Canberra who has already invested \$2.2 billion in the Suburban Rail Loop, and they hate that over there because it means that we will actually get on with building this; it is actually going to be a reality.

As I said, Victorians have spoken clearly on this not once but twice. I look forward to those opposite being in electoral oblivion in the eastern suburbs because we will make sure that we tell every Victorian voter in the eastern suburbs how much you did not want this much-wanted project to proceed, because people want it and people need it. You do not know what it is like. You can hop into your rich European car and travel 3 kilometres up the road or whatever and be spoiled for choice, but I am telling you that people in the eastern suburbs do not have a choice, particularly when they are in the Manningham LGA, about public transport. They have the bus; that is it. Young people do not have the same equitable share of public transport and being able to get around. Our government recognises that, and we will be providing it.

It fits a long-held pattern. The Liberals refuse to fund things like Melbourne Metro, the West Gate Tunnel, level crossings and now the Suburban Rail Loop. They talk about infrastructure but they never back it. All they do is say, 'Isn't this terrible?' They talk disinformation about budget blowouts. Mr Mulholland is fantastic at doing this, because he selectively quotes reports. But the Auditor-General said the Suburban Rail Loop is on time, on budget. Let me repeat it: on time, on budget. Let me say it again: on time, on budget. A fourth time: on time, on budget. Mr Mulholland, I return to my earlier point. If Mr Mulholland and those opposite in the Liberal Party want the Auditor-General to do another inquiry into the Suburban Rail Loop, they do not need a motion in this chamber. Anybody can write to the Auditor-General and ask him to do that. This is a stunt. It is a stunt and, again, no-one is listening.

We will remind people in the eastern suburbs of your position on infrastructure, which is to say no to it and to say to people 'You deserve to miss out. You deserve to miss out on great, world-class public transport. You deserve to miss out on affordable housing. You deserve to miss out on the benefits of growing up and living in the place where you grew up and being able to afford a home near your family and near your friends.' That is what you are telling people in the eastern suburbs.

This is a project that Victorians have voted for not once but twice, and they will get another chance to vote for it again. In my electorate in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region I will remind everybody about what those opposite have said about this project. You do not want it to proceed and you want people who live in my region, particularly young people, not to have access to good public transport and not to have access to affordable homes. I will conclude my remarks there, but we will not be supporting this motion. The government opposes this motion.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (11:24): I rise to speak on Mr Mulholland's motion. The Greens will be supporting this motion on the grounds of transparency for public expenditure. The 2022 report from the Auditor-General titled *Quality of Major Transport Infrastructure Project Business Cases* found that:

Business cases for 3 of the 4 projects we reviewed do not support fully informed investment decisions.

On 19 February this year the Auditor-General tabled a separate but highly relevant report titled *Major Projects Performance Reporting 2024*.

The lack of public transparency on major infrastructure investments is much wider across the state. One of the findings of that 2024 detailed investigation was that:

The information public entities provide Parliament and the community is not meaningful. It does not allow the community to understand major projects' performance against expected cost, time, scope and benefits or the impact of any changes.

Relevant here as well is the time we spent in the chamber yesterday discussing the tabling of the Commonwealth Games report from the committee.

If we want to take another example from that 2022 report, the North East Link road was one of the projects that was examined in depth in that investigation. The North East Link was originally sold to the public in 2016 with a justification it would cost \$10 billion. In 2018 the project was approved with a price tag of \$15.6 billion, and at that point a business case was submitted to Infrastructure Australia claiming a cost-benefit ratio of 1.3 to 1.4. Since then the cost has increased substantially to \$26.2 billion, but no updated cost-benefit ratio has been released.

In regard to SRL in particular, I was interested to see recently that the Auditor-General is already planning a follow-up investigation. The Victorian Auditor-General's Office website states:

We plan to examine whether SRL East precincts are being planned in a way that the benefits identified in the SRL business case can be realised.

So those findings will emerge from VAGO regardless of the success or otherwise of this motion today.

With all that in mind, an ongoing problem appears to be that there is little capacity or little public reporting on the value between these large projects, and many of them are transport projects. The Greens maintain and have been frequently on the record both in this place and in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, for example, asking the government why it is not fulfilling its statutory obligations under the Transport Integration Act 2010, which requires the government to prepare an integrated transport plan. A 2021 VAGO investigation found that the government have not:

... demonstrably integrated transport planning and are yet to meet the Act's requirements for the transport plan.

It rejected the department's assertion to them that 29 transport planning documents for different modes and strategies, only 14 of which were published, fulfilled the objectives of the act. There was no unified integrated transport plan, and that remains the case.

So while we will support this motion, I will make the point that regardless of the success or failure of this motion the Auditor-General does already have sufficient existing powers to investigate further and issue update reports on this or any other matter. The Greens continue to call on the government to fulfill its obligations under the Transport Integration Act 2010 and work towards a proper, unified, integrated plan for Victoria's transport needs into the future.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:28): I too rise to speak on Evan Mulholland's motion about infrastructure and the Suburban Rail Loop East project and the 2025–26 Australian federal budget. Having noted that the Commonwealth Games was a massive failure for this government, we do need to have additional information from the Auditor-General and have the report from 2022 updated on the SRL East project. It is pleasing to note that the Auditor-General is going to be investigating the details on these, but I think we have to remember that this is a government that is failing Victorians. This government cannot manage money. It cannot manage projects. I mean, we still do not know some of the outcomes on the investigation with the CFMEU, and infrastructure is just outrageous, with situations where Victorians are paying their hard-earned money and where they are struggling to pay enormous bills, enormous taxes and additional taxes, because this government cannot manage money. Now we are in a situation where this failing idea of the SRL has not been properly costed and has not been properly funded. It was just a thought bubble in a back room somewhere. It really has not had the attention that it needs.

We need to have a look at what the debt is like here in Victoria. With our debt being at \$188 billion and rising, the only places in the world that have a higher debt than us would be the German state of North Rhine–Westphalia, which has \$220 billion; the Canadian province of Quebec, at \$304 billion; and Ontario, at \$486 billion. We owe so much to creditors that we as a state are in the top four places in debt in the world, yet this government is insisting on pushing a project that they cannot fund. What is more, many, many Victorians do not want this project, and if they had the choice of what they would like and what would be their priority, I can tell you that for the people in the south-east, this is not their highest priority.

We have people living out in Clyde and Clyde North and the east, and there is no station going out from Cranbourne to Cranbourne East and Clyde. There is nothing. It was something that we went to the election in 2018 and promised that we would deliver, but since we were not actually elected, we were not able to bring these sorts of projects forward. What about the people in Mornington? Their train line ends at Frankston, and they have to then travel out either by car or by bus, because there is no extended train line for them. I am just speaking about things in my local patch, but as many of my colleagues would be able to tell you, their local patches are also unfunded. And yet this government, this Premier, keeps insisting on the SRL. It is very clear from the reports in the *Age* this morning that the Premier's popularity is plummeting, and there is no wonder when this government does not listen to the Victorian people.

If we look at Victoria's debt, by 2027 it is estimated that we will have climbed to a whopping 214 per cent of operating revenue, which is up from 70 per cent in 2019, whereas with our counterparts in New South Wales, their debt is expected to reach 167 per cent of operating value. If we look at major states

that will be forced to pay for Daniel Andrews' pandemic subsidies in Victoria for the first time in the annual GST carve-up, economists have warned the state's new Treasurer that she needs to rein in the spending and get the finances in order. Well, we need this spending reined in, and the SRL is not reining it in. It is going to basically blow every cent there is in this state on a project that has not been properly costed, has not been properly funded and is letting the Victorian people down against much-needed upgrades. What about the upgrades I spoke about this morning in this house for schools in the south-east? Why are they not getting their funding? Because this government is insisting on using its money for things like the SRL.

Another thing that is really, really interesting – and I could not help but note this – is that in late 2023 the government allowed residents in Cheltenham, Pennydale and Highett to provide feedback on the SRL precincts. In this particular discussion paper, the surveys, there were 198 responses which were never actually released publicly by this government, which is a concern in itself.

We look at the fact that \$50 billion was the original costing, as my colleague Mr Mulholland said earlier. Fifty billion dollars was the original costing for the whole project from Cheltenham to Werribee. It was only going to cost us \$50 billion. That sounded a bit too good to be true. Well, of course it was, because we know that Labor cannot manage money, and Victorians are constantly paying the price. So this amazing claim that they had is so out of the costings of what it is actually going to cost, and it is going to be taxpayers, not just in this generation, not just in the next five years, but for generations to come that will be expected to pay for this flamboyant thought bubble from Daniel Andrews' back room. They tried to make it look like they had done something wonderful, that they were coming up with something that was fabulous that the Victorian people needed. Quite frankly, as a person who lives in the south-east, I can tell you how incredibly difficult it is for us to get to the airport, and we have been waiting for our airport out in the south-east for goodness knows how long. The fact that they now come out with, 'Oh, well, we are going to do something about that,' well, I would like to know how you are going to do something about that when you are insisting on keeping the SRL project going and using up all of Victorian taxpayers money on this project, because this project is going to mean that nothing else can be done.

We have grave concerns, because we actually care about the Victorian people. Unlike this particular government, which likes to lie about us and say we are all with the big corporates, the reality is this Labor government is the one that is attached to all of these big groups, and that is why we have to have major investigations into what is going on with the CFMEU and criminals and bikie gangs et cetera, because they are attached to these big corporate groups and we do not know where all that money is going. But we do know that taxpayers are paying an awful lot of money.

We as a coalition are committed to having an airport rail link. It is embarrassing for us as a major city, a globally known city, to have to find other ways to get from our airport into the city and to get home. It is embarrassing. Only recently a member of my family had to go to Sydney, and it took them 20 minutes to get from the airport to the place they needed to get to – they just had to jump on the train. Every other person that comes to visit us thinks that they are going to be able to get public transport straight from the airport out to the city and into the suburbs, and the reality is it is embarrassing that we cannot do this.

I also want to speak up for the people in Heatherton, who were promised their chain of parks. Because of this government insisting on having this SRL project, they have been told that their local area is going to have a train stabling yard. As a result of the government choosing to dig right near their homes instead of putting the promised park where it was supposed to be, they have been forcing these residents to have to drive around to get to the park, which has now been put in place but is a fraction of what it was supposed to be. They have been digging near their homes, and I can tell you I went there only 10 days ago and there was asbestos blowing in the wind. I do not think their headaches and everything are caused by drilling, because there was no sound going on at the time I was there, but I felt sick, and I have to say I think it was the asbestos blowing in the wind. What a disgraceful government this is. It has uncovered asbestos in that area. It should never, ever have happened, because

if they were not going ahead like bulldogs with this SRL, they would not have been doing this with this train stabling yard.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:38): I am always pleased to make a contribution in a debate in this chamber on the question of the infrastructure that this city needs and the infrastructure that our growing city needs to meet our population needs, to meet our transport needs and to meet our housing needs. Yet again in a debate like this we see the Liberal Party decrying investment in infrastructure, saying that we should not be building rail infrastructure in our city and in our state and yet again using the sort of analysis and rhetoric that would have sat comfortably amongst the legion of naysayers who, from the 1960s and during the 1970s until it was opened in the early 1980s, said that there was just no way that Melbourne needed an underground rail loop in the centre of town. It is very instructive to go back and look at those debates both in the Parliament, in this very chamber, and also on the pages of our daily metropolitan newspapers decrying this investment in underground rail as an ‘underground folly’. That is what they described it as: ‘a white elephant’. We had reports from academics telling us that there was just no way in the world that Melbourne’s population could ever justify the construction of an underground rail system. They were wrong. Their analysis was wrong; their rhetoric was wrong. But fortunately at the time the then Liberal government had the vision, the foresight and the planning to make sure that our state’s railway system was being built to meet the needs of the future and not the past. We have been here before. We have seen this before. We have heard these arguments before. They were wrong then, and they are wrong today.

The reason that Melbourne’s underground rail loop – what we now know as the city loop but was known as the Melbourne underground rail loop when legislation to facilitate it was passed by this Parliament in 1970 – is such an instructive case is because it is essentially a repeat of the rhetoric we are getting from the Liberal Party today about why we do not need to invest in further underground rail infrastructure across our city. It is instructive because the analysis of why we cannot do it is the same and just as wrong today as it was back then but also because the necessary preconditions that the Liberal Party today say are required to continue further investment in rail projects to meet our city’s and our state’s future growth needs, which in their analysis today they say we cannot satisfy, are exactly the sorts of conditions that existed back in the 1960 and 1970s.

The city loop, after all, was built without a contribution from the federal government. It was built using the resources provided by the state of Victoria and by Victorians. It was supported by revenue from the state government out of consolidated funds and particularly debentures and borrowings – so we used debt, basically, to finance the construction of the city loop, because we knew that a generational investment should come with a generational timeframe to pay for its costs. But we also had contributions from local government – the City of Melbourne. We had contributions from Victorian Railways. We had contributions from what was then known as the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. And that included special levies on rateable properties in the City of Melbourne, which commenced in 1963, to pay for a loop whose construction was initially opened in 1981 and which was fully completed in 1985, and the levies continued until the middle of the 1990s.

The Liberal Party wants us to think that the concepts that are being discussed in this motion are unfathomable, because they think it is an unprecedented way to go about constructing necessary underground rail. Well, actually, they do not think it is necessary. They do not believe a growing Melbourne needs improvements to its rail network. It needs improvements to its rail infrastructure the same way that we knew back in the 1960s, when we were planning for the city loop, that the city was growing. It grew faster than we thought, and the city loop became at capacity quicker than expected. And what did we need to do? Build another underground rail tunnel through the city – Melbourne Metro. That is opening later this year, and it is an important part of continuing the story about how you have got to think about the future when it comes to understanding demands on our suburban rail network and plan for them accordingly.

That is what this government has been doing since it was elected in 2014, thinking about what our city and our state are going to need in terms of rail infrastructure and making the preparatory planning and

investment decisions that are required so that we are building the infrastructure to meet the growing capacity of our growing city. Back in the 1960s there were some people who thought Melbourne's population would never be big enough to justify an underground rail loop in the city; they were wrong, just as those who today say that there is no need for further investment are wrong too. Hopefully that takes care of those issues about the substantive question on the infrastructure.

There are a couple of other quick points. This motion also talks about the federal budget, and one thing that is notable about the recent federal budget is that it actually invests in infrastructure in Victoria. There is actually a commitment from this federal government, from the federal Labor government, for investment in infrastructure in Victoria, because that sort of an approach – investment in Victorian infrastructure – was absent when the Liberals were in charge of this country. When there was a Liberal prime minister in Canberra, Victoria missed out. When there was a prime minister for Sydney – Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull, Scott Morrison – Victoria missed out. We consistently received less over the period of the last federal Liberal government than Victorians should have expected if we were receiving infrastructure based on our population share. From the 2014–15 to 2023–24 financial years Victoria received about \$9.6 billion less infrastructure funding than our implied population share would have seen us receive. We know the record of the Liberals when it comes to investing in infrastructure in Victoria – it does not happen. They do not believe that we need it, they do not believe that we deserve it, and when the Liberals are in power in Canberra they do not fund infrastructure. We know Peter Dutton, if he ever gets his feet in – I am saying if he ever gets his feet into the Lodge, but we know he is not going to go into the Lodge, he is going to live in Kirribilli – is going to be the next prime minister for Sydney. He has got plans to cut infrastructure to Victoria and to stop the upgrades to Sunshine station that are necessary to deliver airport rail. So when the Liberal members opposite get up and talk about how important airport rail is, they have got to explain why their federal leader wants to stop the project that makes it possible. The Liberal Party, the federal Liberals, want to cut investment in infrastructure in Victoria to keep repeating the mistakes of Liberal governments in the past. Victoria cannot afford more years where the federal Liberal Party ignores the needs of Victoria's growing population. Labor will always back infrastructure in Victoria.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:48): I rise to speak on Mr Mulholland's motion 802. Contrary to the last contribution, this is not a question of whether or not we need infrastructure. This is all about good governance – good governance in government, good governance over taxpayer money – and the Suburban Rail Loop is a complete outlier in the sense of how this project should be run with public money. I am going to run through a few things about the cost, the funding model and the governance itself and the information that goes through it. Let us be clear: the key concern is costs and the lack of update to costs. The costs were set in 2021 or perhaps even earlier, perhaps on the back of a napkin, and it is not the Liberal Party or the Nationals or the opposition going on about it; you do not have to listen to what we say – the Victorian Auditor-General's Office refers to cost as a serious risk. Infrastructure Australia are incredulous that the costs have not been upgraded. VAGO in fact noted that there is a cost reset that has been going on for perhaps over a year that we still have not seen. Even the project's own risk register notes cost as a risk. Every second infrastructure expert out there notes that they are also incredulous that this project could be delivered, and there is something we can benchmark that against. The North East Link is a roughly 6-kilometre tunnel, it goes over relatively simple geographic terrain, and it is going to cost \$26 billion.

The Suburban Rail Loop is a 26-kilometre tunnel with six brand new underground stations to be built and yet somehow magically that is only going to cost \$34 billion. It defies all common sense. When we have gone from 'pause' to 'We think it should be cancelled' it is really not a change of policy, it is a statement of the obvious. If you are signing contracts and you do not even know what it is going to cost, you are putting good governance in trouble. Infrastructure Australia have been asking for those updated costs for as good as three years, and nothing – crickets. VAGO would like to see them – crickets. The public would like to see them – crickets. We also note that those existing costs were based on very crude sampling of the contaminated sites along the route. There was some sampling at

a couple of the station sites and down at Heatherton but no proper costing of what the contamination en route is, and it is said that there are as many as 14 different contaminated sites en route.

We know what happened when the West Gate Tunnel ran into contaminated soil. It led to blowouts in the billions. It is not trivial in any sense that this cost is completely undefined, unscoped and out of date, and you really have to ask why. What has the government got to hide? Infrastructure Australia have been begging for updated figures for years, and we hear these words: 'We're working with Infrastructure Australia.' I fail to understand how working with Infrastructure Australia excludes the fact that you can update the costs, the costs that you have been resetting that you were due to deliver in June last year and still have not delivered. Just show us the figures. Show them the figures. Maybe you will get your funding. But it sort of leads to the very strong suspicion that within the governance of this project the costs are out of control and to provide the costs would be forcing you to admit there is a problem with the costs. That, I think, is the only logical conclusion you can come to from the subterfuge and the illogical intransigence on delivering a cost update on the project.

I think the reason they do not want to update the cost is because the funding model is incredibly fragile. It is fragile because they came up with the funding model before they came up with the project – \$34 billion. It is fragile and it is now broken, because the funding model in the first instance more or less assumed that this project would be 66 per cent cash funded. That is, the federal government would put in \$12 billion and it would have another roughly \$12 billion from value capture – that is cash – and they would only have to borrow \$12 billion to fund the project. But we now know of course that the federal government is not going to provide \$12 billion. We even know that the \$2.2 billion provided came with such stringent conditions that none of that or very little of that can actually go to the works. It has actually been banked into land acquisitions and assets that the government, I think, hopes it can get money back on. It is an insurance policy. It is a hedge. It is \$2 billion of hedging on it.

We go from a 66 per cent cash-funded project to one where it is now a 100 per cent leveraged project all through the build cycle, and that comes at a cost of capital. At a weighted average Treasury bond rate of around 3 to 3.5 per cent that is going to be about \$15 billion in interest. It is further fragile because the value capture model itself is fatally flawed and broken, because it assumes you are going to raise \$11 billion from the sector. Again, as Mr Mulholland pointed out, that was a calculation developed working backwards. If you even put a basic net present value onto that – the time cost of money, using the 7 per cent rate, for \$11 billion today in 20 years – if we are getting value capture from 2035 on, you have to raise, are you ready for it, \$22 billion on net present value to have \$11 billion of current value money. So we are paying interest rates for 30 years and we are going to have to raise more interest.

The other concern of course is the information and the governance around that. What we know is bad enough: the annual reporting is vague, the financing is vague, the project spends massively on advertising and social media and publications but no single line item in the annual report covers communications. We do not know how much they are really spending on it – basic, basic transparency. The grants process – \$300 million of grants – is listed as an operational cost. Now, the only people who list paying out money as an operational cost are the mafia, because you have to buy your way through a project. The grants process is dodgy. They signed off 90 grants in 60 minutes. That is literally 45 seconds per grant. I do not think you can move a piece of paper around a table for signatures that fast.

The qualification of the senior leadership is dubious as well. How many people have run major projects successfully in the major leadership group? And of course then there has been the CFMEU fraud and corruption on site. There have been the faux consultations where they ask for input but then provide people who cannot provide answers, and they salami-slice information out to the community piece by piece in little increments, wearing down the community. I think we are now into the fourth consultation period, and you can just see them going, 'We'll wear them out by the end of it.' Does any of their feedback from the first three consultations matter? Probably not – it is probably discounted at this point.

But it is what we do not know that is equally a governance issue that we would respectfully ask the Auditor-General to look at, and that is in the risk register. What is on it? What are the current risks? What exposure does the state have to them? The claims that we are on time and budget – well, we all know there are many ways you can fudge that language. Is the project on its critical path? Have they used the contingency that was meant to occur over 10 years? Has that contingency been used up in three years? Has there been covert descoping? Have there been covert project definition changes? The claim that works are underway – well, to what extent? We do not know, because there is no proper transparency, and there are desperate pivots in language.

I will summarise by saying in every instance this government is choosing the SRL over everything else in this state. It had a choice between health funding and the SRL, and it chose the SRL. It had a choice between mental health services and ambulance services and the SRL, and it chose the SRL. It had a choice between road repairs and the SRL, and it chose the SRL. It had a choice between the entirety of the western suburbs and the SRL, and it chose the SRL. Everywhere this government chooses the SRL over Victorians. We need to scrutinise the governance.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:58): Once again I rise to speak on yet another motion on the Suburban Rail Loop by Mr Mulholland, yet another desperate attempt to cover up his history of when he used to support the YIMBY movement. He is going to be holding his head in shame this afternoon. He is making up for it by focusing on the SRL, a project that the Victorian people have voted for twice – in the 2018 and 2022 elections – which this government is already delivering. We have got shovels in the ground at Clayton, at Heatherton and right across the SRL East corridor. I had the great privilege of being out there with Minister Shing just last week and colleagues including Mr Berger, Mr Batchelor and others from the other place to see the immense work that is already taking place on what will be a truly city-shaping project.

I have enjoyed listening to some of the contributions in this place today. I have to say though I was quite taken aback by the contribution of the Greens party and surprised to hear that in their entire contribution Ms Copsey did not once actually say anything in favour of the Suburban Rail Loop. Now, we are to believe that the Greens are supposedly in favour of public transport. Clearly that only extends as far as Richmond. I do not know where the goat's cheese curtain goes at the moment, but clearly their transport priorities and their interest in public transport end as soon as you go past Caulfield station. And what a shame that is, because we know that this is a project that will take 600,000 cars off the road, a truly transformational project not just for our city's demography and getting around but also for our environment, for our sustainability. The Greens cannot even say a word in favour of that, not even as a concept, and that is frankly disgraceful.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Livestock industry

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:00): (877) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. World Animal Protection have released a report on feedlots whose title is a perfect description of what they are – Australia's hidden factory farms. This is where cows and other animals are held in extreme confinement for up to 600 days before slaughter with the primary goal of gaining weight as cheaply and as quickly as possible. If you have ever read the label 'grain-fed' it means the animal killed was first subjected to a feedlot. This amounts to 80 per cent of the beef sold in Australia. While most feedlots are spread across Queensland and New South Wales, Victoria is supplying animals to these locations at their final stages of life. How many Victorian cows are sent to feedlots in other states to endure this horrific practice?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:01): I thank Ms Purcell for her ongoing interest in the housing of animals. This is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture. I will refer the matter on to her for a response to you.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:01): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. Feedlots are exposed to extreme temperatures and filthy environments and are at constant risk of disease outbreak. Often these conditions are how cows are raised to produce \$65-a-kilo products like Wagyu that are driving the demand for feedlot expansion. Last month at an Australian Agricultural Company owned Wagyu property in Queensland 140 cows died from thirst after their water supply was accidentally turned off. What measures are in place to ensure Victorian cows are not subjected to this cruelty as well?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:02): I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question, which is different but related to the substantive. It will be referred to the Minister for Agriculture for a response.

Taxation

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): (878) My question is for the Treasurer. I refer to Victoria's state taxation revenue, which as you know is money paid by Victorian families, households and businesses and spent in accordance with ERC decisions. Taxation revenue has risen from \$23.2 billion in 2019–20 and is predicted to rise to \$45.8 billion by 2027–28 – almost double. That is a rise from \$3502 for every Victorian man, woman and child in 2019–20 to \$6160 by 2027–28. Decisions leading to almost a doubling of the tax burden were made on your watch at the ERC table. I ask: do you accept any responsibility for contributing to the cost-of-living crisis by almost doubling the take of state taxes on already struggling families and businesses, or is it all Tim Pallas, Daniel Andrews and Jacinta Allan's fault?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:03): I thank Mr Davis for his question and the opportunity to talk about the importance of supporting families in Victoria struggling with cost-of-living pressures. That is why we are a government that is focused on ensuring that those parents of children at state schools and those in non-government schools that are doing it tough receive the school saving bonus. This has been an extremely popular measure – \$400 going straight into the pocket of parents to spend on uniforms et cetera.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, this is clearly a question to the Treasurer about tax. It is not about schools spending. She should come back to answering the question directly and not go off on a frolic.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the Treasurer was relevant to the question.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Davis, you specifically asked me about the government's approach to cost of living, and it is why we are absolutely focused on the pressures that are on families. It is why we have free dental, free glasses and free kinder. There are a range of measures that we are all about, and I am hearing a chorus from behind me in relation to the measures of support that are the focus of this government's attention on hardworking families and the pressures that they are under. Of course balancing cost-of-living pressures, ensuring that we are supporting those most in need, has to be balanced with ensuring that we have the revenue for the state to deliver the infrastructure and the services that Victorians rely on, whether that is road, that is rail or that is hospitals – a range of services that the government must provide to the community. It is all about balance, Mr Davis, but I can assure you, as the Treasurer, my focus is on the cost-of-living pressures of Victorian families, and that is what you will see as a feature of the upcoming budget.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:05): I noticed that the Treasurer hardly went near the issue of the \$3500 for every man, woman and child in 2019, up to \$6160 in 2027–28. She said it is all about the balance. Does the Treasurer believe, or is it the Treasurer and the government's position, that it is balanced to double the tax take on families in such a short period of time?

The PRESIDENT: I kind of feel that was close to asking the Treasurer for her opinion, but I will call the Treasurer.

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:06): Mr Davis, you have repeated effectively elements of your substantive question in your supplementary question. As I will repeat, considering you have, we are a government that is focused on ensuring that the revenue that comes into the state delivers the services and the priorities that Victorians rely on. You cannot deliver for the priorities of Victorians without spending the revenue that you reap.

Ministers statements: Changing Places

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:07): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is supporting all Victorians to participate in activities across the state through our investment in Changing Places facilities. Changing Places are larger than standard accessible toilets which have extra features such as a tracking hoist and space for two or more carers. We are delivering these facilities right across the state. Just last week I was pleased to open our latest facility located at Barring-buluk Park with the member for Pakenham from the other place, Cardinia shire mayor Cr Jack Kowarzik and members of the Cardinia Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee.

These specially designed facilities allow individuals with high support needs to take part in all elements of community life without having to limit their time out due to concerns about being able to access a suitable toilet. Here in Victoria we are leading the charge in making Australia a more accessible place for people with disability, with 150 out of the 300 Changing Places nationally located here in Victoria. We are proud of the fact that the Victorian government has provided \$11.4 million towards Changing Places since 2015 to build these facilities right across the state, and this included \$180,000 for the Pakenham Changing Places.

Inclusive Victoria, our state’s disability plan, is helping us build a safer, fairer and more accessible Victoria. The actions in *Inclusive Victoria* describe the activities all Victorian government departments are doing to build a fairer community for everyone. A key commitment in *Inclusive Victoria* is to create more inclusive parks so that all Victorians can take part in nature and community life, and facilities like the new Pakenham Changing Places will help us to achieve this goal. We are proud to lead the nation through our continued commitment to the Changing Places initiative, alongside our work in *Inclusive Victoria*, to make Victoria accessible for everyone. I would encourage those who want to know more about Changing Places and where they are to visit the website changingplaces.org.au.

Cannabis law reform

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:09): (879) My question is for the Minister for Police in the other place. 420 Day, an international day of action to celebrate cannabis and protest our drug laws, falls on Easter Sunday this year. There is an event in Flagstaff Gardens where very relaxed adults may risk lighting up a joint in defiance of our outdated and unjust laws. While the police at last year’s 420 event were not as heavy handed as in years gone by, there was still a significant Victoria Police presence, complete with sniffer dogs. Once again Victoria was the only state in the country where arrests were made, in this case 36 in total. The *Victoria Police Drug Strategy 2020–2025* outlines its new approach for tackling drugs: focusing police efforts on drugs that cause the most harm, disrupting drug markets and pursuing unexplained wealth. Does the minister know if the 36 arrests made were effective in addressing any of the aims of Victoria Police’s new approach, as outlined in their strategy?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:10): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question

and his interest in these matters. I will take that question on notice and forward it to the Minister for Police in the other place for an appropriate written response.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:10): Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. The previously mentioned police drug strategy talks of Victoria Police’s commitment to minimising the impact of drug-fuelled behaviour, such as violence, burglaries, drug-related road trauma, family violence and sexual assault. We would all hope to see these sorts of crimes minimised. Indeed this Parliament passed two pieces of legislation aimed at protecting the community from violent crime. Given the significant resources it will take to administer these new laws to keep the community safe from violent crime, I wonder what the justification is for devoting scarce police resources to policing a harmless event like 420. Can the minister provide information on the budget for policing the 2025 420 event on Easter Sunday, a public holiday?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:11): I thank Mr Ettershank for that supplementary question. I will make sure that is forwarded to the Minister for Police in the other place for an appropriate response.

Housing

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:11): (880) My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, your government has claimed that only 1.8 per cent of social housing was unoccupied as of March 2024; however, the most recent data shows that as of 30 June 2024 there were 4935 unoccupied public and community housing dwellings, representing a significantly higher proportion. Can you clarify how your government arrived at the 1.8 per cent figure and explain why thousands of homes remain empty while nearly 42 per cent of greatest needs households have been waiting for more than two years for housing?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:12): Thank you very much for your question, Mr Mulholland, and for your interest in social housing and the importance of making sure that as we upgrade, rebuild, build and repair social housing, we are bringing additional homes online to meet that need.

As you have correctly identified, as at 28 February this year, 1.8 per cent of public housing was vacant and in the re-tenanting pipeline. Being in the re-tenanting pipeline is about that turnover that is required upon exit of one resident and entry of another. You would appreciate, Mr Mulholland, that when people are living, often permanently, with very few breaks throughout the day for leaving their home there is more than the usual wear and tear to those homes. Therefore when people exit a property there is often additional work required and there may well be structural repair or upgrade required as well.

The 1.8 per cent which you have identified in your substantive question compares to a private market vacancy rate of 2.5 per cent in metropolitan Melbourne and 2 per cent in regional Victoria as at September last year. An additional 2.7 per cent of public housing properties are not suitable for renting, even in the short term, due to asset management reasons, and of these properties 1.4 per cent are no longer suitable for renting because they are being prepared for redevelopment or sale. Again, that is a subcomponent of the overall discussion on vacant properties. So the remaining 1.3 per cent are currently undergoing upgrades, being reviewed or will be developed.

The total number of vacant properties has reduced by almost 24 per cent, or 889 properties, over the 20 months from 30 June 2023 to 28 February 2025. As I also pointed out to you, Mr Mulholland, we do have a process of assessment at the end of each tenancy. We want to make sure that where work is identified to bring properties to a modern, habitable standard, that work is able to be assessed and then undertaken prior to tenanting. Properties that are in the process of being assessed go through that standard vacated maintenance process as well before the new occupants move in. We also want to

make sure that in accordance with the standards prescribed by the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, we are meeting those standards that apply and should apply to people within the social housing system.

Most of these properties, as I indicated in the statistics provided to you at the outset, are able to be tenanted within 28 days. What I would also say, though, is that in some instances – for example, in the high-rise towers – it often takes a very long time to re-tenant those properties simply because people do not want to live there.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:15): Given the high number of unoccupied homes, what specific steps is your government taking to expedite the allocation of these properties to families in urgent need and why has there been such a delay in making them available?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:15): I do not accept the second part of your supplementary question about a delay. We work really hard to make sure that properties are able to be re-tenanted as quickly as possible. As I have indicated to you as well, we do work very hard to make sure that the total number of vacant properties is reduced by a significant proportion over time, and we have seen 3743 properties vacant over the 20 months from 30 June down to 2854 to 28 February 2025. We want to make sure that we are putting people into homes that are fit for purpose and that meet the standards prescribed by the Residential Tenancies Act. This means that the work we have done compares favourably to a private market vacancy rate of 2.5 per cent in metropolitan Melbourne and 2 per cent in regional Victoria. As I said, that is comparably 1.8 per cent of public housing vacant in the re-tenanting pipeline as at 28 February this year.

Ministers statements: Corrections Victoria

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:16): Today I rise to celebrate the achievements of Corrections Victoria's inside to outside jobs strategy, which is an approach that is making a difference and winning global awards. With this strategy, Corrections Victoria recently received an international Correctional Excellence Award from the ICPA for helping to break the cycle of reoffending, whilst beating 79 countries and reaffirming Victoria as a world leader for our work in rehabilitation and reintegration.

Last week I was delighted to take a tour of Fruit2Work's facility in Laverton, which is a fantastic social enterprise passionately led by Rob Brown and Simon Fenech. They are an example of a great partner that is vital to the success of the inside to outside jobs strategy. I had the pleasure of meeting Ben, one of the delivery drivers, who while in prison completed vocational training which led him to success in his role today. In the two years since the inside to outside jobs strategy was launched, more than 400 people like Ben have got jobs in a range of sectors, from construction to manufacturing to office administration to warehousing. The hardworking member for Laverton in the other place Sarah Connolly, I might add, has been a strong champion of Fruit2Work, and I would like to take this opportunity to also thank her for her advocacy for programs such as these.

We know that successful reintegration means supporting prisoners throughout their post-release journey. That is why our employment service agencies, like the WISE Employment team in St Albans, who assisted Ben, play such an important role in providing practical assistance, posting job vacancies and giving 26 weeks of support following job placement. I am proud to share with all of you that Victoria has the highest rate of prison industry employment in the nation and the second-highest portion of prisoner participation in educational programs. These are not just statistics; they translate into real and meaningful outcomes, because we know that securing a job after release from prison is a key factor in reducing reoffending, which is good for everyone. This world-leading work by Corrections Victoria is inspiring and is making a difference for all.

Ministerial conduct

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:18): (881) My question is for the minister representing the Premier. Item 5.2 of the ministerial code of conduct requires ministers to:

... publish summaries from their diaries on a quarterly basis, detailing scheduled meetings with stakeholders, external organisations ... lobbyists, Government Affairs Directors, and external individuals.

This update to disclosure requirements came after recommendations from IBAC related to corruption risks from lobbying. IBAC recommended publishing monthly disclosure of ministerial diaries, amongst other measures, and the government updated the ministerial code to require quarterly publishing of diaries from 2023. These diaries were published through 2023 and 2024, providing an important transparency measure for the public. But as reported in the *Age* last weekend, these disclosures seemed to cease in the third quarter last year, and many ministers were late in submitting the September disclosures. Minister, why has the government stopped publishing ministerial diary disclosures?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:19): Mr Limbrick, I know that you have referred this question to the Premier, and I will indeed get an answer from her, but I will just make some comments in that regard, because obviously there has been a conversation amongst many ministers in relation to the reporting of this. I will state at the outset that the reason that diaries are disclosed in terms of ministerial meetings is because this government believes in transparency, and it is an initiative of the government to compel ourselves to do so. We led the most significant overhaul of parliamentary oversight in the country here in Victoria. We do have some new processes. As you have indicated, the ministerial code of conduct requires quarterly diary summaries to be published, and that is what we are doing. It is a significant step forward in relation to transparency. It is something that all ministers take seriously.

In relation to the publication versus the submitting, we are working through some of those processes. It is not entirely accurate that ministers were late. I do not want to speak for all ministers, but we are in the process of working with DPC to ensure timely reporting as well as submission of that material to improve any of the processes going forward. It is not my practice to disclose matters of cabinet, but this is something that is important to collective cabinet, and you will see improvements going forward to something that we are all behind. Diaries from the last quarter will be published very soon.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Mr Limbrick asked the question there, and I actually was looking at Mr Limbrick when he was getting the answer. He was not interjecting, and he wanted to hear the answer. The minister was giving an answer appropriate to the question. Maybe give the courtesy to the minister and Mr Limbrick that he gets the chance to hear the answer. Mr Limbrick on a supplementary.

David Limbrick: I do not have a supplementary.

Youth justice system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:22): (882) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, Liana Buchanan, the outgoing commissioner for children and young people, has said rehabilitation and education programs for youth offenders in custody have been compromised by staff shortages and lockdowns. Minister, why are you failing to provide education to young offenders in custody?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:23): Ms Crozier, I am not sure if you listened to my ministers statement about participation in educational programs. We have the second-highest participation in the adult corrections system, but we also do amazing work in the youth justice system to give young people the chance to address offending behaviour and to provide supports from an

educational perspective. I might add that I do reject the premise of your question, but I am happy to assist.

In our youth justice system we have made record investments, and I am proud of the Allan Labor government for the work we have done in particular in our youth justice system but also in our adult corrections system. There are the investments in centres of excellence. If you are talking about our youth justice system, our Cherry Creek facility is really transformational. It is obviously an important investment in terms of the physical space, but it is more than the physical space; it is the investments that we have made in intensive wraparound health services, educational facilities and also a pathway to vocational outcomes. We always need to do more to share the success stories of our youth justice system, but I can confirm that there are three young people that are now attending university level in our youth justice system. I obviously cannot go into individual cases, but when I had a look at their life circumstances, I can say that they would be unlikely to be attaining a bachelor level of education if it were not for the efforts of our frontline youth justice staff. So I do want to take an opportunity to thank the staff in our youth justice system, who do an amazing –

Members interjecting.

David Ettershank: On a point of order, President, I am interested to hear the minister's presentation, and I cannot do that.

The PRESIDENT: Can the minister continue and be heard in silence.

Enver ERDOGAN: What I will add is that we do have a strong complement of staff in our youth justice system at the moment, considering we do have historically low numbers in custodial settings. In the first place we do not want young people making contact with the criminal justice system, but when they do we will try to obviously avoid them coming into custodial settings through early intervention and diversions and the cautionary system we have that we all in this chamber reflected on during the Youth Justice Act discussions last year. But when they do come into our systems, I know how passionate the staff are; it has been one of the privileges for me to meet the staff in our youth justice system, who are committed to keeping our community safe but also committed to giving these young people the best chance to address their underlying behavioural issues that many of these young people have.

An example I gave was the engagement at university level; so these are bachelor's degrees – some of these young people are in second- or third-year university now who would have never had that opportunity out in the world because of their life circumstances. We now understand that people that come into our system come in from different perspectives and different lived experiences of life to many of us in this place that are more fortunate. But we will make every effort and continue to make those investments, working together with our partners at Parkville College but also our partners in the TAFE sector that provide educational opportunities for these young people that want to take up those opportunities.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:26): Minister, the Premier has said that under the new bail laws, 'It is my expectation that we will see an increase in the number of people on remand.' If education programs are not being delivered now, as the commissioner has alerted to, what are you doing to ensure that education and rehabilitation programs are provided to youth offenders on remand?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:26): I do reject the premise of the supplementary question by Ms Crozier. As in my substantive answer, if you listened closely, we have a strong complement of staff; we are committed to working closely with Parkville College and all our vocational partners to provide these young people with the opportunities they need. There is strong support for those young people, and for those young people that want to address their offending behaviour there will be programs in place; there is currently and there will be programs in place for any of the new young people that enter our system. There are a lot of positive changes happening

within the youth justice system, and it is important that we support our staff that are doing that important work. If anyone is watching, if you want a rewarding career there will be more opportunities going forward in the youth justice system; it is a challenging career, but it is a rewarding career.

Ministers statements: Ramadan

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:27): It was my pleasure on Friday night to attend an iftar hosted by the Board of Imams Victoria in Hoppers Crossing. Over the course of Ramadan I have had the absolute pleasure of attending many iftars right across the community. At each event the importance of community, mutual understanding and respect has been evident for all to see, and iftars like this bring people of all backgrounds together in a moment of unity, which does reflect the core Islamic values of generosity and hospitality. On Friday the conversation centred on combating Islamophobia right across our community, and I know that the newly passed anti-vilification laws will be welcomed by the community. Islamophobic incidents have risen sharply in recent times. It is hate that goes against the very fibre of the proudly diverse multicultural state that we all live in. It is why we are working in partnership with organisations like the board of imams, the Muslim Welfare Trust and the Islamic Council of Victoria to ensure that our Muslim community feel safe, valued and respected. I am proud that our government has supported the board of imams to host iftar dinners right across Melbourne, bringing together Muslims and non-Muslims alike throughout Ramadan. On behalf of the Allan government I want to wish Victoria’s Muslim community a happy Eid al-Fitr and thank each and every member of the community for the significant contribution they make to our state. Eid Mubarak.

Housing

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:29): (883) My question today is for the minister for housing. Minister, in a ministers statements last sitting week it was pleasing to hear you assure us about the redevelopment of the North Melbourne and Flemington public housing estates and that every eligible resident will have a right of return. That right-to-return messaging echoes the public messaging from Homes Victoria, but it seems in contrast to the Homes Victoria relocation manual, which under the heading ‘Insufficient redeveloped housing’ says not only that the right to return will be subject to availability but also that residents who had been at the original site longer will be given priority over people who had been at that site for less time, including people who might have, for example, been relocated from another site slated for demolition. Minister, are there other caveats on the right to return?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:30): Thank you very much for your question and thank you for the opportunity to be able to continue to discuss the right of return as we develop and build new social housing to meet that demand. As I indicated in previous answers to the chamber, and as I have talked about at length in the community, the right of return is a really important step in providing residents with certainty around what a relocation process will look like, not only from an original place of dwelling to a new location for the duration of a redevelopment but also what happens at the end of that redevelopment.

We know that many people in the course of discussions about what they want to do make different decisions to the decisions that they had indicated a preference for at the time of relocation. They may, for example, have chosen to move from an inner-urban environment and from an apartment into a suburban block with a backyard and a balcony, space for a dog and for the kids to spend time outside, and that that may be their preference to remain in that sort of configuration at the end of a relocation. We of course work with people who have been at a specific location for longer in making sure that when a relocation opportunity is provided to people to return to the same location or to the neighbourhood, that their connections to the area are respected and recognised in the longevity of their original residency and tenure. We also, though, do want to make sure that when we do have relocations in place we are working with people around what their eligibility looks like. Again, as I have said here in this place before, people may well be eligible for a different type of housing, a different type of

configuration. If, for example, you do not have the same number of dependants and therefore you do not require the same number of bedrooms, then the eligibility will change for the sort of configuration that you have asked for and that may then shape the sort of housing that is made available to you as part of relocations.

We also, though, want to make sure that in the course of a relocations discussion we are providing people with as much information as they need. Circumstances around relocation will therefore be informed by what it is that residents want, whether it is a return to the site itself or a return to the neighbourhood, a return to one type of housing or a return to another. But what we do work really, really closely with communities on is making sure that there is the best possible measure of autonomy in the decisions that residents take and also making sure that we respect the importance of certainty in those processes. So the manual is there to assist housing officers and residents with the breakdown of processes around relocation and the assistance that Homes Victoria provides as well as the processes whereby residents and their families can express views and preferences and have them taken into consideration, again with respect for longevity of tenure.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): Thank you, Minister, for that answer. Minister, 33 Alfred Street, North Melbourne, is a community where many larger families live, as there are 152 homes, all of which are two- or three-bedroom. Will there be enough larger dwellings on this site so that all these families will be able to exercise their right to return to this site if they choose?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Housing and Building, Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts) (12:33): Thank you for that supplementary question and for the specific example that you have raised around North Melbourne. The families who have a need for additional bedrooms beyond, say, a studio or a one- or two-bedroom home are not configurations unique to this particular development. One of the things that we did do with the design of the new homes at the Carlton red-brick towers was to consult with communities around what those larger homes looked like, so four- and five-bedroom homes. This is where, again, it will come down to eligibility. So when people are being relocated, the return may not necessarily be for a dwelling configuration that is the same as the configuration that they originally had, due to changed circumstances. We will continue to work with communities around the sort of demographic and the sort of need that applies there, but as I said, the right of return is a really important part of providing residents with certainty. Again, we will work closely with communities around understanding what individual families' needs are and whether they want to return to the same site or to the broader neighbourhood, for example, where housing configurations may be able to better meet their needs.

Early childhood education and care

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:34): (884) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, has land been acquired or secured in Seymour for the promised Victorian government owned early learning and childcare centre?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:35): I thank Mrs Broad for her question. It has certainly been an exciting year for Early Learning Victoria. Already this year we have opened four of the new early learning centres.

Members interjecting.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I remind those opposite, who are very quick to interject, that this is one of those occasions again when the state government is stepping into the responsibility of what is really a Commonwealth area, because we are talking about long day care and our responsibility is in the delivery of free kinder.

In terms of the Early Learning Victoria sites, we are very pleased that we have opened four of those this year, and I was recently at the one in Sunshine having a good discussion with the families there

who are benefiting from the co-location of that service with the primary school, ditching the double drop-off and benefiting from the work that the state government is doing in delivering early learning.

We will have more to say as we progress through the implementation of the Early Learning Victoria plans as it comes to each and every one of the sites that we have previously spoken of, and when we can provide a further update for the member we will.

Gaelle Broad: On a point of order, President, I just asked the minister a question about Seymour and whether or not land had been purchased. She has been talking about other sites. I ask you to bring her back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister had finished her substantive answer, and in that answer I picked up that she said this could be the responsibility of the federal government.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:37): Can the minister guarantee the centre will be open and operating by 2028 as promised by the former Premier on the eve of the 2022 state election?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:37): Further to my answer and just to clarify your characterisation, President, what I was saying is that long day care is the responsibility of the Commonwealth government, but because we know that there are shortages in the long day care services across the state the state is stepping up and delivering long day care facilities and assisting the Commonwealth in that matter. They have not necessarily always, in the best way they can, addressed that. But we are very pleased to be working with them on that now, and we are continuing to have conversations with them about the best way to do that.

Further to my substantive answer, the website does include regular updates as we have them for each and every one of the available 50 sites, including the four that we have opened already this year through to the rollout of the whole program. In relation to Seymour specifically, you can continue to find those updates on the website in the usual way.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:38): Can I thank Minister Symes for getting a response to Mr Limbrick's question from the Premier; Minister Erdogan will get one for Mr Ettershank's questions for the Minister for Police, both of those, per standing orders; and Minister Tierney will get one for Ms Purcell, both of her questions, from the Minister for Agriculture.

Aiv Puglielli: On a point of order, President, I seek your guidance in relation to constituency questions, which we are about to go to. My question 1432 to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure relating to Nillumbik and Whittlesea consultations on Yan Yean Road upgrades was due on 19 March this year. It is now April. What is the situation? Constituents are awaiting a response.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Tierney, Mr Puglielli is chasing a late response, not from you but a different minister, to a question on notice. Could you get the number off him and chase that up for him with the minister?

Constituency questions

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:40): (1510) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place. Minister, what is the state government doing to ensure clean, affordable and reliable electricity for residents and community groups? I recently visited YMCA Victoria's Camp Manyung at Mount Eliza to see the site of their new 88-kilowatt neighbourhood battery. This is one of a hundred neighbourhood batteries which are rolling out across Victoria, including 13 in the electorate of Eastern Victoria and one of six at Y discovery camps run by the YMCA. Camp Manyung has as many as 14,000 visitors every single year, and these batteries will help reduce power bills and meet the Y discovery camps' target of being carbon-neutral by 2030. This

battery is not only reducing their own costs and emissions but helping the wider community by passing on the financial benefits of lower power bills to the community through reduced fees to vulnerable and low-income students attending the camps.

Western Metropolitan Region

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:41): (1511) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Why are the western suburbs always taken for granted and put last in line for public transport investment? In the west we have been crying out for trains, buses and roads. Instead this government approved a third runway flight path right over the top of us, which will ruin our quality of life and the value of our homes by blanketing us with debilitating noise and the dregs of jet fuel. We do not want planes in the middle of our suburbs, we want trains. But the Melbourne airport rail link has been delayed again until 2033, and the promised electrification of the Melton line, first in 2018 and then a couple more times after that, was never delivered until finally they admitted it was only ever an evolving commitment, not a promise. Now we learn that the Suburban Rail Loop West was never even slated to reach the west until the 2060s – that is over 40 years away. We want trains and lanes, not broken promises and planes.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:42): (1512) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning and relates to the planning approval process for Hampton Park waste transfer station. My constituent is a resident of Narre Warren and has been following the proposed Hampton Park waste transfer station. My constituent is aware that nine south-east councils have signed a deal to supply the proposed station with waste for 25 years. From reports about half of the 500,000 tonnes of waste that will go to the transfer station will then be transported to the Maryvale waste-to-energy incinerator via trucks. So my question is: can the minister confirm if the truck route has been developed, and if so, what are the considerations for hundreds of trucks travelling to the Maryvale incinerator on local roads in Hampton Park and through Narre Warren?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:43): (1513) This afternoon my question is for the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs. Last week I joined the minister at the Study Melbourne hub in Hardware Lane, Melbourne, to meet this year's Study Melbourne ambassadors, 12 international students from across the globe who will represent and advocate for their peers throughout 2025. The refurbished hub now features upgraded wellbeing spaces and expanded student areas and plays a vital role in supporting the success and safety of international students studying here in Melbourne, particularly those in the Northern Metropolitan Region. With Victoria's international education sector contributing \$14.8 billion to the economy and supporting 63,000 jobs, it is clear how significant this sector is for both our local communities and the state. My question is: how is the Allan Labor government supporting the international education sector and international students?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:43): (1514) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister commit to prioritising construction of the duplication of Donnybrook Road and delivering the state's share of the necessary funding? Residents of Donnybrook are frustrated and have been given no hope by the Allan Labor government that it will do anything to fix Donnybrook Road. Federal Labor are no better. The Prime Minister stood in Kalkallo just to announce that they were going to tear up the same roundabout that the state Labor government upgraded in 2023 to replace it with other upgrades but did not commit to duplicating Donnybrook Road or the bridge over the highway. By contrast, the Liberals have a real plan to fix Donnybrook Road. Jason McClintock, the Liberal candidate for McEwen, has worked hard to secure a commitment from a Dutton Liberal government to provide \$192 million to duplicate Donnybrook Road as well as

the bridge over the Hume, remove the level crossing and upgrade the Mitchell Street intersection and the connections to the Hume Highway.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1515) My question is to the Minister for Environment. The Gardiners Creek catchment is one of the major waterways of the Yarra, spanning 112 kilometres over much of eastern Melbourne, including in my electorate. Kooyongkoot, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung name for this water, means ‘place of the waterfowl’. It is an important biodiversity corridor and has a significant impact on the quality and health of the water in the Yarra, the Birrarung. The precious resource is cared for by a large network of dedicated volunteers. The KooyongKoot Alliance is more than 20 different friends and advisory groups from across the catchment. When I spoke with alliance representatives last week they told me that they desperately needed funding for a paid project officer to help coordinate and unlock the time, skills and passion of the volunteers across the catchment. Minister, what support can the government provide to this amazing group of volunteers?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1516) My question is for the Minister for Environment in the other place, Minister Dimopoulos. The Allan Labor government is investing \$13.4 million in the new and upgraded dog parks program. This program aims to deliver easier access to quality green spaces to relax, socialise and play with our furry friends. Successful recipients of round 2 of the program were announced last week, and I am very happy to say that one such successful project, which received \$240,000 in funding, is at Sweeney recreation reserve in Berwick, which is going to transform some unused land into a vibrant community space with designated off-leash areas for dogs large and small. Minister, how will round 2 of the new and upgraded dog parks program improve the access to and quality of open spaces for dog lovers in the south-east?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:46): (1517) My question is for the Minister for Environment, but formerly the Minister for Agriculture was in charge. Minister, last year the wild dog program was under threat of being cancelled. This year it is being sanitised and rebranded as the vertebrate species management program, incorporating other species such as deer, pigs and foxes. Speaking with farmers at Willow Grove last week, wild dog attacks are proliferating, butchering calves and lambs, pack-attacking family dogs and tracking frightened joggers near state parks. Areas of high attack include Aberfeldy, Licola, Yellingbo, Noojee and Hill End. Doggers are overworked and under-resourced in their trapping, baiting and shooting. The current funding is approximately \$4.3 million, but this is woefully inadequate considering the expanded program. Will you, Minister, provide additional funding and extend the work program from 3 kilometres into public land on Crown land to 5 kilometres?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:47): (1518) My question today is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it relates to the eastern busway, which will run from Doncaster Road in my electorate through to Hoddle Street. I will start by saying that I am pleased to have more public transport in my region. I would have preferred a train line to be running along the Eastern Freeway, but a dedicated busway is a good start. What I am concerned about is the safety of the bus drivers and passengers when using this busway, which looks to be two single lanes right next to each other in opposing directions without any sort of space or barrier between the passing buses. These buses will be passing each other at speeds of up to 100 k's an hour. We know that bus drivers have to stick to strict timetables. I and others in the community are concerned that there is not enough space on the busway for the safe passing of buses, and this poses a safety risk. Minister, can you advise

the house what is being done to ensure that there is sufficient separation between two high-speed passing bus lanes on the new eastern busway?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1519) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. What support is the government providing to the proposed Jewish Arts Quarter in Elsternwick? Melbourne's Jewish community is a thriving hub of culture and the arts. The Jewish community here in Melbourne has a rich and proud cultural history. The proposal for a Jewish Arts Quarter or Jewish arts precinct in Elsternwick has been supported by the state Labor government. We made a \$7 million commitment at the last election. I was pleased to be in Selwyn Street at the Kadimah on Monday to hear the Deputy Prime Minister and the federal member for Macnamara Josh Burns announce an \$18 million commitment from a re-elected Labor government to support the Jewish Arts Quarter project. State Labor and federal Labor are backing the Jewish Arts Quarter, supporting a thriving hub of Jewish arts and Jewish culture right in the heart of Elsternwick.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1520) My question is to the Minister for Health, and my question is: why are residents who are requiring urgent paramedic and hospital care code 1 in Casey and Greater Dandenong waiting longer for ambulance attendances than last year? While our highly skilled paramedics and first responders do a remarkable job providing the best care to our community, according to the figures released by Ambulance Victoria from October to December 2024, only 61.3 per cent of code 1 incidents in Casey were responded to within the target of 15 minutes. This is a drop from the 64.6 per cent in the same period for 2023. In addition, Dandenong saw an 8.2 per cent decrease in code 1 incidents within 15 minutes in the quarter from 2023–24. Demand for ambulance crews remains high. Ambulance Victoria is very busy and is now having to recruit from interstate, in New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory and New Zealand.

Western Victoria Region

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:51): (1521) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health, and it is about three young children in my electorate. The dismantling of the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service at the Royal Children's Hospital is severely affecting families across Victoria, including Western Victoria. Local mother Taryn shared in the Ballarat *Courier* that she can no longer contact the CPRS for essential medical advice regarding her three-year-old son Jack, who has already undergone seven major surgeries in his short life. These sentiments are shared by Ballan mother Melanie, whose two-year-old son Arthur was born with Hirschsprung disease. In the *Geelong Advertiser*, Fyansford mother Hannah described the CPRS as a lifesaver for her five-year-old son Oscar, also born with Hirschsprung disease. Minister, on behalf of my most vulnerable constituents, Jack, Arthur and Oscar, will you ensure the CPRS is fully supported by RCH hospital management in its original form?

Eastern Victoria Region

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:52): (1522) My question is for the Treasurer. Our state is home to more than 30,000 hospitality businesses, which have been the backbone of our service-based economy. But in recent years they have reached breaking point, with almost 600 hospitality businesses in Victoria closing last year due in part to the soaring taxes in this state. In my own electorate, several hospitality businesses are struggling, including Coffee On Bate, which is near my office. Co-owner

Davy and his daughter Jenni have shared firsthand how increasing supplier costs combined with payroll tax, WorkCover premiums and rising utility bills have hurt their business. He said:

Customers are not happy, because they don't want to spend more and we are trying to keep the prices reasonable. Businesses around me are really suffering because the bills have gone up.

Treasurer, will you join me in meeting with the Shadow Treasurer to discuss how we can reduce financial burdens on businesses like this?

Motions

Suburban Rail Loop

Debate resumed.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): I rise with the harmonious tones of the Assembly bells in the background to conclude some remarks around the Suburban Rail Loop, which, as I was discussing prior to the question time interruption to proceedings, is a very, very important project and one, of course –

A member interjected.

Michael GALEA: I have got 30 minutes. Twenty now – I am losing time already. It is a very important project not just for south-east and eastern Melbourne but for the entirety of Melbourne, including for university students in Gippsland, for example, to access Monash University and to access Deakin University and of course for students in my region of the south-east – the outer lying, in my case, south-east suburbs down the Frankston, the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines – to be able to access those employment and especially those educational opportunities at both Monash and Deakin in particular. It is disappointing that my colleague Mrs Hermans, a fellow representative of the south-east, does not support those improved transport options for constituents that we represent in the region. It is disappointing indeed that in other states Liberal parties are prepared to support public transport projects but we do not have that here. We saw no federal funding for the Metro Tunnel under the previous federal Liberal government and we have seen a campaign of opposition by the state and federal Liberal parties against the Suburban Rail Loop, because fundamentally they do not support public transport projects. They also do not support providing housing for millennials and gen Zs, and that is what these activity centres around Suburban Rail Loop will also provide. I am sure we will have plenty of opportunity to discuss that after lunch as well.

I do reflect briefly again on my remarks just before the break and how disappointing it is that a supposedly progressive party in the Greens, who supposedly advocate for a mode shift away from cars to public transport, refuse to even say anything of support for what is one of Australia's most significant transport infrastructure projects in the Suburban Rail Loop. They are refusing to even support a project, as I say, that will take 600,000 cars off the road. I am not sure why that is. Maybe it is because it is not an inner-city Suburban Rail Loop from East Melbourne to Footscray – maybe that is the project they would get behind. If it went through Richmond, which is already extremely well served by existing train lines – Mrs McArthur is not here, but she would appreciate it is obviously well served by the tram tracks.

This Suburban Rail Loop is actually about providing the same level of connectivity for people in middle suburban Melbourne and for people in outer suburban Melbourne through those integrated connections at Southland station, at Clayton station, at Glen Waverley and at Box Hill in the first stage of the project for SRL East. Those are the transport options that this project is unlocking. It is remarkable that a supposedly progressive party that supposedly advocates for public transport is refusing to get behind, even in a general sense, a project such as the Suburban Rail Loop.

I noticed in the constituency questions we just had that Mr Puglielli – whose electorate will benefit from the Suburban Rail Loop at Box Hill, Glen Waverley and Deakin – lamented the fact that there is no train to Doncaster. The next stage, or one of the future stages, of the Suburban Rail Loop is for a

rail link to Doncaster. Again, there was still no support of the Suburban Rail Loop; it was very disappointing on the part of the Greens. Clearly it is only the Labor Party in this state who is actually prepared to invest in the long-term infrastructure needs of this state.

We have seen some of the fastest growing population increases across the country. Business investment is at record levels, and we have seen that business investment outstrip every other state consistently now. We are continuing to be the hub of major events in Melbourne – in central Melbourne and increasingly beyond as well, in the regions and in the outer suburbs. Whether it is local community events or festivals, we have seen many such huge celebrations just in the last week for wonderful Eid Mubarak as well. We have seen Eid celebrations at the start of this week in the south-east, in some cases with thousands of people attending these events. Major events of worldwide significance have been celebrated right across the state of Victoria as well. With a growing population – a population that, as we like to say, will be the size of London by the 2050s – you need to provide better transport options for that, and that includes orbital options.

Many of the same pundits from some newspapers and from certain far-left political parties were for many years calling for this, but it takes a Labor government to actually bring action and to actually deliver it. That is what this government is doing, and now that we are, we see some support fall away, which is quite sad to see, because this is not a quick fix. It is not a short-term political-thinking exercise; it is a long-term strategic vision for Victoria, for the way in which we move around our state and for the way in which we live, providing, so essentially, those housing options for future generations of Victorians as well. You should have a choice to live in the wonderful outer suburbs or to live in the inner city or in the regions. You should not just have that choice made for you by a bunch of stuffy old Liberal members who are opposed to all sorts of development in any sort of radius within 30 k's of the CBD. We do need to build a future Victoria for all Victorians, and the Suburban Rail Loop is a very important part of that.

Sitting suspended 12:59 pm until 2:02 pm.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (14:02): I am pleased to be able to speak about this motion put forward by Mr Mulholland, which is focused on the Suburban Rail Loop. I note that Ms Terpstra in her contribution called it a stunt. But I certainly think it is anything but a stunt, because this motion highlights updated information that we have. Infrastructure Australia's recent report did raise serious concerns about the Suburban Rail Loop project. Certainly with the Commonwealth budget recently we saw a big \$9.5 billion that was missing there that the government had their fingers crossed hoping for. In light of this new information, this motion requests the Auditor-General update their 2022 report to examine the SRL East project.

When you consider the role of the Auditor-General, it is very important. When you look at their website, they are 'an independent officer of the Victorian Parliament' and they are 'supported by around 185 staff'. It says:

We provide assurance to Parliament and the Victorian community about how effectively public sector agencies are providing services and using public money.

So I would say this is certainly not a stunt; this is good governance. Assurances are exactly what we need here, because the Suburban Rail Loop, as Ms Terpstra pointed out, went to two elections – two elections. People voted for it, so the government is saying they are committed to it. Well, that did not stop the Premier cancelling the Commonwealth Games when she was Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery. That was also promised in the lead-up to the 2022 state election, but very promptly cancelled afterwards.

The Parliamentary Budget Office have looked into the Suburban Rail Loop. They have estimated that the project is going to cost in excess of \$200 billion. The Victorian Auditor-General report that they have done on this project did find that it will cost Melburnians more than it benefits them. They found a lack of business case, very little transparency and no transport agencies involved in the original plans.

The *Age* today reported:

Infrastructure Australia last month warned the Albanese government against putting more Commonwealth cash towards SRL East until it was re-costed and more information was provided about how the state proposed to fund it. The Victorian government says one-third would be funded through unspecified value capture.

Federal Labor's \$2.2 billion commitment to the SRL has been restricted to funding "tangible elements" that could provide benefits even if the project does not go ahead.

Certainly there are lots of question marks still over this project. Value capture – what is that? How are you going to collect that? How is this project going to be funded? It is interesting when you look at the annual reports of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority, in 2023–24 employee expenses were nearly \$58 million – 102 subexecutives on an average salary income of \$322,000 every year. The money going into this project from just the smallest elements is extraordinary. We were told by this government, 'No, can't go ahead with the Commonwealth Games. Too expensive, costs too much. Had to cancel it,' and they have wasted nearly \$600 million so now we can watch another country host the games. We know this government love headlines. They love making big promises in the lead-up to elections, like the rollout of the childcare centres, which has now been pushed back; like the legacy projects that were talked about with the Commonwealth Games, which have been pushed back; like the housing projects that have been promised and have now been pushed back; like the new hospitals in different locations, which have been promised and now pushed back; like the fast rail that was promised to the regions – with free wi-fi, I might add. The Premier does need to catch the train to Bendigo – I do – and I can tell you that there are often replacement coaches in operation, services are packed I know in different locations and there is very infrequent operation.

I have mentioned it before, but in the state budget this government allocates about 13 per cent to regional infrastructure when we have a population of 25 per cent that calls regional Victoria home. The continued focus of this government on city-based projects is extraordinary. I know that I have certainly raised the need for public transport in regional areas in this house very often. I know in the Premier's own seat in Strathfieldsaye we had a local there who raised a petition because of the lack of bus services in Strathfieldsaye, which is just a very short drive from Bendigo, less than 10 minutes. Nearby in Marong, again there is a lack of bus services, and it is a rapidly growing suburb; it is highly residential now. But the Premier, although she is based in regional Victoria, seems to be ignoring the transport needs of regional Victoria and just continues to sign us up to another city-based project, despite there being big questions, I might add, over CFMEU involvement and the escalating costs that we are seeing on major projects.

The coming state budget is a chance for the government to pause the Suburban Rail Loop and get the state back on track – excuse the pun – but also to consider the infrastructure needs of the whole state, not just Melbourne. Victoria needs to become a state of cities, not a city-state. I know Ms Terpstra referred earlier to the SRL being on time and on budget. We heard very similar sentiments before the Commonwealth Games were cancelled. I know I had Senator Bridget McKenzie in Bendigo, and we raised questions in April 2023 ahead of the cancellation of the games because we were concerned who would be holding the bill for the games. Let me just say:

Deputy Premier and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery –

I am quoting from the *Bendigo Times* of 28 April 2023 –

... Jacinta Allan, said there was no truth of budget concerns or timeframe issues.

"We are making great progress with regional communities on the delivery of the 2026 Commonwealth Games ...

"The Andrews Labor Government has grabbed with both hands the opportunity to have regional Victoria be the home of the Games, unlike the Liberal and Nationals.

...

Ms Allan said the Government is working with communities to produce a Commonwealth Games legacy that will last.

“We want to take an investment approach with our regional communities,” she said. “Which is why we are partnering with councils and communities across the state to host the games.

“This will leave a lasting legacy with \$3 billion of ongoing investment into the regional communities to go along with the job opportunities and the chance to showcase regional Vic on the international stage.”

That is what we heard from the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery just a few short months before the games were cancelled. And that may explain –

Jacinta Ermacora: On a point of order, Acting President, I thought the topic was the SRL – relevance.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): There have been some prior rulings on relevance in this debate. I will ask Mrs Broad to come back to the motion at hand.

Gaelle BROAD: But I think this raises the question. We get assurances now from this government, ‘All is fine. All is well. The Suburban Rail Loop should go ahead.’ But let me say we have a state debt heading towards \$188 billion. By 2027–28 we are facing interest repayments of \$26 million every single day. Yes, we support public transport, but we also support good management of taxpayer money. When you cannot even answer how this project will be funded, then I think we have valid questions to ask, and that is why this motion is so important, and we ask the chamber to support it.

This week we are seeing another tax being proposed by this government, the 60th new tax, the emergency services levy. Why? Because they keep going ahead with projects like the Suburban Rail Loop and they need to find extra money. In this case it is an extra \$2 billion over the next three years that they are trying to raise from households, from businesses and from primary producers, who will be carrying a very heavy burden if this tax goes ahead. We certainly oppose that tax. We have had enough. The Victorian people have had enough. They are struggling to pay the bills, and yet this government wants to sign them up – well, they have already spent billions of dollars – and want to continue to sign them up. I say there is no light at the end of this tunnel.

Infrastructure Australia has recommended an exit strategy, and I would say that the Premier, before any further contracts are signed, perhaps needs to consider her own exit strategy. Because Victorians do not – (*Time expired*)

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:12): I rise to speak on the motion on the Suburban Rail Loop from my colleague opposite Mr Mulholland. This motion is short and sharp, so I imagine it will give our side of the chamber wide latitude to talk about the important work the Allan Labor government is getting on with in this space. First, the motion notes the recent Infrastructure Australia report which discusses the Suburban Rail Loop East project. This part of the project will massively benefit my community of Southern Metro, and I was pleased to have the chance to visit parts of it last week with my colleagues in this chamber and the other. The second part of this motion discusses the federal budget and the money needed to deliver the SRL East project. And thirdly, it requests that the Auditor-General update their 2022 to report to examine the Suburban Rail Loop East project.

Before I begin I want to say that we build things here. On this side of the chamber we build things. I want to commend the hard work of Minister Shing, who oversees the Suburban Rail Loop’s development, because Minister Shing and the Allan Labor government build things, unlike Peter Dutton and the Liberals. They will cut funding to the Suburban Rail Loop. They will rip up contracts, which is what the state Liberals want to do. They will slash thousands of jobs and they will block 70,000 homes from being built. We know the Suburban Rail Loop will take 600,000 cars off the roads, but Dutton wants these people stuck in traffic. The SRL is a city-changing project being delivered by the Allan Labor government. This side of the chamber, who build things, know that it will cut travel times on the eastern leg down to just 22 minutes between Box Hill and Cheltenham. It links up the commercial and the residential hubs across Melbourne’s eastern suburbs with fast underground turn-up-and-go rail connections. Turn up and go means you do not have to even check the timetable. You can just show up and expect a train will be there shortly to take you to one of the six new stations. The

project is expected to take around 600,000 cars off the road, meaning lower emissions and less congestion on the morning rush hour. It will save the economy about half a billion dollars too. Construction on the 26-kilometre twin tunnels is well underway, with tunnel-boring machines going in the ground in a year's time and trains running by 2035.

Last week I was joined by my colleagues from right across this place and the other, including the hardworking member for Ashwood Matt Fregon, member for North-East Metro Ms Terpstra, my fellow member for Southern Metro Mr Batchelor and Mr Galea from Southern Metro. We visited some of the locations for the upcoming SRL East stations to see their progress so far, and I had the opportunity to see that Burwood SRL site just across the road from Deakin University, where tunnel-boring machines will launch – *(Time expired)*

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:15): Just a brief summing-up for the benefit of the chamber: we have had some good contributions and some interesting contributions that got taken a bit off track, but I want to point out particularly the contribution from the Greens, which the government should agree with, really – it is all about transparency in major projects. One would think we should be supporting that. One would think a government that has racked up \$50 billion in project blowouts would actually agree with a decent amount of transparency. There seemed to be some interpretation that the previous Auditor-General's report was quite glowing of the Suburban Rail Loop, so I just want to read the conclusion from 2022:

The business case DoT and SRLA provided to the government for ... SRL program did not support informed investment decisions. The business case only analysed part of the program and did not fully meet DTF's guidance requirements.

DTF has provided substantial advice to the government on the SRL program since 2019. However, it is yet to complete the assessment of the business case required under its HVHR project assurance framework to give the government confidence in its deliverability.

I want to point out one of the reasons why we respectfully request the Auditor-General have a look at this is the Infrastructure Australia review of the business case, which is actually one of the things that the Auditor-General said was to be confirmed. So given Infrastructure Australia's scathing assessment of the Suburban Rail Loop, where it found that there were unverified cost assumptions – it still thinks the 22 per cent cost increase sector wide since 2021 never happened – and unbalanced value capture mechanisms in which the modelling is fanciful and that we will end up paying more than the \$11.5 billion and its complete obliteration of the business case in general, we need to view this project in full.

Members interjecting.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Ms Shing and the government say, 'Well, Infrastructure Australia needed to assess the east, north and west sections combined.' You cannot calculate a benefit for the east and the north section if you are not willing to tell us the what the cost of the north section is. The minister says the west section needs to be included as well; well, the minister, with her investment case that she bandies about, says that a business and investment case for SRL West has not been completed, yet she is asking us to view the benefits through the north and the west as well. It is fanciful, and given Infrastructure Australia's scathing assessment and given the fact that both the federal opposition and the federal Labor government have not committed the additional funding required to fund the federal \$11.5 billion contribution, the Auditor-General respectfully needs to take another look at the Suburban Rail Loop East.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (22): Melina Bath, Gaele Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (17): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (14:25): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Crimes Act 1958**, the **Equal Opportunity Act 2010** and the **Bail Act 1977**, to repeal the **Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001** and to make consequential amendments to other Acts and for other purposes’ the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Committees

Select committee

Establishment

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:26): I move:

That:

- (1) a select committee of nine members be appointed to inquire into, consider and report, by 13 May 2025, whether the amendments to the Victoria planning provisions made through VC257, VC274 and VC267 give proper effect to the objectives of planning in Victoria, and the objectives of the planning framework, as set out in section 4 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987;
- (2) the committee will consist of three members from the government nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Council, three members from the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Council and three members from among the remaining members in the Council;
- (3) the members will be appointed by lodgement of the names with the President within five calendar days of the Council agreeing to this resolution;
- (4) the chair of the committee will be a non-government member;
- (5) a member of the committee may appoint a substitute to act in their place (for nominated meetings or for a defined period of time) by that member, or the leader of that member’s party, writing to the chair advising of the member who will act as their substitute;
- (6) a member who has been substituted off the committee must not participate in any proceedings of the committee for the nominated meetings or defined period of time that they have been substituted off for;
- (7) substitute members will have all the rights of a member of the committee and shall be taken to be a member of the committee for the purpose of forming a quorum;
- (8) the first meeting of the committee will be held within one week of members’ names being lodged with the President;
- (9) the committee may proceed to the dispatch of business notwithstanding that all members have not been appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy;
- (10) the committee will hold public hearings; and
- (11) the committee may obtain technical and specialist assistance to aid its inquiry.

Notice of motion 908 is a motion to establish a select committee of nine members. They are to be appointed to inquire into, consider and report by 13 May 2025 on whether the amendments to the Victorian planning provisions (VPP) made through VC275, VC274 and VC267 give proper effect to the objectives of planning in Victoria and the objectives of the planning framework as set out in section 4 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

The motion sets out a number of key points. It indicates that there will be three members from the government, three members from the opposition and three members from the crossbench. There is a process that is laid out there. The chair will be a non-government member. There will be a substitution ability, and the committee may proceed to dispatch of business even where not fully appointed. It asks that the committee holds public hearings.

The committee is an important committee because of the government's recent planning announcements. These are planning announcements that have been made broadly, without proper consultation and without proper engagement with communities and proper engagement with councils. They are extraordinary new powers that will change our city forever. I want to begin by saying at the outset that the opposition strongly supports more housing. We support options for more housing, but we do not support those occurring where there is not proper process and where there is not proper engagement with local communities and councils.

There are plenty of opportunities for councils to look for land, to find opportunities and for government to do likewise. There are large areas of government land that have not been utilised for housing. There are large areas of council land that have not been utilised for housing and opportunities. That is important. It is also very important to understand that a large number of planning permits have been issued – planning permits that have not been actioned. That is an important substrate for people to understand. The huge population increases we have seen in recent years have put additional pressure on housing.

All of us want to see young people with the maximum options and the arrangements in place that mean they can live the kind of lives that we would all want them to live with the options and choices that they would otherwise have. But what is important here to understand is that the government has gone about this the wrong way in a very heavy-handed approach, an approach that is not driven by the facts and not driven by outcomes that we all want to see. I was listening on the radio the other day and a developer came on, and he made the point that many of the proposals for high-density development in and around our major eastern, southern and northern areas would see massive development, but the development would struggle to sell to the very audience that people want because the costs of building are so high and the costs of taxes and charges are very much a part of what is going on here.

Specifically, this talks about three planning amendments, and they are three of the more important ones in the cascade of announcements and amendments that have been made: VC257, VC274 and VC267. I think it is important for me to lay out what they mean. The community understand that the government has said, 'We're going to build tall towers, high-rise, high-density development, and we're going to force it into local areas.' That is what they are intending to do, and many in the community struggle with that, because they say, 'Look, actually this is going to get suboptimal outcomes.' You are going to be building in suburbs like those in Southern Metro, my electorate and Ms Crozier's electorate, where property prices are relatively high to begin with, and you are going to be building properties –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: I am going to talk about a lot of electorates, actually. I am picking an example here. Fifty zones have been chosen, some near transport hubs and others not, and another 10 large zones have been chosen by the government, so that is 60 in total. Some are in the Southern Metropolitan Region, some are not. Some are out into the east and some are into the north and into the west. Each of them has their own peculiarities and particularities of course. I do not pretend to be an expert on each and every one of those, but I do know a number of them in my electorate and in some of the other areas particularly well. So forgive me if I do talk about my electorate of Southern Metropolitan, but it is actually much broader than that: the 50 plus the 10, 60. If you look, for example, at Niddrie and North Essendon, that is not my area but the community is very unhappy with what has been proposed there. I went to a large public meeting, probably 400 to 500 people at a bowling club, and it was very

clear there that this had been entirely foisted on the community. The community had not been asked about the catchment zones that are proposed for those two large zones.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: No, no. They were not when the catchment zone was announced, and I can tell you what, the catchment zones that are being put in place now are not being supported by the community. I have them ring my office, I have them email me and I attend a number of these meetings. I can go down the long list of meetings if you wish – some in my area and some outside my area. I am actually interested in all of these, and I am deeply interested to hear people's views.

But three of the important planning amendments, which give a very strong clear indication of where the government is going and will have a major and inadequately examined effect, are the VC257, the VC274 and the VC267. I am just going to step through these in some detail. All of these three that are in this motion are Victorian planning provisions, so they apply right across the board. 257 has introduced:

... the new version of the previously released draft 'Walkable Catchment Zone' the Housing Choice & Transport Zone (HCTZ) –

I mean, these are Orwellian words –

and Built Form Overlay (BFO) into the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP).

I am quoting here from a Hansen article, and I am going to draw on that, because I think it provides a very nice summary of some of these points. You could go for a long time discussing these, but I am trying to look for a summarised form of them which will be helpful for the house. So 257 also has the built form overlay in the Victorian planning provisions. It continues:

The HCTZ sits within the residential suite of zones, at Clause 32.10. The BFO sits within the Heritage and Built Form Overlays, at Clause 43.06.

The Housing Choice and Transport Zone will be applied initially to residential zoned land within the – so-called –

“catchment” of identified activity centres, or approximately 10 minutes walk – of the activity centre “core” ... so this 800-metre approach that the government has adopted.

It will provide a transition between intense and low scale built form ...

Maximum building heights are set out in a matrix ...

On some of the large sites, 1000 square metres or more, a significant six-storey height is what has been mandated or put out as something that can be achieved. On smaller sites, there is a smaller zone.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: It is a fair summary, I think you will find.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: Some of them are six still on the large properties, yes.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: Many of them are. As with the residential zone, the maximum building height can be exceeded in certain circumstances. There is no exemption from notice and review for non-VicSmart applications, and the BFO will apply to the core of an activity centre and is focused on facilitating higher density development. These are the actual amendments that have been gazetted and tabled in the house.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

David DAVIS: It is VC257. That was gazetted and tabled in this house, I think, from memory, on 4 March, but I could be wrong on the date. A schedule must include a development framework. There is a master plan requirement and other points, and it will have a very significant impact. There is a new medium-density housing standard. There was also the townhouse and low-rise code to be applied to changes at clause 55 and a separate set of four-storey apartment standards – these are the cookie cutters that people talk about. The new townhouse and low-rise code will see clause 55 operate as a deemed-to-comply provision, with no right of appeal for compliant applications, and they only have a small number of standards. If they meet those, bang, they have got their permit. We understand that the new controls under clauses 55 and 57 will be introduced when VC267 is gazetted on Thursday this week, they say. Then they go to the precinct zone. The amendment VC274 was gazetted and introduced as the precinct zone to the VPP, again across a large number that will sit within a suite of special-purpose zones. The precinct zone is expected to be applied to some Suburban Rail Loop precincts, but it is much more broad than that. It has a use and development framework plan and associated master plan requirements, but what you notice here is that there is again a distinct lack of community and council input here.

I think it is important to understand what this is all likely to mean. It is likely to mean massive changes to our planning arrangements, and it is likely to mean a serious change to the quality of our suburbs, the livability of our suburbs, and we need to focus on that. What we need to get is a development way forward that is actually a fair way forward that enables reasonable options but at the same time does not see councils and communities overwhelmed in such a way that they are unable to have proper input and actually means that there are a proper set of outcomes for the community that will see a result which is fair for the overall situation.

I do want to talk about heritage, because there are many areas of significant heritage and these overlays do not properly take account of heritage. There will obviously be legal tests of these if these planning amendments stand, but it does appear that they may well overwhelm any protections that are there in many cases. If that is the outcome, I think that is very concerning, and I think many people will be very worried indeed.

VC267, the townhouse and low-rise code, VC257, the housing choice and transport zone and the built form overlay, and VC274, the new precinct zone – all of these will have a very significant effect. They are in the context, I might add, of other changes that the government have announced and put forward, and they do not seem to have properly connected all of these up. They do not seem to have understood that there is a lot of individuality in our suburbs. They do not seem to have understood that actually the engagement with councils and communities will improve the outcomes that can be achieved with any of these planning changes. High-rise and high-density developments are appropriate in some areas, and I would support them in some locations, but I do not support them being foisted on communities –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: But you know, I held a forum at Hawksburn, again, in our respective electorate – and Hawksburn station and 800 metres around it has been designated as one of the zones, with the state government allowing high-density and high-rise –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

David DAVIS: It is also just bizarre. Somebody asked me at the forum, ‘Where will people park?’ And I said, ‘Well, look, the government has a view, I think’ – I am perhaps paraphrasing too much – ‘that we can do with less vehicles.’ That may be partially true, but it is hard to see that they can deal with none, and it is very hard to see where those vehicles would park when you are in around Hawksburn station and you think about the density of spots like that.

If you think of other areas, like the proposed so-called Moorabbin centre, which really is a large sweep that goes through a big part of Kingston into Bayside and sweeps down through Glen Eira as well, it

is very hard to see how that is appropriate in the way it has been promulgated. It is very hard to see that that is what people want in that area, and certainly when you talk to local communities they want more say. They feel in their communities that they actually want greater control and more say, not less say and being overridden. So I think there is a democratic aspect to this too. But there is also the detailed information about these planning amendments and how they will impact.

My view is that this committee has the opportunity to look at this closely. It has the opportunity to examine the impact of the suite of changes, including the other changes that have been made in and around these particular three amendments – but these three particular amendments are the most significant of the amendments that have been made – and to look at how it is going to impact on local communities. I think we can get a better outcome if we do the work here. People understand that I have a relatively strong view, as many in the opposition do, which is around protecting our local area and seeing that the quality of life is actually preserved. I freely admit that there is a significant balance to be struck.

Part of the slowness with planning is actually in the city. Part of it is the minister. Very often the planning scheme amendments that actually slow things up are sitting on the minister's desk for a long period. Developers say to me, 'Look, I've put the planning scheme amendment in and it's gone through the proper processes, and it's sitting on the minister's desk.' And sometimes that is for years.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

David DAVIS: And they are being taxed, and the tax is actually significant too. But even on this process aspect in the city, there is the process aspect for the minister to actually move on some of these things when there has been proper work done at a local level. There are lots of examples I think now where people are increasingly concerned about the process that is involved. There was a demonstration on Sunday at Elsternwick, and it is instructive to look at this. In the Elsternwick case there was a considerable tussle with the community. A developer was wanting to build a large, tall tower with a Woolworths underneath. In the end the council opposed it. It went to VCAT, and VCAT struck an outcome and a permit was given, and the community kind of went along with that because there was a proper process. But then what we find is the government coming around the corner with a fast-tracked planning process after the VCAT case. So we are actually jumping the legal system here. We are actually taking a different tack, a different track, through the legal system and actually going around VCAT and overruling VCAT by a set of decisions by a fast-track panel. Even though the community had been run to the ground and exhausted in its attempt to have its say and finally the legal outcome happened at VCAT, then the developer sat on it for two years. It has come back through this fast-track panel to try to get extra height and extra development. Some may think that is a good idea, but I do not think this is the sort of process we want to see.

I think we want to see a sensible process, and this committee is an opportunity to look at a number of these aspects – to look at the decision-making, to look at what is fair, to look at some sensible ways through it and to look in particular at these three amendments and to see the effect that they will have across the state in the 10 areas, in the 50 areas and indeed beyond. Mr Limbrick talked to me about Frankston earlier in the day. Frankston–Seaford is one of the large areas, and these amendments will have significant effects in that area. I think it is important to understand these to see how that is actually going to impact, and I do not think the work has been done to date to look at these things. We can benefit from council and community telling us more.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:46): The Greens will be supporting this motion before us today. Let me say at the outset that the Greens support more housing. Increasing density in areas that people want to live in and that already have infrastructure and have access to services like transport just makes sense. It prevents further sprawl and loss of green space and destruction of native habitat. But it also has to be density done well. Crucially, it has to include a substantial amount of genuinely affordable housing and public housing, and there must be adequate infrastructure available

to meet the needs of residents. It has to ensure that these places remain places people want to live and are not just hot, sterile concrete jungles of poorly built developments designed to make a quick buck.

We have heard many concerns about the impact of the planning scheme amendments referred to in this motion and believe they warrant further scrutiny. We agree with the government: changes need to be made to get housing out faster. But the planning scheme amendments as gazetted are very blunt instruments, and we are concerned about the potential for poor planning outcomes. They are also not the panacea for our housing crisis.

Firstly, these amendments cut communities and councils out of decision-making. This is concerning, especially given that many local councils have already done a huge amount of work to develop place-based plans to achieve the government's housing goals. These are plans that have done the hard yards in terms of community consultation and that are respectful of the community needs and the character of the local area.

We are also concerned about the misleading narrative that the government continues to push that community objection and delayed planning approvals by councils are somehow a huge driver of the housing crisis. It is simply not supported by the evidence. For example, in Camberwell Junction since 2011, 2670 home developments have been approved but only 1926 have been built. The fact is many tens of thousands of developments are approved by councils but never lead to a sod being turned because developers do not proceed. According to SGS Economics & Planning, 90 per cent of multidwelling applications are approved in Victoria but 25 per cent or a quarter of these are never built. That might be because of difficulty sourcing labour and materials, or it might be because developers do not think they can make a big enough profit for it to be worthwhile. There are all sorts of reasons why this might occur, but it is not councils or communities that are holding that up. But lumping the blame at the feet of councils and communities diminishes the importance of the consultation process in ensuring good development outcomes for the community.

Further, and absolutely critically, affordable community and public housing provisions have not explicitly been built into the scheme. This is a real missed opportunity. The government has the opportunity here to introduce inclusionary zoning which would require a percentage of these new developments to be set aside for public and affordable housing. If there was just one thing that this government could do to address the housing crisis, building tens of thousands of public homes – government owned and operated housing intervening in the market – would be the most effective intervention. There is no one solution, but that is about as close as you are going to get. And yet there is nothing in these planning changes to ensure this outcome. We are left wondering who is going to be able to afford these homes. The current market suggests that developers expect a certain level of return; that means that these will be out of reach for many people, if not most. The market and its failure is the reason we have the housing crisis, so it is not going to be the solution. We also wonder whether these fast-tracked developments that simply have to satisfy a list of tick-a-box criteria will be built in a way that attracts people to these centres; for example, the replacement of current landscaping standards with new tree canopy standards is inconsistent with the canopy coverage targets required in urban areas to keep them livable, particularly in a heating climate.

I want to be clear: the Greens are not against more housing, we are not against density, but it has to be done well, and it has to use the opportunity of increasing density to deliver real solutions to the housing crisis by getting more public and genuinely affordable housing built. These planning scheme amendments are a significant change, and what we believe is that they warrant further interrogation. That is the simple reason we will be supporting this select committee inquiry motion before us today.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:51): I am pleased to rise on Mr Davis's motion to establish a select committee into these three planning scheme amendments. It is a little strange, I have got to say that despite protestations of Mr Davis and the Liberal Party, even through that contribution of the Greens that they are supportive of additional housing being built, it seems that all the action that we see is to the contrary – that instead of seeking to facilitate, seeking to support and

seeking to work with the government and go through the extensive consultation processes that have been underway and continue to be underway relating to housing as opposed to building under the planning scheme amendments that will be inquired into by this select committee, that is not actually what the intended outcome is. I might leave that broader policy question there for just a moment, and I will come back to it in a moment.

Mr Davis's contribution was concerned about things being rushed; he is concerned about the process of developing these planning scheme amendments being rushed, he said there was not enough time and he was concerned about some of the democratic aspects of it. I think it is then curious that he has proposed a select committee to report by 13 May – so an incredibly short process, an incredibly rushed process, a process that probably will deny the opportunity to many in the community to have their say to this proposed select committee inquiry – and has not explained why. He has chosen a timeframe that is so short, that is so truncated and that is not in keeping with the timetables that we have taken with other either select committee or standing committee inquiries that this Parliament has undertaken.

It is also not clear why a select committee on a truncated timeframe was required when this chamber, under law, has a standing committee to deal with environment and planning matters. We have got a committee, an Environment and Planning Committee, of this house that is empowered to examine these issues, and no-one in the course of the debate who is supporting this motion has been able to articulate or has thought to articulate why it is inappropriate to ask that standing committee of the Parliament to examine these issues other than it being not actually a genuine attempt to get to the bottom of the issue or other than it being a political exercise to seek to block the government's attempts to build more homes for more Victorians. That is the conclusion we can draw from the way this has been set up, the timeframes that have been proposed, the scope of what is going to be looked at and where it is being sent.

The only conclusion we can draw in the absence of any explanatory information that is being presented as to why such a short timeframe, why so many Victorians are going to be denied the opportunity to participate because of that short timeframe, why the scope is just on these three planning scheme amendments and not the rest of the proposed housing planning and development agenda that is being pursued by this government to give more homes to more Victorians and why we would be circumventing the regular processes of the house and sending it to a standing committee instead of establishing a different committee is that Mr Davis will have the opportunity to select the chair to pursue his political agenda. That is the conclusion we can draw based on the lack of clarity that has been provided in the debate so far today. It would be useful if anyone else in the course of this debate who appears to be supporting this motion would like to answer some of those questions, and we will sit and listen to them.

The substantive question, though – getting to this point – is whether we as a government and whether we as a community should be facilitating the opportunity for more Victorians to buy homes in the places where they want to live, close to their families, close to schools, close to jobs and close to transport, because that is the core of the housing agenda that is being enabled by the planning scheme amendments that are being considered in the committee referral here today. The planning scheme amendments are not an end in and of themselves; they are a means to get to the end, which is more housing.

Mr Davis in his contribution has lamented the lack of consultation, particularly around the first tranche of 10 major activity centres. It strikes me that he must not have been paying attention to what has been going on in communities for the last close to 18 months since the 10 pilot activity centres were first announced in September and October 2023. It is now April 2025, so more than 18 months ago the government announced its intention to proceed with planning changes in these activity centres. We went out and consulted with the community. We set up community reference groups. We engaged with local councils. We had open community information sessions. There were submissions through the Engage Victoria website. There has been a broader *Plan for Victoria* process. I think around

10,000-odd submissions have come through those processes. Many of us have had direct representations from members of our community. We have gone and engaged with them.

For Mr Davis to stand up and say there has been no consultation and that there is some kind of problem with the democratic aspect of the proposals that are being put forward through these planning scheme amendments beggars belief and just shows the untruths, the scare and the fear that are at the core of what those who are opposed to building more homes are really on about. What we have seen in many of the community forums, in engagements with many of the communities, in the contributions in this chamber and in the dross that has been peddled around social media by members of the Liberal Party is that they are intent on whipping up fear and confusion in the community and spreading misinformation about these housing changes, not because they are interested in making sure people have somewhere to live but because they can sense political opportunity. I think that speaks to the worst instincts that we can possibly bring to a debate that is as important as this in our community. If we are willing to peddle misinformation and untruths out in the community through the depictions that we are putting on their social media about the scale and form of proposed changes and about what is coming to a suburb near you which are just not borne out by the facts, I think it goes to the heart of the scare campaign and the lies that are being told by the Liberal Party in our communities.

What we have seen from the government is a policy direction, a consultation process, engagement with local communities and working with local councils. In fact in one of the areas that Mr Davis mentioned, which we jointly represent, the Camberwell Junction area, the proposal for the draft activity centre at its core was just a lift-up of work that had been done by the City of Boroondara for years – years of work had gone into something that has been decried by Liberal Party, who have said this is being done without community consultation and engagement. They are just peddling untruths in our community. I hope that through this very short inquiry we might be able to get to the bottom of some of those untruths and expose them for what they really are, because that is what we need to be doing here. Once we get through that – once we get through the misinformation, once we get through the lies, once we get through the obfuscation, once we get through the blocking – Labor is going to get on with the job of building more homes for more Victorians in the places that they want to live.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:01): I rise to speak to Mr Davis's motion, an excellent motion that he has brought to the house today to establish a select committee to inquire into, consider and report on whether the amendments to the Victorian planning provisions made through VC257, VC274 and VC267 give proper effect to the objectives of planning in Victoria and the objectives of the planning framework as set out in section 4 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987. Mr Davis has gone through in detail the concerns around those particular planning provisions and, as he said, some of the utopian terminology and phrases that are used for various aspects of it. But nevertheless, it goes to the concerns around the community. Just listening to Mr Batchelor in his contribution, quite frankly, it was a very disingenuous contribution around the community concerns.

Michael Galea: Coming from you.

Georgie CROZIER: No, no, these are community concerns, Mr Galea.

Michael Galea interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Mr Galea, this is about the community concerns in my electorate and Mr Batchelor's electorate. I think Mr Galea is quite disgraceful in ignoring the concerns of the community in Southern Metropolitan Region, where a large number of these activity centres will be. The Labor government never took this policy to the Victorian electorate – never did. All of a sudden we have this given to us as described in terms of these planning provisions, and quite rightly, community members are concerned, whether it is in Essendon, whether it is in Frankston, whether it is in Camberwell or whether it is in Moorabbin. Let me tell you, I do not know where Mr Batchelor is, but when I go and speak to the local councils, they too are very concerned around –

A member interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, he has returned. But I am just saying I do not know where Mr Batchelor has been in terms of speaking to local councillors and councils, because they too are concerned about the lack of consultation. In relation to the community reference groups that Engage Victoria is –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, at least you live in the electorate, not like the other representative, who does not, who has got no clue about this. I take up Mr Batchelor's interjections about him flitting around the electorate – that is good to see.

I want to return to the issues around Engage Victoria and the community reference groups, because there are real concerns for members of those community reference groups who have put their feedback in, and they have put forward their concerns. They do not feel that they are getting a fair hearing from government and indeed some selective processes around those community reference groups and who has actually been spoken to and their concerns that have actually been assessed more thoroughly. This is an important inquiry to be undertaken. We saw only yesterday the tabling of the Commonwealth Games inquiry report, which was a select committee, and very well chaired by Mr Limbrick, I might add. But look at that report and look at the findings from that inquiry of that select committee. Look at the details and the findings and what actually occurred through the process that that select committee undertook. These select committees are a proper avenue to look at these issues.

The government is desperate for this not to occur; that is quite evident. They do not want the community to come out and express their concerns – and I know the Greens have raised concerns around public housing. When Dr Mansfield was speaking it reminded me of Barak Beacon and looking at those concerns from those communities down there. They have been very concerned. They came out and they were speaking to council and to local members of Parliament, and their concerns were falling on deaf ears with the local member and indeed the government.

We all do acknowledge that more housing needs to be established. Nobody is in disagreement with that – nobody.

Michael Galea interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: What are you talking about? Forest Hill is right in my backyard, Mr Galea. Go and have a look at the high-rise there. You have got no idea what you are talking about. In my electorate there are appropriate levels of high-density development. We are talking about appropriate levels of development –

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I note that Ms Crozier is directing her comments to Mr Galea directly, and I ask that she direct her comments through the Chair.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Gaelle Broad): I uphold the point of order. I remind all members to direct their comments through the Chair.

Georgie CROZIER: I would say again in terms of what Mr Galea has said, he has got no clue what he is talking about in terms of the high-density. In fact the Premier had no idea what she was talking about. There are areas in my electorate where she was saying, 'More medium-density.' It is already there; it is already established. What we are talking about here is activity centres where community has had no say. They have just been plonked in their areas, and they have had no ability to have their say on this. That is why it is incredibly important for those people to come forward and for this committee to have a look at some of these and others and talk to the experts in this area.

There have been planning experts who have spoken out about the folly of the government initiative, because they know it is going to fail. The developers are saying these cannot be built cheaply, these high-rises. I have raised concerns and put FOIs in, and I wish the government would respond to them, because then we would have a better understanding of, 'Well, what are the needs? What analysis have

you done in relation to medical and health infrastructure?’ And there is other infrastructure – childhood education centres, schools, other modes of transport, sewerage and drainage, all of these things that have got to be thought through.

It is no wonder that councils are concerned and it is no wonder the public is concerned, and I think it is just a cheap shot for the government to brush this away and to say, ‘You don’t want this.’ It is not about that. It is actually about proper planning. It is a proper planning process that needs to be undertaken, and this inquiry will look at these planning provisions. This is the work that needs to be done – it should be done – and I would urge the house to take this very seriously so that this committee can undertake that important work, so that we can have a look at it, because there are too many concerns. This needs to be up and established as soon as it can be to get to the bottom of the government’s lack of planning, the lack of process, and to understand these planning provisions, which Mr Davis has highlighted very eloquently the concerns around. I urge the house to support this motion so we can get on with it.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:09): I rise to make a contribution on Mr Davis’s motion calling for a select committee to look into Victoria’s planning provisions, which Legalise Cannabis Victoria will be supporting. I want to be very, very clear at the outset: housing matters. Housing should be available, should be affordable and should enjoy appropriate infrastructure to ensure a decent quality of life for all Victorians. We need appropriate, affordable and accessible housing in Victoria, and that does not exist now in adequate quantity. Everyone I think in this chamber would agree with this simple proposition. The question dividing this chamber is how to best achieve that goal.

This motion before the chamber is not about whether you agree or disagree with the government’s proposals on where new homes should be built or how quickly. I really implore my colleagues from the government side not to simply caricature this as nimbyism – it is not. In terms of this proposition, it is not about whether you agree with the government’s proposals on where and how to build, because I would say at the outset that the overarching settlement strategy in *Plan for Victoria* is pretty sound. It is a pretty good document. This is about whether the new planning controls that the government has been introducing one at a time by regulation are appropriate and give effect to the objective of planning and the planning framework as described in the Planning and Environment Act 1987. Are these regulations consistent with the act under which they are auspiced as subordinate legislation? How can you argue against that proposition? Do they comply with the act or not? Are they consistent with the principles there? I think we would all want to be confident that the government is fulfilling the requirements of that act rather than frustrating it when it comes to new subordinate legislation.

Other speakers have talked about the three different planning provisions, so I will not go into that other than to note that if we actually start to delve into a few of those, we come to some interesting issues – some problematic issues that we would suggest warrant consideration. If we just breeze through some of this, the first thing that caught my eye is that via VC257 there will be a new housing choice and transport zone around activity centres and a new precinct zone for Suburban Rail Loop precincts, which are also activity centres, but that the existing activity centre zones will not be used for any of the new activity centres. I just need to percolate that one for a little while. So now there are three zones for activity centres instead of one, and there are a few other special-purpose zones that have been applied to activity centres in the past still kicking around in the system as well. We hear a lot from the government about reducing complexity in the planning system, yet at the same time having three to five different types of activity centre seems to be a pretty funny way to go about it.

The second point of interest perhaps is all of the exemptions that are contained in the new deemed-to-comply provisions for two or more dwellings on a lot in the residential zone known as the townhouse and low-rise code, which is part of VC267. I understand the government’s objective in removing those barriers in the planning system that prevent the speedy approval of new homes – it is an important objective. But I am not sure that that objective has been appropriately balanced with other objectives like protecting life and responding to local environmental risks.

Let us take a look at a few examples of that deemed-to-comply provision. The new provision literally switches off local policies and applies a 10 per cent tree canopy cover standard – Dr Mansfield referred to this before. This standard is lower than many councils are encouraging through their local policy. So will that help or hinder the government’s *Plan for Victoria* target for 30 per cent cover across the state? It would be good to see some modelling, but are we talking about 10 per cent? Are we talking about 30 per cent? Clearly the two are not the same and they are not readily reconcilable. This is exactly the sort of thing that an inquiry can and should be looking at.

The same provisions also switch off environmentally sustainable design policies for energy, waste and water. Again, think about that. They apply some standards, but where those standards are lower than those found in local policies, will that not reduce the quality of homes? Won’t lower standards of energy efficiency make homes more expensive to run and to own? They also switch off the EPA environment reference standards. So does this mean that planners will be prevented from helping developers to improve their proposals and reduce air, sound and water conflicts? Well, yes – the answer is yes, it will have that effect. And that is a terrible result.

They also switch off requirements to consider planning scheme amendments that have been adopted by council but not yet approved by the minister. This is very troubling. Let us say a council has adopted an amendment that changes the flood overlays requiring a higher ground floor level for a new building but the minister has not approved it yet. What then? Mr Batchelor and I sat on the Environment and Planning Committee talking about exactly this issue of how we respond in a timely manner with flood plains. We have talked about that. If we take this logic that is built into the code, does that mean that the applicant will fail to get a building permit and have to go to all the expense and effort of reapplying for one, because that is expensive and inefficient? Alternatively, will they get a building permit and go ahead and build something that the government’s own flood modelling says is a risk to human inhabitants? Make up your mind. Given the need for timely advice to families who may be in the process of building their homes in an area potentially subject to inundation, it is utterly staggering that planners would be precluded – legislatively precluded – from the requirements to implement commonsense resilience measures. And some might say, ‘What’s the gap? It’s not going to be much.’ Well, talking about personal experience, in my community we spent almost two years negotiating with council and developers on a structure plan, and that structure plan when approved by council sat on the Minister for Planning’s desk for three years before it actually got permission to advertise – three years. So we are not talking about fantasies here. By all means let us talk about real shit, and this is what is happening out there.

The example I have just cited about flood and floor levels could easily be the sort of time gap we are talking about, and I believe it is something this inquiry should be talking about as well.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I think Mr Ettershank just used some unparliamentary language, and I ask that he withdraw that unparliamentary language and honour the –

David Ettershank interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Do you want me to repeat it?

David ETTERS HANK: No, I am perfectly happy. I withdraw the comment.

It is these incongruities that need to be teased out and explored by a select committee. I am reliably informed that the consultation on the three amendments we are discussing today was overwhelmingly poor, notwithstanding some very high level discussions about the principles, but the actual detail, especially all the exemptions from normal planning considerations that the townhouse and low-rise code makes, was not even known until the amendment was gazetted. So the consequences of all these new provisions have not been tested – not with councils, not with planners, not with developers and not with the public. We should not be sitting here being lectured to about nimbyism and extended consultation processes when the government has not done that, and it has used regulations specifically to obviate its obligations in that regard.

To pick up Mr Batchelor's comment about the Environment and Planning Committee, yes, we could do this review in 12 months or 14 months time, when there is going to be a gap. Well, some of us do not want to wait until the dying days of this government to run into it. In terms of precluding community consultation, let us get real. This is the pot calling the kettle chartreuse. Let us get to the truth of these issues. This is a technical exercise; it is not a polemical exercise. Let us do a technical exercise on whether these planning scheme amendments are consistent with the act. Seriously, argue against that, please. This is just common sense. I know people will come with their own agendas – they always have, they always will – but it does not mean this should be opposed, because we are trying to get to the truth and the appropriateness of this matter. Accordingly, we are happy to support the motion.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:19): I rise to speak on a motion today, a motion which is a slap in the face to generation Z and millennial Victorians who are trying to get their foot on the property ladder, who are trying to get ahead in a system that increasingly, over several generations nationwide, has been stacked against them. We recognise that there is a problem. This government recognise that there is a problem, and we are taking action to address it. Mr Ettershank asks what is wrong with the current system. I say, ask a young Victorian. Ask a young Victorian who is trying to save up enough to purchase their first home whilst they are renting and seeing increasing rent costs, while they are trying to juggle other commitments, while they are seeing property prices get further and further and further out of reach. The system is not working for young Victorians. Truth be told, it has not worked for young Victorians for some time, as it has not worked for young people in other states.

Sarah Mansfield interjected.

Michael GALEA: I will take up Dr Mansfield's interjection. It has not been working for some time under successive governments. But this government has been prepared to say, 'Enough is enough. We cannot allow this to continue.' Despite the constant stream of NIMBY motions and petitions that are put into this place by members opposite, this government is continuing to invest in and to work thoroughly on creating more housing opportunities for more Victorians in the inner city, in the middle suburbs, in the outer suburbs and across regional Victoria. I have spoken about that many, many times. We are doing that work, and we are doing that consultation work too, with one of the largest community engagement processes in this state's history with more than 10,000 people already engaged.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Michael GALEA: Yes, Mrs McArthur, 10,000 people who have already been engaged in these processes in local reference groups across metropolitan Melbourne in different activity centres, and as a result of those processes, in many cases those plans and those structure plans have changed – in many cases. We saw that with the announcements of just a few weeks ago. We have listened, and we are taking those considerations and that feedback into account. We have a severe housing challenge in this state, and for too long there has been a generational divide, and it has been young people who have been screwed over by the systems that are in place. We need to be different. We need to act. We need to act now.

Ms Crozier was specifically interested in the whereabouts of Mr Batchelor and who he has been speaking to. I note from his remarks that he has been speaking to quite a lot of people in fact.

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Michael GALEA: And he also spoke to the City of Glen Eira in the last two weeks as well.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Michael GALEA: Yes, we are out there. My colleagues in places like Southern Metro – Mr Batchelor, Mr Berger – are out there listening and talking to communities.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Michael GALEA: Not flitting around, as Ms Crozier would say, but actually out there and listening. But I also say to Ms Crozier: come out with me to the south-east. Let me take you to Clyde North. I can of course show you all the investments that we are making – the new schools, the new roads – all the investments that we are putting into Clyde North. I am sure members in this place get sick of me talking about it, because I do mention it a lot. There are a lot of things that we are doing, but it is not enough, because that suburb is growing so fast. And it is a symptom of a good thing. It is a symptom of a strong economy, of strong population growth in Victoria. I will give one quick example. A primary school that opened just four years ago with 400 students in that suburb last year hit 1300 students, double-storey portables, and the school principal said to me, ‘If we do not have something happen soon, we will be putting portables on the only oval that we have for the kids.’ Fortunately, one of the new three new schools that we opened in Clyde North this year is alleviating the pressure on this school. We are making those investments, and we must continue to do so, but we cannot sustainably go at this rate.

I say to Ms Crozier and others on the Liberal benches: come out with me to Clyde North. Let me introduce you to people there, and you can tell them how you think we should not be putting more sensible density in inner- and in middle-ring suburbs, and that instead people like them should be taking more of the brunt of the population growth.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Michael GALEA: I have just answered exactly your point, Mrs McArthur, as to why we actually are doing all of those things, and I encourage you to listen to further contributions I will make probably in this place today about all these things that we are doing. We are all doing all of those things. But come out and talk to the people in Clyde North. I note that Mr Mulholland is not in the chamber, and I am sure there is a very good reason for that. If you talk to the people in his electorate too in the outskirts –

David Davis interjected.

Michael GALEA: If it is too much for you having some late sittings, Mr Davis – I know that this place can get a bit long in the hours sometimes. I know that it can get a bit much for some over there.

We are having some growing pains in our outer suburbs. I simply ask those supporting this motion to come out and talk to people in the growth suburbs. Ask them: do you want another five suburbs behind you, or do you want us to change the system? Do you want us to actually rethink things? Let us think more holistically and more sensibly about how we can continue to grow in our outer suburbs and provide those options for young families that want to have a nice quiet suburb, have a good school to send their kids to and some local job opportunities nearby – or it could be if you want to live in the inner city or in the inner-ring suburbs or in Forest Hill or in South Yarra, like Ms Crozier talks about. Those options, or of course regional Victoria, should be available to young people.

There was a time where the Liberal Party stood for the aspiration of Australians. The aspiration to be able to choose where you live is foundational. You do not have that if you do not have choice of housing, if you cannot afford to live anywhere within a 30- or 40-k radius of where you work, where your family is and where your social networks are. That is not a choice, but that is what the Liberal Party is saying to young Victorians today: you do not deserve that choice because we want to keep things as they are in the suburbs that we live in.

It is a sad thing indeed to mark the death of Liberal yimbyism with this motion today. Mr Mulholland in his maiden speech spoke very, very passionately about green triangle placards stopping progress. With this motion today and with his support of this motion, Mr Mulholland is effectively holding up that green triangle placard and saying, ‘I am with them. Stop progress, stop development and stop

giving opportunities to young Victorians.’ That is the effect of this motion today. I say to any decent Liberals out there who still have some sort of sense –

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Michael GALEA: They are in England, Mr McIntosh, yes. They have gone to England. Maybe there are some still here – I do not know. Maybe they will speak up and make their voices heard, but certainly it will not be coming from the benches opposite. I am sure that many in the party who do still hold onto those values of aspiration and a better outcome for young Victorians will have something to say about you lot. I can tell you that the young Victorians who you are seeking to disenfranchise through this motion are watching. They are watching you today. They are watching the attempts to stifle opportunity, to stifle the chance to own their own home and to stifle something that has been afforded to countless generations of Australians and Victorians. Let them be the judge of you for that.

This is a frankly ludicrous committee proposal that we have before us today – a foregone conclusion as proven by the motion that was read in this morning. We know what the outcome is that Mr Davis is seeking. He read it in as a motion. His proposed committee has not even come to a vote yet, his six-week short committee. Complaining about lack of consultation and then attempting to undertake an entire select committee inquiry in six weeks over Easter is not genuine consultation. You know why you are doing it for six weeks. We know why you are doing it for six weeks. It is a foregone conclusion, and that is the motion that you put through this morning. That motion, if it comes into effect, would be devastating for young Victorians. It is something that they would not forgive you for.

As we have said in interjections and possibly in Mr Batchelor’s contribution as well, this belongs in the Environment and Planning Committee. The hint is in the name: ‘Planning’. If it was a genuine motion, if it was a genuine attempt to look at this, that would be the referral. Even if it is not, even if you insist that it should be a select committee, it does not need to be 18 months, Mr Ettershank. Let us be reasonable. But it should not be six weeks, because that is outrageous. If it is a select committee, it does not need to be six weeks. We know why the Liberals want it to be six weeks. They have already decided what is going to happen. They do not care about listening to young Victorians, and we will see that in this inquiry should it get up. On this side of the chamber we will always listen to them and champion their right to housing.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:29): I will start this by saying the Libertarians believe in property rights – it is one of our fundamental things. Planning restrictions are effectively people who do not own property exerting rights on people who do have property, so planning systems in general are problematic. If we needed a select committee because the Environment and Planning Committee is backed up and we would not be able to get it through, then I would support a select committee that looks widely into planning systems in Victoria and what the government is doing. I actually would not mind that. But what concerns me a lot about this is the fact that we are looking at three very specific planning schemes in a short timeframe.

I think I agree with Mr Galea here. The reason that we are looking at this and wanting to do it in such a short timeframe is because the opposition, the Greens and Legalise Cannabis want to put through a disallowance motion that will effectively abolish these and cause huge disruption to property rights. People have already purchased the land. They are putting permits in, and they will have to go through all that again, causing all sorts of delays. It costs money. Potentially people will have financing costs and all sorts of things that could cause them to go bankrupt. I just think this is a really bad idea. If we are going to do a review, I would like to do it over a longer timeframe and do this properly, not over six weeks over Easter. You cannot do an inquiry that is going to look at something so complex and detailed – huge numbers of stakeholders will want to participate in this. I just do not think that you can do something sensible in that timeframe. The only reason that we are trying to do it in this timeframe is so that it will meet the window for disallowance. It seems obvious to me.

On top of this, I have spoken to people as well in the south-east. Mr Galea was talking about Clyde North; I have spoken to people in Frankston. I am sure Mr Galea would have spoken to people in Frankston as well. I have been talking to a group there for some time who have been pushing for higher density housing. They were quite happy with what the government were doing because they did allow it. There is an area along the Nepean Highway where there are lots of empty lots and shuttered-up businesses. There is one business there which has still got Christmas decorations from when they went bankrupt during the pandemic. It is sad when you see it. This group of people are older people; you could probably call them empty nesters. They live in Frankston already. They want to stay in Frankston. They love Frankston. They like Frankston. Frankston is a good place to live. What they want to do is buy a luxury apartment near the beach in Frankston and move out of their home, because they have got a big family home that they do not need anymore because the kids have grown up and gone off to do whatever they do as adults. They want to live in a luxury apartment where they can walk to the supermarket, they can walk to the beach, they can walk to the train station and they can still drive into the city or do whatever they want. That is what they wanted to do. They were happy that the government approved this and that they were allowed to build this. The Greens and others have been saying, 'Well, this new housing, it's going to be very expensive.' And these luxury apartments probably will be quite expensive. I saw some plan designs for them; they looked really nice actually. But when they move into those apartments, they are going to be selling their house, which is a family house. A young family would buy their old house in Frankston.

To say, 'Well, we're going to just set up this inquiry with an objective that will effectively be the opposition and the Greens trying to move this disallowance motion to throw all that into chaos' – I just cannot support that in good conscience. It just seems totally wrong. I hear all the time from the Greens that they support housing, but they are constantly attacking developers. They are the people that build houses, for goodness sake. I just think we need to make it as easy as possible. I do not think the government has gone far enough in lots of this, but it is good that they have made it easier to get permits issued and things like this, which have lowered the barriers and the timeframes. That is a good thing.

David Davis interjected.

David LIMBRICK: There may be problems with it, but the intent is there to lower the barriers to get planning permits issued quicker. I support planning permits being issued quicker because it is very expensive to hold property on finance, and the quicker that you can get these things done, the cheaper it is for people.

I have got lots of criticisms of the government about the expenses that they put on property, like land taxes and stamp duty and all these other things that cause property to be expensive, but one of the other things that causes property to be expensive is having to wait while you are holding it and finance it and doing nothing with it rather than building a house for someone to live in. If we can make that faster, then great. I look forward to going and seeing these luxury apartments that get built in Frankston. I might go out and have a look at what is happening in Clyde North. I look forward to that.

I have heard these scare campaigns that the government was talking about. I do not see that in Frankston at all. The area that they want to build these apartments in has empty lots and shuttered businesses. It is sad. There is a local cafe and some really nice restaurants there, but there is hardly any foot traffic because no-one walks past. I think it would be great for the local businesses. I want to see that shop that went bankrupt during the pandemic open up again and see it turned into a nice restaurant or whatever the market decides. There will be a bunch of people that have just moved into their new apartments near the beach, and they will be able to go to these nice cafes and all that sort of stuff. It has the potential, the vision. These people that were pushing for this have a vision. They want Frankston to be better. They think that it can be a better place, and they see the shuttered-up shops and they think the same thing as me. They think, 'This is sad.' They want it to be developed. They want people to support those businesses and to go into those businesses. They want people to live in the

area, and they want to move out of the house that is inappropriate for their needs now because they do not have children living with them anymore. I cannot support this in good conscience.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:37): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Davis's name which calls on the house to agree to a standing up of a select committee to inquire into, consider and report by 13 May whether amendments to the Victorian planning provisions made through VC257, VC274 and VC267 give proper effect to the objectives of planning in Victoria et cetera, et cetera. The motion goes into a whole bunch of things about how the committee will operate, who it will consist of and who will be the chair et cetera, et cetera.

I have been sitting in the chamber for most of the debate, and I have had the benefit of hearing contributions by various people. I have to say it is a strange thing, but I agree with much of what Mr Limbrick has had to say in regard to this matter, not necessarily on the taxation stuff but certainly on the housing stuff. I also agree with what Mr Galea had to say about young people who want to be able to enter the property market. I was the former chair of the Environment and Planning Committee, and before many of you were in this place in the last term of Parliament, we actually undertook an inquiry into the planning scheme. One of the recommendations, in fact the only recommendation of that committee and report, was that the next term of Parliament undertake a full –

David Davis: You have copped out.

Sonja TERPSTRA: I will take up Mr Davis's interjection through you, Acting President. That recommendation was that the next Parliament undertake a full inquiry, but the chamber decided not to do that. What is different about what Mr Davis is proposing and what that motion said is that Mr Davis wants it to be a non-government chair, a very short turnaround of six weeks over a period where there will not be a lot of people around and the capacity to actually get experts in to give evidence to this will be severely compromised. It will be all those things. What we know about those opposite and members of the crossbench is that these committees are often used to do policy development work.

I continue to ask those opposite about the planning scheme amendments, what they see happening and how they are going to facilitate young people entering into the property market, and I hear none of that from those opposite. All I hear is 'Not in my backyard.' It is about nimbyism. I can tell you, particularly from my own experience – and I heard Mr Limbrick talk about his experience in Frankston – from when I moved into where I live in Heidelberg I have seen a lot of changes happening in Heidelberg. We have had big multistorey units put up in activity centres because there is a train station there and people want to live close to train stations. Young people actually do not really want to have a car anymore; they would much prefer to access public transport. In fact there is a rise in cars – you see them everywhere – called GoGet. You can see a car parked on the street, get access to it and off you go. You drive it and then leave it where you want to leave it and someone else picks it up. So there are rapidly changing and evolving technologies that give alternatives to people actually owning cars and the like.

Young people want to have affordable housing in areas where they grew up. They do not want to move out and perhaps have to go to the outer suburbs. They want to stay in the inner-ring or middle-ring suburbs where they grew up, and what I am seeing is a great diversity of different housing choices. The old quarter-acre block family home with four bedrooms and a big backyard is not what families want anymore. In fact if you look at some of the newly built houses, some of them are built on almost 80 per cent of the block. There is no backyard anymore. People do not necessarily want that style of housing. It goes to the other point about medium- and high-density housing, for example: people do like to live in medium to high density housing these days, and that was something I never saw growing up. When I grew up I was on a quarter-acre block.

It goes back to the point about what we see in suburbs. It is disappointing to me to hear people saying, 'Not in my backyard. It's going to change the neighbourhood character.' I am sorry, but when you buy your house you do not get to own the entire neighbourhood and you do not necessarily get to say,

'I don't want people moving in who want a different choice of house.' That is not acceptable, because we have to accept, if we want young people to be able to enter the housing market, that they should have a choice and a range of options that facilitate the lifestyle that they have and the family budget that they have.

We all know it was easier for our parents to get into the housing market because they also had secure jobs and secure income. Today what we have to acknowledge is that, unfortunately, our younger generations do not have access to secure work. We have had wage stagnation in this country for over 10 years, and through cost of living and the crisis we are facing household budgets are stretched. So how do we help them get into the housing market? We do stuff like this. We do stuff like planning frameworks and housing reform. We look at activity centres, and we look at how government can maximise and leverage making affordable housing around activity centres, where we know young people want to live.

We know families want to live close to public transport, schools, parks and all those things. That is not a bad thing, but what is a bad thing is exactly what Mr Limbrick said. This is about doing a rushed committee to get in front of a disallowance motion that would put a halt to all of the planning amendments where people have gone to council and sought building permits or are looking to buy homes et cetera. All of that would be thrown into question, and that would be disastrous, all because those opposite and some members of the crossbench want to put nimbyism ahead of people getting into the housing market. I condemn those opposite and members of the crossbench for supporting this motion, because that is what this really is. And I question: why does Mr Davis want this to have a non-government chair? Well, I know why. It is because either he –

A member interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: A predetermined outcome, absolutely. This is all about politics. They are speaking to themselves yet again to make sure that young people and people of diverse backgrounds cannot live in neighbourhoods that are affluent. I would like to see more people live in very wealthy suburbs like Hawthorn, Camberwell and those sorts of places, because those places are spoiled for choice when it comes to public transport services; they have tram, bus and train. That makes it more affordable for people to get to work, particularly when they cannot afford a car or do not want to have a car.

This motion is what it is. It is a really transparent and obvious attempt at undermining the government's work to help young people into the housing market. It is a transparent attempt to have a predetermined outcome and to attack and undermine the planning scheme. We saw this a couple of weeks ago now in this Parliament when Mr Davis sought to change our sessional orders – he stuffed it up. If this actually went through and we had an outcome and then a disallowance motion came that undermined these planning scheme amendments, what would the response be from Mr Davis and the Liberal Party and those on the crossbench to all those people who had invested their hard-earned savings in permits and getting lawyers to look at contracts for new housing? What would their response be to all of that? Nothing. Crickets from over there. What we know is that when you are in government you have to be responsible and sometimes you have to make hard decisions. I could talk about the extensive consultation that this government has undertaken around these planning and activity centres because in fact we listen. When we got feedback from communities about the activity centres we in fact changed the density because we listened.

If this motion gets up, I look forward to people who sit on this committee actually declaring whether they have got conflicts of interest or not and what interests they have in any of these activity centres. I think it would be a very good exercise in transparency. We get lectured from those opposite about transparency. Every committee member, whoever they are, should declare whether they have a conflict of interest in any of these activity centres or planning scheme amendments. That is transparency. It is all very well for those opposite and on the crossbench to lecture this government about that. I want to see what happens with select committee members in that regard.

This is nothing more than a sham. We know that what those opposite and the crossbench as well do is use these committees to do their policy development work. The problem is that there is a problem with timing. We know that experts are not going to be able to get in to give evidence. It is a too short, truncated timeframe. No-one will be around. Members will not turn up despite them wanting it to be done. No-one will turn up; it will not be done. There will be a predetermined outcome. It is transparently political. So again we waste this chamber's time and finite resources on another committee that we know will have a predetermined outcome that will hurt young Victorians and prevent them from getting into housing.

This government does not do business like that. We want to make sure everyone has the right to access housing for families and a diversity of housing for the housing choices that they need to make and what is appropriate to their needs. I will conclude my remarks there. As stated earlier, the government will be opposing this motion.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:47): I rise to contribute to the motion of Mr Davis opposite. This is another one of those motions that come around every now and then and then we have the same debate. We get our 10 minutes and they get theirs as well. But here we go. This motion is to establish a select committee of nine members to inquire into, consider and report on, by 13 May 2025, the recent planning changes to create high-rise, high-density development in 10 large activity centres and the additional 50 activity centres announced by the Allan Labor government, including but not limited to those centres. It will look at, under 1(a), 10 large activity centres and 50 additional activity centres and how they were chosen and established; under 1(b), whether these decisions were made appropriately by the Minister for Planning, what documents and assessments were behind the decisions and whether there was a sufficient accountability and transparency in the decision-making. On this, the word is consultation. It is something I always go back to in my second-reading speeches when I talk about this. You can see this in *Hansard*. The Allan Labor government is always committed to listening to the people.

I go back to the motion. Under 1(d), the committee will look at whether these changes make adequate or reasonable provisions for social or affordable housing, and then under 1(e), whether proper planning for infrastructure, including schools, health services, open space and sewerage services have been undertaken to support the planned intense developments. The motion talks about protecting heritage buildings and streetscapes at 1(g) and protecting vegetation and canopy at 1(h). The motion then asks whether the powers will be transferred from councils and communities to ministers for planning and whether this is appropriate and democratic.

Those opposite are yearning for the last two Liberal terms of government of Jeff Kennett. Victorians do not want that, and they do not want the cuts. We want to build, and as the Premier made it clear, we are all in this together. That means that we have very clear targets. By 'we', I mean the democratically elected government of all Victorians. But let us be very clear: we have not shied away from any of this.

A media release of 24 February this year could not be any clearer. Times have changed. Our kids are being priced out of the communities that they know and love. If we do not act now, it will be too late. The Premier said it clearly:

It's simple – work with us to unlock space for more homes or we'll do it for you.

So regarding the parts of that motion that discuss transferring powers from councils to communities to the Minister for Planning and so forth, we have made it very clear when this will happen. If the councils do not share the burden in a team Victoria approach, we will intervene and unlock more spaces.

The motion also talks about the logistics of the committee: that is three members of the government nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Council; three members from the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Council, so what that means is jobs for the mates of

Mr Davis, it seems; and then three members from among the remaining members of the Council. It goes on to the logistics of lodgement of the names with the President within five calendar days of the Council agreeing to this resolution and states that the chair and deputy chair of the committee will be non-government members. I will not specify the further logistic details of the motion, but it touches upon quorum rights, substitute members, meetings periods, public hearings, technical and specialist assistance and more.

The activity centres have been established to deal with an unavoidable problem. It aims to build 60,000 new homes across Melbourne to deal with the pressure – (*Time expired*)

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:51): I am pleased to sum up my response in this debate and thank members for their contributions. This is an important motion. It enables us to look closely at these three planning amendments VC267, VC257 and VC274. The state government has not consulted properly on these. It is true that there is a lot of work to do to understand the exact impact and how these will work in a local context. That work has not been done by state government. It should have been. They have overridden councils and communities in many of these decisions.

There are real concerns about the impact and how these will actually cut through and work for local communities – concerns, for example, about the ResCode and how that will work; the impact of the deemed to comply approach; the removal of the ability to consider neighbourhood character; the broader policy in the planning scheme where applications are deemed to comply; a very low minimum tree canopy, and a number of members have mentioned this small tree canopy requirement, which seems to go completely contrary to the government's other objectives and the objectives that most of us in this chamber would hold as sensible; and the removal of third-party review rights to VCAT for the deemed to comply provisions under clause 55. All of these are very important concerns that people have expressed.

The state government is in something of a panic on these planning matters. They have been in power now for almost 11 years – they are in their 11th year. The difficulties that we face in this state with respect to housing are their responsibility fundamentally. It is true, as others have pointed out, that tax and other matters are very significant, and it is also true that the machinery that the state government has had in place has not worked well over a longer period. But much of that is not the responsibility of councils and communities; much of it is the responsibility of the department and the minister. Things sit on the minister's desk for years in some cases, and yet the government has the temerity to point at local communities and local councils. I am sorry – the truth of the matter here is we can do much better as a community, but we also importantly need to recognise that bringing forward options in housing is an important objective; it is just that the state government has got 11 years of failure behind it on these matters. Prices have gone up, availability has gone down; that is true, and that is the state government's fault. It has actually caused these problems over the last almost 11 years. However, this is a very narrow motion in the sense that it deals with the three planning scheme amendments. It is in the context of other announcements by the state government, but those three planning scheme amendments can be looked at closely, and a sensible approach can be adopted where we make sure that they impact in the right way, that there is a proper approach to this and that the genuine outcomes that most of us want to see can be achieved.

I say local communities should have a say; I say councils should have say. I say people are entitled to live in an area and make sure that the area is held in such a way that the outcomes are fair and the objectives are balanced; now, that is a reasonable request. It is not what the state government is proposing in a number of its recent steps. It is proposing to steamroll local communities and do that unfairly. But even if you agreed with the state government in most of its approaches, you would still want to understand precisely how these planning schemes – these three individual but important planning schemes, which are applied across the Victorian planning provisions, so they are statewide provisions – will actually impact on local communities. I have got to say the state government does not want the examination or the transparency here, because the state government wants to cover up its failings.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (22): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (17): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Tom McIntosh, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaelyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion agreed to.***Business of the house*****Notices of motion**

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:02): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 817, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.***Motions*****Defence industry**

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (16:04): I move:

That this house notes that:

- (1) in 2022–23, the Australian defence industry contributed \$10.6 billion to Australia’s gross value added (GVA), up 4.1 per cent from the previous year and in the same period the industry consisted of 5544 businesses and employed 64,100 persons, up 6.3 per cent;
- (2) the top three industries account for 75.6 per cent of the total defence industry GVA, with the three largest contributors being:
 - (a) professional, scientific and technical services;
 - (b) manufacturing;
 - (c) construction;
- (3) the states with the largest defence industry GVA growth between 2021–22 and 2022–23 were:
 - (a) NSW, up \$370 million;
 - (b) South Australia, up \$125 million;
 - (c) Western Australia, up \$58 million;
- (4) Victoria rates fifth in manufacturing, second in construction, and third in professional, scientific and technical services of defence industry GVA, with currently 24,000 defence industry jobs in Victoria;
- (5) in March 2023, unemployment in Gippsland rose from 6800 to 7100 while youth unemployment jumped from 3400 to 6600;
- (6) Gippsland’s largest employment industries are health care and social assistance, and education and training;
- (7) the number of 15- to 64-year-olds on JobSeeker income support payments in Gippsland is 13,360 or 7.6 per cent of the community;

and calls on the government to work with the federal government, defence and industry to develop critical information and provide networking opportunities along with support and advocacy services to develop a plan for increasing employment opportunities in the defence industry for Gippsland.

Sadly, war and defence industries have been a crucible for development, and very quick development, of technology. You have just got to look at World War I with the air war. At the beginning of the 1914 to 1918 war planes could barely move, and by the end they had multi-engine bombers and were flying higher than they ever thought. Plus with World War II they had jets by the end of it.

Anyway, paragraph (b) is about manufacturing: obviously we have to make stuff to use for our defence. With construction, we have to have somewhere to put it. This is getting to where I am going. The states with the largest defence industry GVA growth between 2021–22 and 2022–23 were New South Wales, up \$370 million; South Australia, up \$125 million; and Western Australia, up \$58 million. Victoria ranks fifth in manufacturing, second in construction and third in professional, scientific and technical services of defence, with currently 24,000 defence industry jobs in Australia.

One of the things I found whilst I was at the air show last week was how many little defence industries are just squirrelled away around the place. I had a look at the F-35 bits and pieces, the newest fighter we have at the moment, and there was a display. One of the displays was of a guy basically with a forged right-angle casting turning it into a machined work of art. This was just one little guy. There were gun carriages, the things they bolt the guns into, which then bolt to the plane. There were all sorts of things going on that you would not think. There were also people like Marand, who do the carbon fibre, the vertical stabilisers, if I recall correctly.

With all this good stuff there is some bad stuff. In March 2023 unemployment in Gippsland rose from 6800 to 7100 whilst youth unemployment jumped from 3400 to 6600. Gippsland's largest employment industries are health care, social assistance and education and training, and the number of 15- to 64-year-olds on JobSeeker income support payments in Gippsland is about 7.6 per cent of the community. What I am calling on is for the government to work with the federal government, defence and industry to develop critical information and networking opportunities with the support advocacy services to develop a plan for increasing opportunity in the defence field.

The timing of this is not accidental. We have a problem with higher unemployment; we have the timber industry gone from Gippsland; we have the coal-fired power industry reducing; we have got a ready-made workforce; and sadly, the world's geopolitical situation is declining rapidly – we just have to look at some of the stunts that other countries are doing near our borders. It is time that Australia's defence industry is supercharged. We hopefully will never need it, but we may need the capability. We may need to defend the Commonwealth from any potential threats to our security. This can form physical threats, this can form cyber threats. The federal government response to this has committed to increasing defence spending to confront these threats. This global uncertainty gives Victoria the opportunity to lead the further development of defence manufacturing. We have space, we have – for the moment – power and we have the workforce. We can as a government encourage the sector to replace the industries that have been going from Victoria in the recent decades, and obviously being one of the member for Eastern Gippsland I want to make it happen in the Gippsland area. Gippsland has a long history of manufacturing and heavy industry. It has a long history of providing the power for pretty well Victoria for over a century, and there are a lot of technical skills and knowledge that are going to go to waste if we do not do something about it.

It is not to say Victoria is a wasteland of defence industries; there are numerous defence companies that are vital to the construction of some of the world's most technically complex military vehicles. Two of these companies, Lovitt Technologies and ILIAS Solutions, manufacture parts for the F-35, much like I was saying before. That F-35 is flown by 20 nations and is Australia's premier military aircraft. It was at the Avalon air show last week. It is quite an impressive machine, and as a country, we need more.

What this says is we have the capability. What this says is that we as a state can do it. We have people, we have places and we have power. I want further employment opportunities that will not only give defence capability and not only attend to the Gippsland economy but will also attend to the Victorian economy. As I have always said, with jobs comes the ability of eight hours work, eight hours recreation and eight hours sleep. With that eight hours recreation we can go shooting; fishing; farming, which is more work than recreation, boating; four-wheel driving – all those sorts of things. When more people are in gainful employment, the crime goes down. There is a crime problem across Victoria – across Australia, to be honest. You know the old saying, 'Idle hands make the devil's work.' What that means

is if we give people jobs, it will just naturally drive the crime rate down. People have got to go to work, they have got to get up, and they will have that –

Sheena Watt interjected.

Jeff Bourman: Yes, earn a buck. They will have that feeling of contributing to society. That makes people feel better about themselves. And we will drive down the crime and drive up the GDP of the state. Gippsland, unfortunately, has a higher proportion of people needing JobSeeker income. It is 3 per cent above the rest of Victoria. I could wax lyrical as to why this is happening, but really it is what it is. We have got to look forward, not back.

Gippsland had quite an important, historical role in the military history of Australia. In 1943 RAAF Base East Sale – which I lived at twice, both times as a preschooler – opened during World War II and has trained over 3000 aircrew. Also, aircraft from this base protected naval convoys along Australia's south-east coast. We look at it now from our point of view of what is going on and we have geopolitical threats, but in the 1940s it was not a threat; it was a reality. So dotted across the place out near Mallacoota, I believe, there is an airfield and there is a bunker that is actually a museum. Dotted across Australia there are all these little places where, when we needed them, we made room for them. What I would like is to see more of the projection of the strength, projection of Victoria and Australia rising to the occasion, so we do not need to go to war. The last thing we want is war. Back in the 1940s we did not have much of a choice. Back then we were joined at the hip with the UK. We went on with them and then we ended up fighting Japan at the time. That was then; I say this is now.

Currently East Sale employs 700 defence personnel, and its main role is the training of Australia's RAAF pilots, who play a critical role in defence of this part of the Commonwealth. What I found very interesting during the air show, whilst I was looking at all planes flying around, was learning about the universities. Federation University, Swinburne and TAFE Gippsland all have a large presence in Gippsland obviously, but they also provide a lot of technical education. This is not making a plane out of wood and canvas and some radial engines; now it is computerised. You have to make stuff within tolerances that were just unimaginable 80 years ago. We have the capability; we have the ability to teach people and we have the teachers. One example of this is the Aerostructures Innovation Research Hub. This is a Swinburne University facility that drives research in the fields of aerospace, complex manufacturing and advanced air operations. One of its primary locations is at Latrobe Regional Airport in Morwell.

What I did not know – which I should have known, being a bit of an aircraft nerd – is there is an aircraft manufacturer in Gippsland called GippsAero, surprisingly, and it makes a light utility aircraft, the GA8 Airvan. The company was founded in 1977 by Peter Furlong and produces aircraft that have been sold in the US and Europe as well as Australia. It is still 100 per cent owned, and it shows that, albeit on small scale, the ability to do these things is still well and truly here. We are poised and we are on the precipice of being able to drive a lot of the problems that we have in our state down. What we do have around the rest of the country – and I am not sure when this happened so I am not giving it to either side of the aisle here, just the federal government – is a new forging facility from Thales in Victoria for the construction of the 155-millimetre artillery shells in Benalla. Also there was a forging plant – I think it was in conjunction with Rheinmetall – with NIOA Munitions in Maryborough, Queensland; this was some time ago. I also recall that there was a contract that we were fighting for in Australia for a vehicle which I cannot recall off the top of my head, and the manufacturer of it was to be in Victoria. Unfortunately, we lost it to Queensland. My job is not to take work away from NIOA Munitions; my job is to get them to spend their money down here. The AUKUS treaty pact will see an investment around the nation, particularly with naval skills and training in Victoria. We do have quite a coastline for a small state, so whilst Gippsland has a lot of it, I think historically most of our naval stuff has been done in Melbourne, in Port Phillip Bay. Someone will correct me, no doubt. So it is important that the Victorian government lobbies for further defence projects to be built in Gippsland. I believe we can make a tangible difference to our ability to defend our country.

Also, there are other offshoots as well as defence. One of the things I did see at the air show was there were a lot of drones of different sorts, and we are not talking about the little drones you can fly around and take selfies with and all that sort of thing. This thing was bigger than me, but what it was designed for was if you had offshore wind farms, instead of sending a boat out there in weather that would be pretty ordinary, this great big drone flies out there, does an inspection and flies back, with someone just sitting safely onshore. This takes away the problems we have with, first of all, time, distance, cost and danger to people. We can all have our own opinions on offshore wind farms, but the point is you cannot just put them out there and just ignore them. There are bleed-offs to where things can go, and this goes back to what I was saying about that military technology driving innovation.

It is interesting – in the course of doing this I came across the *Victorian Defence Vision Statement: Victoria's Defence Sector in 2030* from the government. I do not have enough time to go through it, but basically it is to secure, grow and train, and we need to do this from the point of view of all the problems that we have as a state that we can deal with. Swinburne was, surprisingly to me, sort of very deep in this whole thing. I intend on going out to have a look at their facilities over the break. I mean, they were doing something with supersonic and hypersonic air vehicles, composite materials and a lot of research to do with various aerospace stuff. Latrobe Valley has a facility at the airport, which is quite a cool little airport, but we could have it as a cool big airport. In fact in 2024, which was only last year, Swinburne became the first foundation member of the Latrobe Aerospace Technology Precinct. In 2023 – and I am reading obviously from Swinburne's blurb here – Swinburne achieved the first flight of an Australian-developed hydrogen fuel cell electric power VTOL, vertical take-off and landing, drone in Victoria's Latrobe Valley. Obviously hydrogen power is one of those things – you can get hydrogen from coal, and one thing about Gippsland is we do have coal. One of the other smaller companies I came across in the thing was called Ferra, who do design, manufacture and assembly of complex systems for strategic platforms. It is obviously a way of just saying that they design strategic military stuff.

One of the things I did find from talking to people which is not in any of these documents is there is a skills shortage, and the skills shortage is a labour shortage of a specialised kind. When I say 'fitters and turners', it is not just people with a lathe or a mill these days; there are complex computer numerical control operations that need to be done. Making stuff for the F-35, for instance: you cannot just sit there with a pair of calipers at home and design this part and make it happen. If you screw up a part even just a small bit, it can lead to a catastrophic failure of an aeroplane, and then they have to ground them all. I was having a look at the quality of some of the output and it was just astounding, but when asked what they wanted it was one of two things. Most of the time it was more skilled people, which means TAFEs and places like Swinburne and Federation Uni are going to have to step up and offer courses that will give an industry-specific set of skills so that people are coming out and able to just use the machinery. Obviously you go through an apprenticeship – this, that and the other. But the other thing was sometimes land. Obviously, land in Victoria is quite a premium product, and if you are a small company developing a widget for a supersonic jet fighter, maybe you can do it in a small garage, maybe you cannot. But one thing that is always a problem is finding an appropriate amount of land and of course investment.

I am going to wrap this up, but just to basically recap, we have an opportunity. We are not in dark times. I hope we never get into dark times. But I look at the geopolitical situation we are in, and it could be better. I do not want to be the UK in the late 1930s where when something does happen we are playing catch-up. We need to be ready; we need to have the people, the machinery, the products, the ability. We have a small military, but I would say pound for pound it is probably the best military in the world. It has always fought harder than its size would suggest – I do not have the time to go into it. But this is an opportunity for the government. This is an opportunity for governments. This is an opportunity for TAFEs and universities. This is an opportunity for the sector to have a go and attend to their problems and also bring up the area of Gippsland and give it the ability to grow back to what it was – a regional powerhouse.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:23): I rise to support Mr Bourman's motion and acknowledge his advocacy for jobs and opportunity in Gippsland. This motion before us goes to the very heart of what matters to regional communities: secure employment, meaningful career pathways and the ability to build a life close to home. I would like to say for the Allan Labor government these priorities are not new. We have always understood that skills and training are central to job creation, particularly in regional Victoria. That is why we have made record investments in TAFE, because when we back skills we back people.

Our commitment to a public TAFE has helped drive jobs growth right across the state. Since we came to office more than 140,000 jobs have been created in regional Victoria. We have seen regional unemployment fall from 6.6 per cent under the former government to just 4 per cent today; in fact it is lower than in metropolitan Melbourne. And it is no accident. That is Labor policy in action – a strong economy supported by a strong TAFE system, helping people into secure and rewarding work.

Gippsland has directly benefited from these policies. From Morwell to Sale and Traralgon to Bairnsdale, our regional TAFEs are equipping locals with the skills they need to thrive in industries like advanced manufacturing, clean energy and defence. Let us take a moment to examine the defence industry, a sector where Gippsland is already punching well, well, well above its weight. Whether it is the RAAF base in East Sale, the growing aviation capability in West Sale or the broader defence supply chain that links into major projects across the state, Gippsland is becoming a real hub of activity, and I am so glad to see that we in fact have four members in here representing Eastern Victoria.

Can I say: none of this, not a single bit of this, happens without skilled workers. That is why our investment in free TAFE and the broader Skills First initiative has been so critical. Since launching free TAFE in 2019 more than 156,000 students have enrolled in priority courses designed to meet the needs of industries for real long-term career opportunities. Many of these are available in Gippsland through providers like TAFE Gippsland – courses in engineering, construction, IT, automotive and electrotechnology, just to name a few – and they are all equipping locals with skills that align with defence and advanced manufacturing. We are not just talking training for training's sake – we have had enough of that – we are creating clear pathways into real jobs. Through our defence industry workforce development program we are supporting students and jobseekers to enter the defence sector through targeted internships, training programs and upskilling opportunities. One stand-out is the work we are doing for the Defence Science Institute, which is co-funded by the Victorian government. The DSI links our world-class universities and TAFEs with industry, enabling practical experience and innovation that translates directly into workforce outcomes. That is what a modern TAFE system looks like: connected to industry, delivering real results and changing lives.

Gippsland's contribution to our sovereign defence capability continues to grow. Earlier this year Lockheed Martin selected Martin-Baker Australia based in East Sale to deliver ejector seat survival training for Australian Defence Force pilots. It is one of those ones that you hope you never have the need to call upon, but if you do, you want to know how to use it. It is a vital role that will support the safety of our service men and women, and it is being delivered right here in Victoria by highly skilled Victorians. Initiatives like this are a clear vote of confidence in our state's workforce – a workforce built in large part by our public training system.

More broadly, I want to talk about our digital jobs program and Skills First investments, which are helping thousands of Victorians gain the digital and technical skills that underpin defence and aerospace projects. From coding and cybersecurity to design and data systems, these capabilities are becoming increasingly vital, and Victoria is leading the way. It is not just technical skills, mind you; it is also about making sure that all Victorians can access opportunity, including women, young people and people from diverse backgrounds. That is why we are embedding diversity and inclusion targets into our skills programs and promoting STEM pathways that encourage broader participation in defence and manufacturing. I have previously spoken about women coders, and it is good to see so many women taking on coding, which has got so many opportunities into the future. These are the

skills that are the cornerstone of economic security, and nowhere is that clearer than in regional Victoria.

Our government continues to invest in infrastructure and in capital works at regional TAFEs, making sure students have access to modern fit-for-purpose learning environments. At TAFE Gippsland these include upgraded trade training facilities and learning centres that reflect the needs of today's industries. I have gone out there to Gippsland TAFE with some of the students out there doing the ranger training, and it is a world-class centre, there is no doubt about it. That is because we are listening to local communities through regional skills taskforces. We are working with industry and training providers to identify current and future workforce needs and then aligning course offerings to match. That is smart demand-driven training that supports economic growth.

Importantly, our TAFEs go beyond training. They also include, really importantly, something we have spoken about a lot, which is restoring public confidence in a system that was gutted under the previous government. TAFE under the former Liberal–National government was under attack; campuses were closed, courses were cut and jobs were lost. This reckless approach really left a skills vacuum across regional Victoria, one that I have heard directly about in particular from folks out in Gippsland. That was fixed by Labor. We rescued TAFE and we rebuilt it, and we are now seeing the results. Thousands of skilled workers are entering the workforce and powering industries from Latrobe Valley to East Gippsland. Through programs like free TAFE, the digital jobs program and the defence industry workforce development program we are building a pipeline of talent that is meeting the needs of employers, particularly in our priority sectors of defence, clean energy, construction and advanced manufacturing. I had the good fortune of actually seeing some energy and clean energy products that have come out of Gippsland recently, and my gosh, it is exciting, the innovation that is happening in the eastern part of our state.

I will just go back to defence and the Land 400 phase 3 and Land 8116 defence projects being delivered by Hanwha in Victoria. These are creating more than 600 direct jobs and hundreds more indirect jobs through the supply chain. Our TAFEs are essential to ensuring that there are enough skilled workers to fill those roles. To support this we have established the Victorian Land Systems Fund, a \$10 million investment to help small and medium businesses upskill, innovate and become part of the defence supply chain. Again, skills are central to that mission.

When you look at defence, aerospace, energy, infrastructure and tech, the common denominator across all of them is people. The workforce is everything, and our government knows that starts with TAFE. That is why we will continue to back Gippsland's future by backing its people, and that means continuing our strong unwavering support for TAFE and public training. We know that a strong skill system underpins a strong economy, we know that local jobs build local communities and we know that regional Victoria, including Gippsland, has a vital role to play in our state's future prosperity. This motion reflects those values. It recognises the importance of local jobs, regional capability and the government's role in facilitating that. It gives this chamber an opportunity to highlight all that has been achieved and all that is still to come for Gippsland, for our defence industry and for the skilled workers that power both. The Allan Labor government will continue to invest, continue to support and continue to deliver. That is our record; that is our commitment.

In the last minute that I have can I thank Mr Bourman for bringing this motion to the chamber today. It is always good to reflect on regional jobs and our unwavering commitment to regional communities, particularly through education and TAFEs. I know under the leadership of the Minister for Skills and TAFE from regional Victoria we will always prioritise regional education and regional opportunities. With that can I say that I am delighted to support this motion today, and I look forward to contributions from other members in our chamber.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:32): The Liberals and the Nationals will be supporting Mr Bourman's motion 811 on the notice paper. Last night parliamentarians, at the kind offer of the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, went to the Shrine of Remembrance. It was opened in 1934, and we

stood there as a solemn reminder of the lives lost in defence of democracy and in subsequent conflicts in defence of Australia. Indeed there is a very important element in this motion which relates to peace through insurance and peace through strength. We must have a defence system now, and that is largely the ambit of the federal government, but certainly continuing to have manufacturing in our state is a very important element of that strength.

Mr Bourman, I am not going to correct your homework, but I just want to provide a little bit of context here for some of your motion. Your motion goes to March 2023, and you paint a picture of the various parts of Gippsland in terms of unemployment. I would like to give you updated labour market figures that have come out from the ABS and others as of December 2024. There are over 14,000 working-age Gippslanders currently receiving JobSeeker payments, an increase of 7.5 per cent. Youth unemployment in Gippsland is 14.2 per cent, and the national average is 9 per cent. Workforce participation in Gippsland is 59.8 per cent, while the state average workforce participation is almost 70 per cent. The unemployment rate is about the same, but this is what we can see if we go to Gippsland's local government areas; let us look at those. Unemployment in the Latrobe Valley is 7.4 per cent, a three-year high. In Gippsland it is 5.6 per cent, a four-year high; in Wellington, 4.8 per cent; in Bass, a three-year high of 3.9 per cent; and in Baw Baw, 3.2 per cent. South Gippsland is on par with Baw Baw. What we can also see is that – and there is no joy in giving you this, but I want to give a reality check for some of the comments I am about to make – over the past two years, under both federal and state Labor governments, Morwell has 16 per cent unemployment. It has jumped 5.8 per cent in the last year and is higher than the national average unemployment rate. Moe and Newborough have an 8.7 per cent unemployment rate – again, higher. Sale is 6.3 per cent higher. Bairnsdale is 7.2 per cent higher than the national average. Lakes Entrance is 6.6 per cent, and Omeo and Bruthen are 7.3 per cent. I raise that because of course not all is rosy in downtown Gippsland, in particular in Latrobe Valley.

We have heard from the government that TAFE is solving all of our problems. If that were so, I would be delighted. But indeed under this government over the last decade we have seen the closure of manufacturing. We have seen the closure of the native timber industry; the closure of all of the associated manufacturing that goes with that and the machinery; and the pressures on the Maryvale pulp mill, the paper mill that has employed people for over 85 years. That is diminishing in scale. Why? Because the government has closed the native timber industry and is putting pressure on not only that industry but the employees. Only a month ago my colleague Martin Cameron and my other colleague Danny O'Brien asked a question, and we had members of the CFMEU, certainly from the forestry division, in there wanting to push their point to the Premier. We also had the closure of Hazelwood a number of years ago, and it was a botched closure. It was a pushed closure. It could have been done on a better scale, but it was not. This government forced them over the edge. And what happened then? This government grew the LVA, the Latrobe Valley Authority, and it was about transition and moving those people into other employment where they could or retraining them.

I could go on for ages, and I do not have that time. But what we know is that there was \$300 million spent on it and still today we have these sorts of figures in downtown Gippsland and in Latrobe Valley. That is not a glowing endorsement for what has happened with the Latrobe Valley Authority – lots of money to keep staff moving and employed, not a lot of job creation. There have been spot fires on job creation. We had some sugar hits, but nothing invested in industry to keep people working and engaging in new industry, and there is plenty there to be had. We also had the SEC hoax. That was going to be an enormous boom, and we have seen about three people employed in that so far. We also had SEA Electric, and I know Mr Bourman will remember that. That was when the Premier came down in 2018 to the valley, saying, 'We're going to grow electric vehicle manufacturing,' spruiking it on the eve of an election – 500 jobs in the region. What happened? Nothing. It dissolved into thin air, like we have seen with all of the industry that we were going to have as a result of the Commonwealth con games that did not materialise and legacy projects that are going to now be in the never-never. These are some of the things that we have been sold a bill of during this government's tenure, and we see, unfortunately, our unemployment rate is a result of that.

I will say it has always been a challenging and dynamic environment, particularly in the Latrobe Valley, but certainly there is room for improvement. Back in the day between 2010 and 2014 we had the Latrobe Valley Industry and Infrastructure Fund. It was a very modest fund – it was \$15 million under the Liberals and Nationals – but it co-invested. It had public and private investments. There was a component there. It was not just a sugar hit for some of the LVA's pet projects; it was actually a co-investment. It grew jobs, and there are figures to back those up. What we also know is – and I take up Mr Bourman's commentary around Latrobe aerospace technology and indeed GippsAero and the opportunity in that Latrobe Regional Airport precinct – there is enormous scope to grow that. Indeed Martin Cameron and I recently went out with the Latrobe City Council, and I thank Bruce Connelly for his time out there talking about this very worthwhile investment. This is what the government should be discussing. This is where we should be value-adding into our regions and utilising the best technology, and some of that certainly can be in that defence personnel. Some of the organisations can move from out of Moorabbin and come where there is more space, more security, less cost and more long-term viability out in our region in Gippsland. I thank the Latrobe City Council for doing that work.

Of course there are other opportunities too. There is a thing called the HESC, the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain. The Japanese government is prepared to put \$3 billion into a system that uses coal from the Latrobe Valley, carbon captures and stores it in safe deposits out to sea, then manufactures that and sends hydrogen back to Japan for their economy, for their zero-emission economy. What a great opportunity. What has this government been doing? Crickets on this. It is having this internal war with Lily D'Ambrosio and the former Treasurer Tim Pallas, who was supportive of that, and I know; I was down in the valley when he made those comments. These are the opportunities. We do have renewables. Whether they are coming or not, it is still conjecture. We have got the federal government saying no to Hastings where the development of the leverage port could be, but there are places in Gippsland like Port Anthony and our Barry Beach area that could really facilitate those ongoing skills and maintenance jobs. These are very much on the precipice and may or may not occur.

What we also know from this government over the last few years – and the PBO, the Parliamentary Budget Office, has presented these facts to the Parliament – is that across the regions we regional Victorians make up 25 per cent of the population. But what are we seeing in this government spend? Thirteen per cent, 12 per cent of the infrastructure. What are we seeing here? A city-centric government pouring money into black holes in metropolitan Melbourne when it should be investing in regional Victoria. It should be investing, as Mr Bourman has said, in some of that componentry. It should certainly be about strengthening our defence, putting back manufacturing as a priority, not just a by-line in a Latrobe Valley Authority philosophy – there was no plan in its last paper – and actually doing the work, enabling Regional Development Victoria and Regional Development Australia to facilitate good investment and co-investment with industries and give them the security and the knowledge that they are going to be open for business in Victoria, which we have not had under the Andrews–Allan government for the last 10 years.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:43): I am delighted to speak on this topic, and I am really glad that my colleague Mr Bourman has raised this issue. I also want to congratulate him for his advocacy for his region. There are strong reasons for Victorians to be confident in our economic future. This motion specifically calls out the defence industry and its role as an employer in regional Victoria, and this is exactly why we recognised defence as a priority sector in our economic statement. The *Economic Growth Statement* states that:

Regional Victoria is at the forefront of **manufacturing and defence industry** capabilities ...

So we have already identified this as a priority sector, particularly for regions.

I did find it fascinating that technological advancements and innovation in defence capabilities are also furthering our defences against things like climate change and furthering other good social and economic advances in our society. I had the great pleasure of meeting Mia, a University of Melbourne

physics PhD candidate, at the Avalon air show last week. She was at the Melbourne Uni stand there. We discussed her interest in physics and her studies of how rockets work, and of course that is the connection with defence in the work that she was doing with the design of rockets. I was fascinated to hear her raise the ethical dilemma of being involved in the defence space but also that so many good things come out of defence research and study. So there literally is an ethical dilemma. I am not going to solve it here, and I am not going to choose which way to go in this speech either. But, for instance, when they test their rockets, their payloads sometimes have a really interesting pieces of research in them. For instance, the one that they most recently put up had the capability of measuring sea level around the globe. That was an interesting piece of information, obviously improving climate change data. This dual role is also evident in growing businesses with strong links to the defence sector in my own regional community. I also had the pleasure of meeting Catherine Dorward of Envirofluid, and that business is based in Warrnambool. They were also at the Avalon air show.

It is worth noting here that the air show is the most comprehensive aviation, aerospace and defence exposition in the Southern Hemisphere and it provides a platform for Victoria's world-class supply chain businesses to showcase their expertise in aviation, aerospace and defence to a national and international audience.

Back to Envirofluid: at the Envirofluid stall I heard from Catherine about their growing business in my very own backyard. Their story is a fascinating one and highlights as well the importance of defence work for jobs in regional Victoria. Envirofluid's journey began not only as a business venture but also as a deeply personal mission. Ben, the director of Envirofluid, grew up hearing the extraordinary story of his father Jim Ohlmeyer. Jim served as a private in the 8th division signals during World War II and endured over three years and eight months as a prisoner of war in Singapore. His service earned him recognition amongst his peers, and he was mentioned in dispatches for services rendered under the harshest of conditions. Despite surviving, Jim's postwar life brought new trials. His war experiences exposed him to toxic substances which over time took a toll on his health. This serves as a grim reminder of the hidden dangers that so many defence personnel face in their daily lives.

For Ben, watching the impact that toxic substances had on his father's health inspired him to create a healthier and safer future. He realised that the use of harmful chemicals was not just a workplace issue; it was a human issue, affecting countless lives and families. So Ben founded Envirofluid with a singular vision: to provide safer environmentally friendly alternatives to hazardous chemicals for cleaning. His mission was to revolutionise the way businesses approach cleaning, maintenance and industrial processes to ensure that health and safety and sustainability are never compromised.

Envirofluid's innovative product lines were designed to reduce environmental impact and protect workers' wellbeing. The products are manufactured to clean chemicals and equipment for heavy-duty workshops. They have a water-based range of descalers and dust suppression products which can go down standard wash bays to standard local waste facilities. This all sounds very technical, but basically it is a bioproduct that is much healthier than the chemicals for cleaning engines have been historically.

These products reduce the environmental impact and protect workers' wellbeing, and these solutions have since become trusted across industries like defence, marine, mining, manufacturing and hospitality. As a result Envirofluid has grown into a company with a global impact. Defence makes up 35 per cent of their business, and mining and trucking make up the remainder. This is not just defence in Australia; they also ship to Singapore, Guam, New Zealand, America and Canada. They are in talks with a distributor in the UK to complete their own private AUKUS program. It is remarkable how the business grew from Warrnambool during COVID. By boosting the supply of sanitiser, Envirofluid were able to scale up their business, producing 60 tonnes per day. That was an amazing innovation. They also became a sovereign option for the replacement of cleaning chemicals. They have what is called a distributor number with NATO, and also Boeing have been involved in purchasing their product as well. Again, that is their global story. Their story continues with supplies to the US navy and to the mining industry. They have just been granted an NSN – that is a NATO

stock number – which allows any NATO member to purchase items from them. The Capability Acquisition and Sustainment Group, which is a recent approval that they received for NSNs, means that their range of products can be purchased by all allied defence countries. This is huge and a real positive for our region and our city. Today Envirofluid employs 10 people in Warrnambool and five people remotely. However, with their growing impact and the investments made by the defence industry, they are certainly projected to expand in scale. As illustrated by just this one story of Envirofluid, employment opportunities and technical expertise are growing in our state, and the Allan Labor government is very committed to supporting this industry.

If we look at the story of Dan and Ben and the chemical impacts on his life, like Mia from Melbourne Uni who is studying physics and learning about rockets, he is also confronting that dilemma of concerns around defence and the build-up of weaponry versus the often scientific benefits that happen as a result of that. I do not see any joy in an arms race at all, but I certainly see positivity coming from these kinds of investments and innovation that happen around the globe. I am thrilled to have discovered that there is a defence industry business located in Warrnambool in my own community.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (16:53): Unlike some in the other corner of this chamber – I do not know where they are today. Where are they, those people over in that corner who are usually dead against anything to do – I cannot see them – with defence? They are just not around. They have left this space. I do not know why they are not here to debate this fantastic motion brought by Mr Bourman. It is a very essential motion. We cannot stress enough the importance of developing our own defence industry in Australia, particularly in this state. I am happy to share the love. A bit can go to Gippsland, but of course we definitely need it in Western Victoria Region, and we have got it. Let me tell you, I am about to outline exactly what we do have in Western Victoria Region. I am just a little perturbed that those over there in that corner just have not turned up at the moment. Really, it is a shame.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Mr McIntosh; it is a shame. Anyway, we will press on without them. Defence is vital to Victoria. It gives us 29,000 jobs – direct defence industry jobs. It makes a \$10.9 billion direct economic contribution. There are \$4.9 billion of gross value added benefits across the supply chain, and there is \$210 million worth of defence research and development undertaken in Victoria, with annual exports – and they are expert – totalling \$1.7 billion. As I said, I was happy to share the love with Mr Bourman so that we do have some going to Gippsland, but what I am concerned about is paragraph (3) of Mr Bourman motion, which tells us how Victoria is lagging behind New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia. They have all had growth increases, but Victoria is now rating fifth in manufacturing, second in construction and third in professional scientific and technical services of defence industry, with currently 24,000 defence industry jobs. That is not good enough. We cannot possibly be a second-class cousin to New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia; we have got to lift our game.

We have heard of some of the companies across Victoria as a whole. But there is, as I said, a very significant cluster in western Victoria, specifically around Geelong, and this is largely as a result of the success of Hanwha Defence Australia in its bid to win the multibillion-dollar Commonwealth government's Land 400 phase 3 program. Hanwha will build 129 Redback infantry fighting vehicles at their \$170 million Avalon Airport industrial precinct facility. This is in addition to their earlier success in winning a defence department contract for a self-propelled howitzer program. I know those in the Greens corner would hate all this – wouldn't they, Minister Shing? They would hate it. But we think it is all fantastic for Victoria, it is fantastic for the defence of Australia and it is vitally important to keeping us all safe and keeping this democracy thriving – although sometimes you would wonder around here. That company has also committed to building the vehicles using a largely Australian supply chain – isn't that fantastic – with many suppliers locating close to the Avalon manufacturing hub. That is what we are getting to here: Avalon's manufacturing hub is going to be the defence leader

in this country. The project is expected to support 500 to 600 direct jobs and over 1000 direct jobs in Australian defence industry suppliers.

Like my friend from western Victoria, I was pleased to attend the Avalon air show last weekend, but it was not just about aerial displays. I should quickly send my thoughts to the pilot who was injured in the accident on Friday and his family and also congratulate and compliment the emergency services and the event organisers for their reaction to that dreadful accident. We wish that pilot a speedy recovery. But this was also a significant networking event for defence industries at Avalon, as Ms Ermacora said. The attendees and exhibitors came from across Australia and internationally, but there was also a lot to show off locally. A real cluster now exists in the Geelong area. Companies with direct interest or relevant supply chain capabilities include Air Radiators, the Automotive Research Centre, BullEx Australia, Chemring, Cross Laminated Offsite Solutions, FLAIM Systems, IXL Group, Marand, McHugh and Eastwood, Quickstep, WRAP Engineering, RPC Technologies, Sykes, Winchester, Universal Motion Simulation, XTM Performance and of course Hanwha.

I also want to give a particular shout-out to CubePilot and their CEO Philip Rowse, who opened, just in time for the Avalon show, their new Geelong factory on the Ford site just last week. CubePilot make an advanced open source autopilot for drones and other unmanned aerial vehicles, which has obvious and important military applications given the increasing importance of drones in warfare. They are a fabulous local business with international expertise and worldwide reach, and they export. This is not just about the existing companies in Geelong and Western Victoria Region –

Tom McIntosh: On a point of order, President, I am thoroughly enjoying hearing Mrs McArthur talk about all the economic activity and investment being made in Victoria thanks to the good work of the government; however, the motion is on Gippsland employment, so perhaps Mrs McArthur could come back to some of the government's intentions and big investments within Gippsland. If there are ideas you see within Gippsland, like perhaps energy generation, you could shed some light there, Mrs McArthur.

The PRESIDENT: I have just joined this party, Mr McIntosh, so I will take it that Mrs McArthur will do her best to stick to the motion.

Bev McARTHUR: Just to take up Mr McIntosh's point of order, I know he is jealous that we are doing better in Western Victoria Region than he is Gippsland, but he can catch up. Look, I said I was happy to share the love. You have just got to learn to get better, Mr McIntosh – seriously. We have just got this huge potential site at Avalon Airport with direct access to the Princes Highway. It is an international airport with heavy rail freight connection – you just need all this – and the rest of a national freight network. Look, I do not know how come you cannot get it, Mr McIntosh. You are in the government.

I know Mr Bourman has done a great job, and Ms Bath, lobbying for important infrastructure development in Gippsland, and I am sure you will be able to catch up down the track, but we will lead the way. Also I want to tell you, Mr McIntosh, that one of the most important things about the defence industry is AUKUS. It really is just leading the way. It is so fantastic that we are going to have nuclear-powered submarines. Just imagine the ancillary business and development and research that is going to come our way because of this nuclear-powered industry that will eventuate from AUKUS. It is a great thing, AUKUS, Mr McIntosh. I am sure you would be right on board with nuclear-powered submarines. The defence minister is in my electorate, Mr Marles in Geelong. He is a great advocate of AUKUS. You must be on board with nuclear-powered submarines. We need them, and it is going to bring fantastic opportunities. You might even get a little trickle-down effect in Gippsland. There might be a little trickle-down effect, but these nuclear-powered submarines are going to bring great industry to this country, great industry in the defence area, and we will all be better off. And who knows, down the track you might be able to turn the light on with a bit of nuclear power.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:02): That was a delight, waiting for 9 minutes and 48 seconds for the nuclear generator comment to come, but thank you Mrs McArthur for putting it on the record. I would like to thank Mr Bourman for bringing this motion to the chamber. I support him in this motion. I think there are a number of points that are very, very valid and worth our discussion and debate as numerous members have made contributions so far. An obvious starting point is the importance of the defence industry in this state and in our nation with all that is happening in the world but also, as many of the members in their contributions have highlighted, with the economic benefits, the research and development and the technical advancements that occur through it. I will come back to that a little bit throughout my contribution.

Given this is about Gippsland, some of the industry and sector changes that have occurred in recent decades have been noted and those that continue to occur. In energy, for the best part of a century we have had coal generation provide our state with an abundance of electricity and a massive workforce in the valley and throughout eastern Victoria over many decades. As we now see those generators coming to the end of their lives and closing, we have had massive transition work occurring in the valley and around. Although this government has been able to work with Yallourn to see it go through to 2028 – and off the top of my head I think there is \$450 million of investment in there for generators to ensure that they can keep operating and keep providing power to Victoria – the reality is that no commercial entity is looking to invest in coal generation going forward. And indeed I might come back to nuclear later, but there is no commercial entity looking to invest in nuclear generation either, Mrs McArthur.

We have got big employers in the defence industry with the RAAF base. I would like to note also Cerberus, which is another big employer and trainer there. It has got some quite incredible facilities. The indoor pool there is pretty incredible, with wave simulations, night-time simulation and the helicopter that will crash into the water, and our defence personnel have to train in real-life conditions, getting out of that chopper back onto ships. It is quite an incredible facility. That is just one item that really stands out in my memory. And likewise, as Mr Bourman went through, the number of people that have been trained over the decades and the number of people that are employed and training at the RAAF base out at Sale are really important as well.

I think the other thing to note is that a lot of our industries and sectors are not as they were in the last century, where we had massive employment happening in one location as we saw with the automotive industry, which the Liberal-National coalition put a death knell to when the Aussie dollar was at \$1.10 or something like that – it is now back down to 67 cents. But anyway, we move on and we look forward; we look through the windscreen and we look at what is coming at us. There were a lot of businesses that fed into that sector, which I think were an important part of diversified manufacturing. And a number of businesses have been outlined, which I can go through if I get time – the amount of businesses in Victoria in the defence sector, the amount of jobs in that and the skills within that but also the flow-on through associated businesses.

I want to just touch on the importance that has been flagged by some of my colleagues in here of the pathways from our secondary education into TAFEs or universities to give people the skills to meet these employers with, as Mr Bourman referenced, some absolutely cutting-edge technology for the defence sector and industry. To be able to meet the needs of employers with a workforce, to have them ready to go with the skills they need now, is absolutely critical. It is something that, as I have mentioned many times in this place, I am really proud of – the fact that this government has rebuilt the TAFE system and made massive investments in TAFE across Gippsland, whether that is the Port of Sale, Morwell, Warragal, Leongatha or around the whole region, and just how important that is.

I want to come to some points around the defence industry more broadly. We understand that it represents a major opportunity for Victorian industry. The state has, as Mrs McArthur highlighted in a lot of her contribution, nation-leading capabilities in advanced manufacturing workforce talent and defence-related research and development. I am glad Mrs McArthur could make that contribution, because so often we hear the opposition talking down Victoria, talking down the state or the places

that we live in, whereas we on this side are looking for opportunity, are looking to invest, are looking to attract business. I will not get time perhaps now, but in my notes I have the numbers of businesses and the amount of investment going on in this state.

Despite all the best efforts of the coalition to talk our great state down, to talk down Victoria, this incredible state that it is, we go from strength to strength. The Victorian defence sector delivers \$10.9 billion in direct annual expenditure and \$210 million in research and development. The sector employs 29,000 workers and there are 6300 businesses in Victoria that are part of the defence supply chain, and whilst those opposite might find it amusing to have such a diversified workforce, with employment in a number of businesses, I think it adds to the strength of our great state. There are calls, yes, about nuclear over on the other side, but we will leave that where it is. Just on that point of a nuclear reactor, we are talking about delivering workforce jobs, real jobs. We know that industries like offshore wind bring tens of billions of dollars of investment and thousands and thousands of generational jobs versus a pie-in-the-sky hoax, a cruel hoax that the Liberal–National coalition are playing on workers and businesses that depend on the jobs and the energy. I hope the irony of the reference to ‘a cruel hoax’ was not lost on anyone in this place.

Some of our leading strengths in Victoria include aerospace platform design, engineering and manufacturing; land vehicle design, engineering and manufacturing; maritime and submarine design, engineering, R and D; munitions infrastructure componentry and assembly; skilled workforce and nation-leading universities and industry-connected TAFEs; cutting-edge industry collaborations in R and D; strong collaboration and advanced manufacturing of precision components; and development of software-intensive systems. As I have said, this is absolute cutting-edge advanced manufacturing which requires a skilled workforce. I am proud that this government is investing right through from early education and child care, where we are socialising kids in groups, getting them the best education early, to primary and secondary education, where they are getting a world-class education. Then they are able to go into a rebuilt infrastructure and service invested TAFE, where they can get the right skills alongside our university system to be ready to work in a defence force that will help to keep us all safe but also ensure that our state is economically prosperous.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (17:13): I want to thank those that have contributed: Ms Bath, Ms Watt, Ms Ermacora, Mrs McArthur – always entertaining – and Mr McIntosh. It is always interesting to listen to these things. Everyone has their own view on what is going on, but for most it is a good time to try and get the defence industries up and going. In my youth things like the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, the CAC, and Maribyrnong arms factory were a big thing. Now as a country we have very little. As they say, the time is nigh. No matter which government or at what level, it is time we started taking this stuff seriously, because it will come and get us sooner or later.

I am actually going to finish off a point that Mrs McArthur brought up. There is a certain party in this chamber that is quite happy to drag geopolitical stuff into here all the time and try and get us involved. They keep on telling us that they are ready to govern, that they are a serious party. This is a very serious issue and a very serious industry, with jobs, which they pretend to care about, and they could not even be bothered turning up. The Greens can do what the Greens do. I commend my motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:14): 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***Melbourne Market Authority***Report 2023–24*

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:15): I rise today to speak on the Melbourne Market Authority's annual report for the financial year 2023–24. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the achievements, challenges and strategic direction of the Melbourne Market Authority. The Melbourne market lies just outside the boundaries of the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, but it plays a vital role in Victoria's fruit, vegetable and flower industries. The Melbourne Market Authority remains central to the efficient distribution of fresh produce and continues to provide essential services that benefit not just the wholesale industry but also the broader Victorian community as well. For those who may not be familiar with it, the Melbourne Market Authority was established under the Melbourne Market Authority Act 1977 and the Melbourne Market Authority's mission is to operate as a government statutory authority that facilitates the wholesale distribution of fresh produce and ensures that the market environment remains commercially viable, fair and competitive. In its day-to-day operations it fosters innovation and maintains a strong commitment to quality, transparency and operational excellence.

In the year in review it is clear to see that the last financial year was one of significant progress for the market. It worked diligently to implement its new three-year strategic plan, which is a critical road map for the future. The plan prioritises three key areas: delivering a modern and sustainable market, driving commercial success and ensuring a safe, vibrant and productive workplace for all involved in the trading of fresh produce. One of the standout accomplishments of the past financial year is the continued development of the modern and sustainable market infrastructure. The market has made considerable strides in adapting to the ever-changing needs of the market, and its users and the report highlights a proactive approach in meeting the growing demand for fresh produce whilst also addressing sustainability goals.

The market's sustainability initiatives deserve a special mention. The authority has set an ambitious goal of achieving zero net emissions by 2045 in alignment with the Allan Labor government's climate goals. As part of this commitment, the market has installed 5432 solar panels, a project that has already resulted in the saving of over 1.7 million kilograms of CO₂ emissions. These efforts demonstrate that the market's leadership in environmental responsibility and its willingness to invest in clean energy solutions will benefit not only the market but also the broader community in years to come.

In addition to its environmental commitments, the market continues to prioritise community engagement and stakeholder relationships. It is evident with the success of the MarketFresh Schools Program which educates schoolchildren about the importance of fresh produce and healthy eating. In the previous financial year over 3580 students were reached through this program, which helps foster a deeper understanding of where our food comes from and the importance of nutrition in our daily lives. The market's efforts in community engagement go beyond just educating the next generation. They also strengthen the market's connection with local communities, reinforcing the essential role it plays in the lives of many Victorians.

However, while the market has made remarkable progress, it is not without its challenges. One of the key challenges highlighted in the report is its adapting to changing market dynamics and consumer behaviours. In response, the market is actively investigating potential changes to market hours to better serve the evolving needs of industry stakeholders. This adaptability ensures that the market remains competitive, responsive and in tune with both industry demands and consumer expectations.

In conclusion, the Melbourne Market Authority's annual report for 2023–24 presents a picture of significant growth, innovation and community engagement. It reflects the positive impacts that the market continues to have on Victoria's fresh produce sector and the broader community. The market's commitment to sustainability, stakeholder collaboration and operational excellence speaks to its longer

term vision, and that is one that is firmly aligned with the priorities of the Allan Labor government. The market's proactive approach in tackling challenges head-on and making strategic investments in its future deserves recognition. Looking forward, the Melbourne Market Authority will remain a vital institution in ensuring the continued success of Victoria's fresh produce industry. The market's efforts will undoubtedly help shape the future of the sector, benefiting farmers, traders and consumers. With that, I commend the report to the house.

Ombudsman

Support when Children Are Sexually Abused at School: The Department of Education's Response to Abuse in a Victorian Primary School

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:19): The report I rise to speak on is due to my desire to emphasise the four remaining recommendations from the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation report *Support when Children Are Sexually Abused at School* of February 2025, which was tabled on 18 February this year. The report was initiated by the Ombudsman in relation to complaints about how the Department of Education and a Victorian primary school responded to allegations of sexual abuse of two children by a teacher, and it is disturbing reading. The education department, as we understand it now, has put into place new actions and policies commissioned by the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office to investigate systems and processes, create teams with specialised staff and formally apologise to the families affected. But the really sad part about this is about how long the process has taken. It is more than 10 years from when the offence took place to when the department finally issued an apology to the first child.

The report raised serious issues about how the child involved had little support or advice on how to manage the allegations, which ultimately led to actions that did not comply to meet Victoria's child safe standards. Outrageously, the first report, which included the staff eyewitness report and the interview of abuse, was not provided to the parents, who only became aware of the incident and that their child was interviewed three years later. How could this even have occurred? The interview of the first child was found to have been conducted inappropriately, highlighting the fact that the school's staff did not have the necessary experience to handle this type of interview with a child. Consequently, the child did not disclose any abuse because of the inexperienced questioning by staff, which subsequently resulted in a finding of no teacher wrongdoing. Sadly, there was no immediate or ongoing support for the child or the family, which left the family to deal with this terrible situation and forced them to seek help elsewhere.

With the second case of abuse the child had moved school, disclosed abuse directly to police, received no direct contact by the education department and only heard from the school four years after the disclosure. It was made clear that the information provided to parents was not adequate, with the first child's family receiving the letter drafted by the department about the teacher's arrest at the same time it was provided to all the school families.

After another disturbing incident records show that the families of the children affected were eventually told of the teacher's arrest and conviction, but there was no effort by the school to ascertain whether there were any other potential victims, and no internal review of its response to the disclosures was made by the department as was required by departmental policy.

I am raising this to ensure that the four recommendations made by the Ombudsman that need to be addressed are formalised into some direct action now. I know from having worked in schools that there are child safety methods of teaching and training staff and that there are some of these things taking place, but I do want the minister to ensure that these are taking place in all schools. These four recommendations have been made and are intended to ensure support is provided to child victim-survivors, their families and all affected parties as soon as practical to ensure school and other department staff are aware of the 'no wrong door' approach to reporting child abuse allegations and that all allegations should be forwarded to the conduct and integrity division specifically formed to receive and manage child abuse allegations. The third recommendation is to place responsibility on

senior department officers to oversight child safety, and the fourth is to ensure the department's accountability by publicly reporting the number of child abuse allegations made each year.

I hope the Minister for Education can ensure the house that these remaining recommendations are safely being put into place in all schools, as this should not happen again to any child in our school system. According to the report, the Commission for Children and Young People received 611 allegations about sexual misconduct and sexual offences in the education sector in 2023–24. I say this because I think this is an incredibly important report, and when I was reading it I just could not believe that three years after the eyewitness report and six years after the teacher began abusing a child at the school the first child disclosed the abuse, and it was not because the child had not attempted to try to say something before, but they simply were not given the mechanisms in which to do that.

I do encourage people to have a read of this particular report and to have a look at its recommendations. I do encourage the minister to ensure that all schools are reinforcing this and that all teachers are getting the training and support that they need, as well as the students and their families.

Select Committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:24): I rise to give a few remarks on the report of the Select Committee on the Commonwealth Games bid, in some elaboration on the comments that I made in this place yesterday and in particular a reference to a few pieces of added context which I believe are important to include. At the outset, while I do not agree with all the recommendations of the report, certainly recommendation 1, which calls on the state government to continue to seek international events of great esteem, is a very good one, and indeed as I flagged yesterday, so is recommendation 2 on ways in which we can improve and expand upon the high-value, high-risk guidelines process. As I said yesterday, the decision to cancel the 2026 Commonwealth Games was the right decision for the government to make to prioritise the investment into regional Victoria.

It is worth mentioning some context as well. The whole reason this came about was because of a failed bid which had been endorsed and accepted by Durban in South Africa. It was an unopposed bid endorsed by the Commonwealth Games Federation, the CGF, which ultimately, due to a number of financial and other issues, was falling apart, from which the hosts attempted to scale back and in fact relocate the games more centrally as well. This was actually rejected by the CGF at the time, which is I think instructive for those who try and say that we should have just moved the games to Melbourne. Ultimately it would take the CGF, though, another four years before the direct approach to Victoria was actually made. I note in terms of the context of various other parts of this report that discuss timeframe pressures that that was a long time for the CGF to have waited to make that approach – indeed four years.

It is not for this report to go into the detail of the model or the efficacy of models of Commonwealth Games delivery, but I do note that out of the 72 member associations in the CGF only seven have actually ever hosted a Commonwealth Games, including Australia, which has hosted the second-most times with five, including just 19 years ago in Melbourne. On the question of Melbourne, I think it is really important as well to emphasise the point that the government was very clear from the outset that we had done the games in Melbourne. They were a huge success, arguably the best ever. There was no need to do the games in Melbourne again, but there was a benefit in providing that support to regional Victoria. Hence the regional model was chosen.

Ultimately, though, due to other cost escalations, which have affected a great many things in the past couple of years, it soon became unviable. So the government made the sensible choice. Rather than trying to proceed with the games in Melbourne and then putting that money toward the Melbourne games and a smaller event, we actually chose to put that money into regional Victoria specifically, and that is through the \$2 billion regional package. That package was very enthusiastically supported by the stakeholders we spoke to. In fact the main theme I would say is that they were more interested,

and rightly so, in getting those advantages out of the regional package, both in the host cities but of course also in those broader parts of the state that were not host cities. They also benefited from the regional package. It certainly is fair to say, and I am sure Mr McIntosh will agree with me too, that the witnesses were much more interested in that package as opposed to a sporting event, which they had mostly by then moved well beyond. We also heard some very encouraging trends at the time of our regional hearings in February last year about those trends in Victoria's regional tourism economy.

As I touched on yesterday as well, the reputational impacts, despite the attempts by opposition members to make an enormous meal out of an apparent huge hit on our state's reputation, have simply not been borne out by the evidence. They struggled to present any evidence at all to the committee to substantiate the claim. But more to the point, we know that since the time of cancellation Victoria has secured several international sporting events, such as the American football game and the Rugby World Cup, and of course it is continuing to host incredible major sporting events. This indeed leads back to recommendation 1, one of the more sensible recommendations of this report, calling on the government to continue that investment, as we have seen with 2 million people attending a major event in the state of Victoria just in March alone, figures that Sydney and anywhere else in the nation can only dream of. It is continuing to happen right here in Victoria. There are further comments that I would like to make, but I do not have time. In closing, I do wish to commend the minority report.

Select Committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (17:29): How timely that I am after Mr Galea, because I too am going to speak about the 2026 Commonwealth Games report that was released yesterday. There were a significant number of issues that were raised by the committee in the report, with evidence coming from a wide range of people, including individuals, sporting associations, small businesses, tourism operators, athletes and events.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Joe McCracken: And Mr McIntosh, you are right: many regional Victorians did feel that it was indeed a slap in the face. That is what they felt, and that was the clear evidence that we received. But it was also clear from the start of the inquiry that the government should have known that the games were doomed to fail. Despite this, the government took it to the people of Victoria at the November 2022 state election. The business case was poorly put together because input was extremely limited. The consultants made it explicitly clear when preparing the business case that they could not make accurate assessments on all aspects, and a large number of caveats were put in that report. Despite this being made explicitly clear and incredibly obvious, decision-makers still chose to rely on that document to justify bidding for the games. This turned out to be a catastrophic decision which led to a chain of events and a string of failures in oversight, communication and collaboration.

Finding 7 of the report says:

... proper processes were truncated or not undertaken at all, and warnings were not heeded by the Victorian Government and government agencies.

Finding 5 of the report notes:

The high cost and inability to host the Commonwealth Games should have been discovered earlier, highlighting a distinct lack of due diligence and robust planning that never occurred.

Finding 35 is even more damning:

It is evident that there was a clear lack of communication and collaboration between responsible ministers, departments and agencies in the planning, preparation and development of the 2026 Commonwealth Games.

There are many other findings which highlight more specific aspects of the failures. However, the simple fact of the matter is that the due diligence was not done and what was done was not particularly robust.

Another alarming discovery was from local government CEOs, who gave evidence that revealed that they were forced to sign non-disclosure agreements. This effectively prevented them from detailing any discussions they had had with the state government to local councillors, who the CEOs were employed by. This bypassing of local democracy should be a warning sign for all of those across the local government sector, and there is no guarantee that this sort of thing will not happen again. What is abundantly clear is a secretive set of processes designed to avoid scrutiny. Finding 62 of the report says:

At almost every point, the Victorian Government has not fully cooperated with the work of the Committee in providing evidence in the form of documents or the appearance of relevant witnesses. These actions are an avoidance of parliamentary scrutiny and public accountability.

The Premier Jacinta Allan should have attended. It was the moral thing to do, but she chose not to. Victorians can only ask: what did she have to hide?

On the decision made to cancel the games, the report finds that the justification used to cancel the games was not transparent and it is difficult to understand how the \$6.9 billion price tag was reached. The impact on regional Victoria was vast. We heard evidence from witnesses in Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Traralgon and even Melbourne stating how challenging the cancellations had been. Many key sports bodies and associations were not afforded a heads-up and found out about the cancellation through the media, just like everyone else did. This is let alone the lost business opportunities, which were detailed in the interim report. In particular, the accommodation, tourism and events industries were savaged. Finding 17 of the report notes:

The Victorian Government's decision to withdraw from hosting the Commonwealth Games had a considerable negative impact on the morale of regional Victoria, which was not confined just to the host cities.

The government may assert that the decision to cancel the games was the right one. However, they are missing the point. It is a position that Victoria should never have got into in the first place, and I hope it never does again.

Fire Rescue Victoria

Report 2023–24

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:34): I rise today to make a statement on the Fire Rescue Victoria 2023–24 annual report and to just let folks here in the chamber know that this report in fact tells a powerful story – one of dedication, bravery and innovation. I am incredibly proud to share how these efforts have made a significant impact on the communities of Victoria, in particular in Northern Metro. In a year marked by challenges, Fire Rescue Victoria's firefighters have shown unwavering courage, professionalism and resilience. Their work continues to save lives, protect property and strengthen community safety, and for that, they deserve our deepest gratitude.

One of the most impressive highlights in this report is FRV's response times. Their crews responded to 94.9 per cent of emergency medical incidents within the service standard of 9 minutes and 12 seconds. This is a remarkable achievement that undoubtedly saved lives. Equally impressive, FRV improved their response times to structure fires, with 86 per cent of incidents attended within the critical target of 7 minutes and 42 seconds. This is particularly important in high density areas like Brunswick, Northcote and Coburg where fast intervention is crucial to protecting both residential and commercial properties. Over the past year our firefighters have faced some truly challenging situations in my electorate. Firefighters responded to a dangerous fire in Carlton in a student accommodation complex caused by a lithium ion battery explosion. Thanks to their rapid response and skilful containment efforts, more than 50 residents were safely evacuated with no serious injuries.

Speaking of batteries, I want to emphasise the importance of safely disposing of lithium batteries. Victorians can safely dispose of lithium batteries at over 1000 sites across Victoria, including at your local Bunnings and at many local councils. Seeing some vision lately does just reaffirm the importance of disposing of them thoughtfully.

In addition to their courageous response efforts, FRV has embraced innovation to strengthen their capabilities. This year FRV proudly introduced EVIE, Victoria's first electric fire truck. You might have seen it around here in fact. The Electric Vehicle for Incident and Emergency is more than just a vehicle, it is symbol of progress. With zero-emissions technology, advanced fire-suppression capabilities and improved safety features, EVIE is a crucial step towards a greener and more efficient emergency response fleet.

FRV has also introduced electronic patient care records, allowing firefighters to provide real-time medical information directly to Ambulance Victoria. This innovation is already improving continuity of care for patients, really a vital step forward in enhanced public safety.

Prevention is just as important as response, I must say, and FRV has made outstanding progress in improving fire safety awareness across the region. In 2023–24 firefighters delivered 718 fire education and risk reduction sessions, more than double the previous year. These programs are crucial to educating vulnerable and multicultural communities about battery safety and fire safety. Importantly, FRV has taken some really proactive steps to address the threat of lithium ion battery fires, which are becoming increasingly common in urban environments. By educating residents about safe charging and storage practices, FRV is helping to prevent these dangerous incidents before they occur.

Our fire services should reflect the communities they serve. I am proud to highlight FRV's progress in building a more diverse workforce. Today FRV employs 219 women firefighters. While there is still more work to be done, this progress is entirely encouraging, and I commend FRV for actively recruiting from diverse backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, bilingual speakers and regional Victorians. Diversity in the fire service is not just about fairness, it is about ensuring our firefighters can connect with and support every community they serve.

We know that climate change is bringing more frequent and severe weather events, from floods to extreme heat waves. The risks facing communities in Victoria are evolving and FRV's investment in specialised training, including urban search and rescue, hazardous material response and road crash rescue, ensures our firefighters are equipped to face these challenges head on.

The Fire Rescue Victoria annual report is more than just a document, it is a powerful reminder of the incredible work our firefighters do each and every day. Their dedication, bravery and innovation should be celebrated. I am immensely proud of their achievements and deeply grateful for the work they do to put themselves in harms way to protect Victorians.

Select Committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games Bid

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to speak to the 2026 Commonwealth Games bid inquiry and the final report that was tabled yesterday. There has been a lot said about this report and the recommendations and findings of this report but not enough. Unfortunately given the enormous issues in this state, this very thorough and important report was brushed over by far too many people. It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to it. I want to go to the point on the government's selective picking out of the wording in the Chair's forward or what they found around that decision to withdraw. In their words, they say it was correct, but it is a very selective piece. They are not going on to say the games should never have progressed in the first place. There are so many elements in this report that talk about that – the business case, the disgraceful way the ministers behaved in front of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and did not provide the full information.

I want to go to the chair's foreword, which really encapsulates all of this. I just say to the government members: you cannot get away from the facts, and the facts are that there were a string of decision-making failures by the Victorian government as well as inadequate due diligence and planning processes at both the departmental level and the ministerial level. I think that is the crux of the issue here, and the decision-making and the process failures were first and foremost in many aspects of the interim and final reports. There are just so many elements to this report that I cannot give it justice in the time that I have today, but if you look at the summary of the decision-making process and you look at the key failures in the decision-making process that are included in this report, it talks about a six-week timeframe to assess the opportunity and submit a bid to the Commonwealth Games Federation. It goes on to say:

A key reason this important policy –

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: Have a look at this. I note, President, we have got a lot of interjections from some very upset government members. They do understand that this is a complete debacle where the reputation was trashed. I take the comments from Craig Phillips, the CEO, when he said in the annual report that it was a callous decision by the former Premier Daniel Andrews. What a disgrace. It was a hoax on the Victorian people, taking it to the election, then pulling the pin and walking away. Quite rightly people involved in the Commonwealth Games were absolutely scathing of Daniel Andrews, and so they should be. And the current Premier, who was the minister at the time, was up to her neck in it too. They walked away and left this massive bill, close to \$600 million, for the taxpayer to pick up. Meanwhile I have got HeartKids, who want \$100,000 to get support to help those kids, and I will be raising that in the next adjournment debate. There are all of these issues where families and children and Victorian businesses have just been thrown out by this dreadful government, who do not care. They waste and mismanage. The reputation was trashed by the government, and the Premier is up to her neck in the cover-ups. What she said –

Michael Galea interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: President, there is a lot of chatter from Mr Galea.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Galea! Mr McCracken is not in his place.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you, President. I know that the government MPs are very upset about it because it is damaging. It is. It goes to the credibility of the Allan Labor government. It goes to the credibility of the Premier and her decision-making. She was the responsible minister at the time.

I will be saying more on this report, because there is so much to say. I think this needs to be spelled out to the Victorian public. With this opportunity today and in weeks to come I will be saying more around the Premier's involvement, the former Premier's involvement and the involvement of Minister Shing and others, who have now left this place. They have departed the joint.

David Davis interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Fled. Exactly, Mr Davis. It is the poor taxpayers who are picking it up, and they are paying the price.

Petitions

Silverleaves Beach, Cowes

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:44): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I thank the 4441 people who signed this petition, which should never have had to happen. As I start my contribution I would like to thank particularly Natalie Gray and Mary Hughes; Dr Stephen and Penny Lapin; Ken Hailey and his wife; Tristan White; Louise Hill; Eddie Lynch – and I thank Eddie for coming down today; the Silverleaves Conservation Association; the Bass Coast shire councillors, united by their concern on this, and particularly mayor Rochelle Halstead; and the 300 other people that stood on 6 January in the pouring rain to show their concern for what is happening at Silverleaves with the coastal erosion issue. They stood beside banksias that had fallen over and they stood near waves, concerned that on those windy nights at those high-tide times that they would actually come crashing into their backyards and into their homes. This is the reality of Silverleaves, a most beautiful community that have been drawn together out of adversity, and they should never have had to be in this position that we are debating in this motion today. I just want to read the actual motion, because it is in two parts. The petition says that we:

... call on the Government to urgently fund and implement the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's proposed geotextile revetment to protect homes, public infrastructure and public land in the short term, and –

and this is where it comes into effect –

work collaboratively with the Silverleaves community to plan and fund long-term solutions to mitigate and manage coastal erosion.

This government has known about this coastal erosion issue at Silverleaves since 2022. The erosion has been accelerating since 2022, and certainly it has been heavily impacting; it has been at an alarming rate of 16 metres in the past two years. What that says is that government must act, but it has actually had its head in the sand, and unfortunately now that sand has washed away due to erosion. The government knew about it in 2023. It knew about it when the department actually triggered a process, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's (DEECA) own study. The *Silverleaves Coastal Processes Study Summary* was handed to the government in the middle of this year. The member for Bass has known about this since that time. She has not been beating her chest; she has not been beating a path to the door of the Minister for Environment. It has taken this community activism for this to occur.

In November last year I raised the issue. The government has had a DEECA plan for geotextile sandbag revetment, as it is called, for emergency works to sandbag that community while a long-term plan can be introduced and worked through with the community, but the government has ignored it. The concern that is facing these wonderful people of Silverleaves is that it was meant to be implemented over summer, because now we have got Easter around the corner, and indeed with those Easter king tides and the weather – we have got winter coming on – these people really face the loss of their homes and infrastructure because of this. This is too late, but thank goodness it is actually occurring today – and I know that many of them have been down on the beach today watching sand being moved. In fact it is going to cost the government more money for these short-term emergency works, because they are shifting sand today, and then later on, to be finished by August, they are going to have these sandbags completed for the short term. This is an action that should have been undertaken prior to this.

I say to the community: thank you very much for working with me and my colleague Dr Heath and others who were down there supporting you, and the council. You are activists – you should not have to be activists to save your own homes when government has been clear in understanding the urgency of this. The government came out on 7 March and they said, '\$10 million – \$10 million for Silverleaves, for Inverloch surf club and the Inverloch foreshore, for Loch Sport, for Tooradin, for Warrnambool and for Black Rock.' Not \$10 million each, but \$10 million between them – that is insufficient. To come out on 7 March and say, 'Look, we're saving that,' is actually unfair and unkind to these very good people – and I will be speaking at the end of this. I thank people for listening and I thank people for contributing. We need action on this coastal erosion, and this is the dearest priority going round.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:49): I want to start off by acknowledging the community in Silverleaves, what has been happening there and obviously the concerns that locals have had. This is an issue that is touching on a number of communities across Victoria. I will come back to that, but I will just speak to the specifics of Silverleaves first.

The money, the \$15 million that was announced in funding to address coastal hazards statewide – I will just correct the record there; it was \$15 million – includes funding for Silverleaves, to protect the dune from further erosion with geotextile sandbag wall and maintaining safe access to the beach. Erosion at Silverleaves has been caused by a complex combination of natural coastal processes and historical interventions. The detailed designs for the interim measures at Silverleaves include the geotextile sandbag revetment work completed last year. As has been commented, the works began last week, and the works will continue.

I mentioned there are numerous towns across Victoria that are dealing with coastal inundation, with coastal erosion, whether we are talking Inverloch, Tooradin, Loch Sport, Lakes Entrance, around the peninsula, Point Lonsdale, Frankston, Queenscliff, Torquay, Port Campbell, Eastern View or Fairhaven. As a government, we are making this investment to get on and mitigate against the coastal erosion that is occurring in each of these scenarios, and it is about getting the right solution for each one of these situations. For every community, for every town, for the local residents and for the people that holiday in these places it is really important that we get this right, but it is also really important when we are talking about mitigation that we are very mindful of and acknowledge the underlying causes, which are going to get worse and worse. It is a conversation that we have been having for two to three decades now about our changing climate, and be very aware as water levels rise, as king tides, storm and weather events occur –

Members interjecting.

Tom McINTOSH: I am getting some comments from the other side. We know about the Liberal–National coalition position federally in this state for decades, whether it is here or whether it is on the international stage. I am getting told it is bad. This is a reality that we have to face. We have to mitigate against climate change, and we have to mitigate against local situations. To put our head in the sand and to ignore it and then to point to the outcomes is just, quite frankly, appalling.

I just want to put that on the record, because this government is committed to, as I said, dealing with the scenarios that are in these various towns around our coast. But we have got to be realistic, because for 10 years in a row we have had record after record smashed for global temperatures. We are 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels, so it is absolutely crucial that as a community, as a state, as a nation and indeed as players in a global world we are taking action on climate change. It is absolutely crucial that we find the local solutions to these situations as they occur and that we support communities. I know from my conversations with Jordan Crugnale that she has been working with her local community to support them through this, working with the minister's office and working with the department to find the right solutions and to implement them.

So again, to everybody in the local community, it is definitely a stressful time, as it has been for a number of other communities across our beautiful, beautiful coastlines of Victoria. I am proud to be a part of a government that is taking action not only to mitigate against more and more severe weather patterns, whether they are wind events or whether they are flood events, whatever they might be, which are also driving up insurance premiums that we are all dealing with and we are all going to deal with more and more every year, but also to do that mitigation work and act in local communities on the situation they face with the solutions that are appropriate to them.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:54): Mr McIntosh, you are not taking action, and that is exactly why we are here today. And it seems to be a pattern in Bass. There have been so many petitions qualifying for debate from that seat alone in this house, and I think that is telling.

Firstly, I want to commend Ms Bath for her incredible advocacy and also the incredible people from Silverleaves and the communities around for their passion and their fight. 4441 – that is how many Victorians have stepped outside of their everyday and signed a petition about the Silverleaves coastal erosion, which is amazing considering that there are only 300 people that live in and around that community. More than 10 times the population have come and signed, because this is an urgent issue and it is something that people want to see action on. They are unified and the concern is widespread.

These signatures draw the chamber's attention to the coastal erosion emergency at Silverleaves and Cowes. They also reveal the Allan government's continued lack of care and their complete disinterest in the lives of Victorians, particularly in the area of Bass. When it comes to the people living there, they have been completely neglected. The erosion is not a slow-moving environmental issue, it is an urgent escalating crisis. Since 2022 Silverleaves has lost up to 16 metres of the coastline – in just two years. The beach is literally disappearing before beachgoers' eyes. Since 1953 the retreat totals 77 metres, and the rate is accelerating. This needs action, and it needs action now. Residents are not just concerned, they are fearful for their homes, their safety and their future. Families live in dread every time a storm rolls in. Public land and community infrastructure are under immediate threat.

Despite this clear and growing danger, the Allan Labor government has delayed any meaningful action. For all the government's climate rhetoric, which we just heard about now – climate action – there has been a decided lack of action in Bass. In November 2023 Silverleaves residents expressed their desperation, declaring, 'We will stand and we will personally sandbag the beach.' In fact, Ms Bath, I think that is what a lot of them are doing today and so are unable to be here in this chamber.

In the same month during parliamentary question time I told the government that residents were fearful for their properties as foreshore cliffs were crumbling and mature trees were suddenly falling. I asked them why they had not even found a contractor to begin the erosion study. By January 2024 the government announced a beach study, with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) committing a comprehensive assessment. While it aimed to evaluate the risk and proposed management options, the community remained in limbo, waiting for tangible measures and actions. Despite all of this, local MP Jordan Crugnale, Labor's member for Bass, admitted that the government was 'well aware' of the community's concern with erosion – well aware, but let me tell you what, doing absolutely nothing. If they were so aware, why did they fail to act before the problem became a full-blown emergency?

DEECA's own report made it crystal clear that these works were urgently needed and must be completed by the end of summer, before Easter's king tides came and the winter storms surged. So the Allan government has missed its own deadline. Funding was not granted until March this year, after the window of urgency had passed. As a result the bags will not be placed there until the end of August, months too late, leaving the community once again unprotected and just completely abandoned through the most dangerous part of the year.

I am sorry that I cannot go through this whole speech due to time, but the Labor government's list of failings in this seat is just endless. It has gone on and on and on. That is why time and time again we have to petition the government so they will even listen, they will even take notice of the real issues that Bass is facing. It is not good enough. We need action, and we need it now.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:59): Before speaking on the substance of the debate I want to acknowledge the many people who raised their concerns about coastal erosion by signing this petition. I recognise that the impacts of sea level rise can be really confronting, and your engagement with this issue demonstrates your desire for action in the community. You are the community who are on the front line. It is your lives and livelihoods that are at stake. In my contribution I will echo a lot of the sentiments expressed in particular by Mr McIntosh. Coastal erosion is and will continue to be a reality across Victoria's 2500 kilometres of coastline. Last year the government released the Port Phillip Bay coastal hazard assessment, which maps the areas along Victoria's coastline that will be inundated by water when sea level rise reaches 1.4 metres, as projected

by the CSIRO. The mapping is really confronting viewing and shows that much of our coastline will be uninhabitable by the turn of the century. It is clear that the time for action from all levels of government is right now, and it needs to be above politics. It needs to be above this partisan stuff. It is all of our communities who will be affected by this.

The approach we need to take is a complex one. Firstly, we have to acknowledge that climate change is driving sea level rise. Rising oceans are a consequence of two aspects of global warming: rising temperatures cause increased run-off from glaciers and ice caps as they melt, and it also leads to thermal expansion of water in our oceans as they heat. Without recognising that climate change is driving the problem, we have little hope of mitigating the impacts. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and are becoming the norm. Tidal storm surges exacerbate already high tides, and flooding forces more and more water out into our rivers, eroding both estuaries and our coastlines.

We need an approach that takes into consideration the solutions that have been identified by experts and by communities, as well as being informed by what the evidence says about climate change. There will not be a one-size-fits-all approach. There are not any simple answers to a lot of these problems. It may involve some very difficult conversations that we need to start having. In some places it might be a technological solution, something like a piece of built infrastructure like a seawall, but in others it might be retrofitting infrastructure. In others still it might be retreat. It might be rebuilding elsewhere. We have to start having some of these conversations.

These are matters that the inquiry into the climate resilience of built infrastructure has been looking into. It is an inquiry that was secured by the Greens, which I have been part of. I do not want to preempt the outcomes of that inquiry. It is ongoing at the moment. These are some of the things we have been hearing about and thinking about really deeply. This is not an easy reality that we are having to come to grips with here, but given what we know about the locked-in consequences – this is the climate change that we know is already baked in and what is coming – we have to turn the evidence we know about that into practice.

Communities have to be at the centre of our response, and they will need significant support in this transition. It is support that we are hearing through this petition that communities are crying out for. Resourcing must be expedited to support them, because it is only going to cost us more in the future if we delay this. In that sense, I really hear what the petitioners are saying. I will say that there is not going to be an easy solution to this, but we need everyone to come to the table, work together and keep communities and their health and wellbeing and their future livelihoods at the centre of what we are trying to achieve here.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:03): I am pleased to be able to speak on this petition this evening. I think it is very important to note there were 4441 signatures and that every one of them is someone who is interested in the outcome, because Silverleaves Beach is eroding away. The shoreline in this area has receded by approximately 77 metres since 1953. In recent years that seems to have accelerated. Since 2022, near Sanders Road the shoreline has retreated by 12 metres and the maximum recession measured in the area was 16 metres over two years. That is significant. I do want to acknowledge Melina Bath, my Nationals colleague, who has been a very strong advocate and a sponsor of this petition, and Dr Heath as well, because each of the people that have signed this petition wants to be heard. This is why we have petitions in this chamber – to be able to advocate for issues. They feel at the moment that the government is not listening.

The funding we have heard Ms Bath talk about has been inadequate. It is important to recognise that your home is your castle. Many residents are very nervous as this beach erodes away, and it may end up as a worst-case scenario. This whole situation makes me think of my dad. We had a road near our house – a very small gravel road – and as traffic went on it, it would often fill with potholes. My dad was not one to drive past the issue. He would take his tractor up and grade it, take some gravel and fill it, because he did not just want to go past the problem – he wanted to fix the problem. I think that is

what is needed here. The government can do the studies – they can be aware – but they need to take action to fix the problem. Action is needed.

This petition highlights the need for action. This petition calls on the government to urgently fund and implement the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's geotextile proposal to protect homes, public infrastructure and public land in the short term, and work collaboratively with the Silverleaves community to plan and fund long-term solutions to mitigate and manage coastal erosion.

That is what we need from the government. That is what everyone who has signed this petition wants to see. They want to see action. We know, as has been talked about today, that the community has done the heavy lifting – literally; they have been doing the sandbagging. But now for further action we need the government to act.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:06): I would like to thank Mr McIntosh, Dr Mansfield, Dr Heath and Mrs Broad for their contributions, thoughtful that they were.

This is time for a reset now. The government is aware of this. They have been aware of it, but the issue has been highlighted. The next stage is working collaboratively with the Silverleaves community to plan and fund long-term solutions and to mitigate and manage coastal erosion. It is a huge issue. Inundation is a massive issue. Erosion is an issue.

This government now has the opportunity to turn over a new leaf and work with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, the local council and the federal government to plan what comes next, because people's homes are their castles, and if the government is just going to do this and then walk away, people need to know. They need to be aware of what is to befall them. Coastal adaptation plans involve taking a holistic approach and creating a vision for the whole community so that people have certainty in what they are living in and how they can invest – or not – in their homes.

At Silverleaves the state government has finally come to an understanding that this is a serious problem. The insurance companies know; their premiums are skyrocketing because of this coastal erosion. Melbourne Water, Bass Coast and VCAT have also reinforced the seriousness of this problem. The planning scheme also needs to create a commitment to Silverleaves and those other areas like Silverleaves we have mentioned through state policy and strategic planning.

This community matters, as all communities should matter. We need to be able to feel confident that this government will sit down and listen to this community and plan for the long term, not take the lax piecemeal approach which has brought us to this point where community activism has to force the hand of government.

I ask the minister to work with the community for the best outcome for that community.

Motion agreed to.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:08): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

North East Community Fund

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:09): (1557) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action I seek is for the minister to encourage eligible community groups and organisations in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs to apply for the 2025 North East Community Fund. The Allan Labor government's North East Link Program represents the largest infrastructure investment in Melbourne's north-east, delivering vital road upgrades, improved public transport and expanded walking and cycling paths. As part of this

transformative project the \$10 million North East Community Fund is supporting local organisations impacted by construction. The fund has already benefited over 150 community projects, including initiatives such as sporting club upgrades, cultural events and sustainability programs. Grants of up to \$100,000 are available to improve community participation, celebrate local culture and upgrade vital infrastructure. I commend the Allan Labor government for its commitment to ensuring communities affected by construction are supported with meaningful investments that will leave a lasting legacy. I ask the minister to actively promote this opportunity to ensure groups in impacted suburbs are aware of the upcoming application deadlines and the available grant-writing workshops, which will help applicants maximise their chances of success. By fostering strong, connected communities, the North East Community Fund will ensure Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs continue to thrive well before the project's completion in 2028.

Cooba solar project

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:10): (1558) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action that I seek is that the minister reject planning application 2403122, lodged by Venn Energy, for a permit to use and develop land in Colbinabbin for a solar energy facility. The minister must deny a permit for this solar project because it contravenes planning guidelines in two key aspects. First, it will take valuable agricultural land out of production, and second, it will ruin the landscape, values and views of the area by turning a beautiful pastoral scene into an eyesore of metal and glass.

According to the Campaspe planning scheme, the proposed site is within the farming zone, and clause 35 in the planning scheme gives a clear imperative to retain and protect our productive agricultural land, which we will need in future as Victoria's population continues to grow. The proposed Cooba solar project will violate these principles by carpeting 665 hectares of prime agricultural land in the Heathcote wine region with over 700,000 solar panels and over a hundred batteries the size of shipping containers. The Victorian government's own *Solar Energy Facilities: Design and Development Guideline 2022* states that a solar energy facility should not lead to the loss of productive state-significant agricultural land. The guideline specifies that agricultural land is high value and strategically important when it combines several features like high-quality soil, good rainfall, access to water and industry infrastructure. The proposed site enjoys all these features. It sits adjacent to major road infrastructure, has good water access from 16 dams onsite, is connected to the Colbinabbin–Cornella irrigation pipeline and has soil rated high-quality or good. This is clearly strategic agricultural land that should be protected by planning scheme guidelines.

Planning guidelines also say that building projects in the farm zone should avoid adverse impacts on vistas, and clause 53 of the planning scheme, which governs renewable energy proposals, requires them to consider the impact of the project on significant views, including visual corridors and sightlines. There are over 40 wineries along the Heathcote-Rochester Road, and thousands of tourists visit the area to sample world-class wines while enjoying the beautiful views from the eastern slope of the Mount Camel range. The Cooba solar project will put 700,000 solar panels that are over 5 metres high right in the sightline of the wineries. The vineyards and cellar doors on the elevated eastern side of Mount Camel range are 80 to 120 metres above the proposed site, and no amount of landscape screening will reduce the negative visual impact of the solar facility. The minister must deny this application for a permit to build this solar facility.

Victoria Police

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:13): (1559) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Police. Minister, the action I seek is a briefing on the progress of the transparency and accountability monitoring group, established in 2018, to address the deep concerns I have about racial profiling. Despite Victoria Police banning racial profiling in August 2015, discrimination of racialised groups is still prolific within Victoria's institutions.

In the 2013 Haile-Michael court case 17 African and Afghan children in Flemington and North Melbourne were assaulted, unlawfully searched, falsely imprisoned, harassed and racially abused by police. Their landmark victory in court led to changes in in-field contact policies and procedures for Victoria Police, eventually leading to racial profiling becoming illegal a few years later. A study of 2013 by Hopkins and Popovic found the police in Victoria continue to disproportionately stop and target people based on race and not crime. Aboriginal, African, Pasifika and Middle Eastern Muslim appearing people face the most unjustified stops and mistreatment. Further to this, the Centre Against Racial Profiling found that First Nations Victorians were 11 times more likely to be searched than white Victorians. Victoria Police state they have zero tolerance for racial profiling, yet it is difficult to see consistency in reporting mechanisms for transparency and oversight. The question remains: how can we assess the scale of this issue or promote accountability if it is only mandated in certain contexts?

With the recent expansion of police powers, it is more important now than ever that the police and government carefully balance community safety with civil liberties. To do that, the police must consistently monitor perceived ethnicity in all areas of their work. Minister, I welcome your briefing to discuss this further and hear more about the progress of the transparency and accountability monitoring group.

Safe Workplaces for Women

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (18:16): (1560) The Labor government is leading the way on changing culture to make sure women feel safe, heard and included in workplaces. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Women. Minister, you recently announced a \$5.5 million investment in the new Safe Workplaces for Women initiative. My request is for you to provide more detail on how that investment will change the culture and attitudes to women in the workplace, in particular for rural and regional women.

Cooba solar project

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:16): (1561) My adjournment is to the Minister for Agriculture and relates to the Cooba solar farm in Colbinabbin. A submission has been put forward to build a solar factory and battery energy storage on prime agricultural land, with over 700,000 panels and 300 batteries across 1000 hectares. I have been to the site and seen the huge expanse of land that will be impacted. It is a stunning location, and local residents are concerned about the impact of this proposal. The project is opposed by the Colbinabbin Renewable Action Group, which represents 60 businesses, farmers and residents who surround the property. We acknowledge their representation in the chamber gallery tonight.

Some who are a bit older in this chamber may remember the 1980s commercial ‘Oils ain’t oils’. Well, I grew up on a farm, and I can tell you that soils ain’t soils. The state government has an important responsibility to oversee future development and ensure that we look after prime agricultural land. Our global population continues to grow and so does our need for food production. The location of this factory is on prime agricultural land. It has unique soils, access to irrigation and moderate climate and rainfall, and the area is ideal for a huge variety of grain, viticulture, horticulture and livestock. The volcanic basalt soils – premium soils – are some of the best in the country and unique to Colbinabbin and the Heathcote wine region. I was very disappointed to learn that the project developer did not do any soil testing of the area and significantly understated the quality of the soil in their proposal. They used data from the City of Greater Bendigo, which I can tell you is vastly different.

Agriculture in Colbinabbin is the main economic driver for the local community and the Campaspe shire. Cereal crops are grown for domestic and overseas markets, and thousands of acres have been developed for winegrowing, with many cellar doors. Colbinabbin is also the largest supplier of sun-dried tomatoes in the Southern Hemisphere. Sheep, wool and cattle are also grown for domestic and overseas markets. The Campaspe Shire Council zoned the area for farming. The soil has been shown to be highly significant and should be set aside for continued agricultural production. I know in

December last year the council agreed to formally oppose the planning application, citing significant concerns regarding its impact on agricultural land and the local environment.

Agriculture is significant for Victoria. Victoria punches well above its weight. We account for 24 per cent of farm businesses in Australia, despite having about 3 per cent of Australia's total agricultural land area. There are over 21,000 farm businesses with nearly 70,000 jobs, and it is a significant contributor to our economy and food and fibre exports. Over 75 per cent of these jobs are in regional Victoria. It is areas like Colbinabbin where I ask the Minister for Agriculture to ensure that agricultural values are protected.

Cannabis law reform

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:19): (1562) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the better use of police resources. I recently obtained data from the Crime Statistics Agency on the number of people forced into contact with the criminal justice system because they possessed a small quantity of cannabis. From 2020 to 2024 on average 7805 Victorians had contact with the criminal justice system, and of those 3812 were arrested. While this data showed a promising downward trend, it was alarming to see that in 2024 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 12 per cent of arrests despite making up roughly 1 per cent of the Victorian population.

There are many people that seem to still be under the illusion that people do not get arrested for cannabis. Well, this data shows that it is just not true. While it may be true that many politicians in this place who have consumed cannabis do not have interactions with the justice system, some are not as lucky. Our most vulnerable and marginalised communities are the worst affected by these bad laws. The harm from coming into contact with justice system is well documented. It is a great way to turn someone smoking a joint the sun to relax into a hardened criminal.

The continued criminalisation of cannabis wastes copious amounts of police resources on what is a non-violent offence. At a time when some members of the public are deeply concerned about public safety and there are such alarming rates of domestic violence we must ask ourselves: is locking up people for possessing small quantities of cannabis an effective use of police resources? To me, the answer is clear. Victorians should not be locked up for possession of small quantities of cannabis. So I ask the minister: will you commit to directing police resources away from charging people for personal possession of cannabis and instead into addressing serious violent crime?

Don't Cross the Line campaign

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:21): (1563) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier and Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. WorkSafe Victoria recently launched the Don't Cross the Line campaign, which calls on everyday Victorians to consider the toll on workers who may experience yelling, swearing and hostility as part of their day-to-day work. It is unfortunately something that is all too common for front-facing workers, such as those in retail and hospitality, to face this verbal and even physical abuse. The Allan Labor government is committed to tackling this abhorrent behaviour, which includes those penalties announced last year which will directly address assaults on people in their place of work, such as those in retail settings. The Don't Cross the Line campaign is a very important tool, especially for that lower level end of offending, which still does a great deal of damage to working people. Minister, will you update the house on what measures and campaigns have been undertaken to address and prevent instances of frontline workers facing aggression and violence while they are at work?

Cooba solar project

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:22): (1564) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources and it concerns the proposed Colbinabbin solar farm, the Cooba solar farm. I note the enthusiasm from people tonight from the area who are determined to make their points known. I want to draw the minister's attention to the *Solar Energy*

Facilities: Design and Development Guideline – October 2022, specifically page 11, which lays out a number of key points:

Solar energy facilities connect into the NEM through the Victorian electricity transmission network.

It lays out:

Victoria's electricity transmission network is planned by the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO). In Victoria, the transmission network is owned, operated and maintained by licensed transmission network service providers (NSPs) including AusNet Services, TransGrid and Powercor.

A solar energy facility seeking to connect to the NEM must have its generator performance standards ...

laid out. This is an important point, because you cannot just connect in willy-nilly. They do say:

Managing cumulative effects in an area

The clustering of solar energy ... facilities in an area can result in efficiencies ...

They lay that out, and:

However, too many facilities in an area can:

- reduce the availability and/or productivity of strategic agricultural land
- result in landscape-scale visual impacts, due to an overconcentration of built form in an area
- impact the area's biodiversity, habitat or wildlife, due to an overconcentration of built form.

They talk about the cumulative effects and say this can be reduced by having a mix of land uses and:

- having enough distance between solar energy facilities within an area to minimise or avoid environmental impacts and natural hazard risk exposure.

These are all worthy points made in the guideline, but what I want the minister for energy to do is to address this particular solar farm and its associated battery approach. It is a very large and impactful solar farm that will devastate the local area and cause huge damage in terms of fire risk and other matters but also with the visual impacts. I am asking her to make sure that this guideline is adhered to, that the guideline is actually approached in a sensible way and that the terrible impacts of this particular solar farm through the agricultural area, particularly the wine-growing area, are dealt with. As far as I can see, the government's process to date has not dealt with these matters satisfactorily, and that I think is a concern. The government's own guideline is there. The minister needs to make sure that this guideline is adhered to and actually actively intervene and ensure that the community is not overrun or overreached in this way by an effervescent and forceful – *(Time expired)*

St Kilda Primary School

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (18:26): (1565) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is to provide funding for a replacement hall for St Kilda Primary School. The primary school used to have a hall, but the state government demolished it during capital works and failed to provide a replacement. Since then the school has lacked an indoor space for PE, assemblies and events, and the wider community has missed out on a venue for meetings, music, art and other activities. The school and its community have an active campaign for a replacement hall. I recently went along to a community rally at the school, at which many members were in attendance. There was a crowd of students, parents and community members, and former school parent Hughesy emceed the event. Lots of support was given from commuters as they drove past, much to the excitement of the kids. As placards on fences all across the community clearly say, the state government removed the St Kilda Primary School hall and has not fulfilled its promise to rebuild.

According to the state government's facility area schedules, St Kilda Primary is entitled to a gym based on enrolment numbers. St Kilda Primary School is one of the largest in the area without an indoor facility. With 52 per cent of kids enrolled this year living in apartments or townhouses, access to any recreational space is really constrained. The local area has just eight public open spaces, covering only

5 per cent of the land, far below the municipal average of 17 per cent open space, and these outdoor areas are unusable in bad weather, leaving these primary schoolkids without a place to be active year round. As one parent says:

Without an indoor space it's a struggle to provide consistent PE lessons, especially during bad weather. This means students often miss out on vital physical activity, which is essential for their health and development. An indoor facility would make a world of difference.

The school's vision is to create a multipurpose hall that enhances our children's education and provides a central venue for local residents of all ages and abilities. Minister, enough broken promises. I ask that you fund and deliver an indoor and community hall for St Kilda Primary School.

Big Housing Build

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (18:28): (1566) Last week I visited the Big Housing Build site on Bluff Road in Hampton East with some students from Moorabbin Primary School, who had just participated in the naming of the three tower cranes on the site. So we have now got Larry the Lifter, Big Joe and Liftersaurus Rex helping to construct the 285 new homes on that site, a 16 per cent increase in social housing on Bluff Road, Hampton East. My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Housing and Building, and the action that I seek is an update on the progress of that construction, including any relevant timeframes.

Cooba solar project

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (18:28): (1567) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Emergency Services, and it relates to the provision of solar farms, battery farms and related infrastructure. I note there is significant concern regarding a proposed solar farm at Colbinabbin from a number of different angles this evening. This is just one example from across the state that has been done extremely poorly, without proper consultation and without properly understanding the very real risks and consequences that can occur from an emergency management perspective. The action I seek from the Minister for Emergency Services is to work with other ministerial colleagues to ensure that more consultation occurs within approval processes so that farmers, landholders, interested parties, and yes, CFA volunteers and emergency services personnel have input into decisions relating to solar farms and battery farm projects. For example, in 2021 a fire occurred at Victoria's Big Battery in my electorate. Once started, the Tesla battery fire spread to another battery. After three full days of burning, it was brought under control. Fire crews stayed around for an extra 24 hours and were on sharp watch to ensure that the fire did not reignite. What impact does this have on our already stretched emergency service workers? With more of these facilities around, what impact is it going to have across the state?

Multiple agencies were involved in the investigation, such as Energy Safe Victoria, WorkSafe Victoria, Victoria Police and the CFA. Similarly in my electorate, a huge battery farm was announced just a year ago to be placed in Melton. My colleague Mrs McArthur raised concerns last year, and she spoke about ACEnergy's proposal in Little River, which locals only found out about via media. There are plenty more examples where locals who actually live and work in the area, within close proximity, have been kept largely unaware and almost completely in the dark in some instances. I am not against private individuals doing what they want on their land within the constraints of the law. Everyone should have the right to do that as they see fit. However, when there are significant projects that impact groups of people, it is incumbent on the government to ensure that there is at least an opportunity for those impacted by a decision to have input and genuine consultation. Colbinabbin, as many have mentioned, is just one example of where CFA volunteers and locals have not been fully consulted. I hope the minister listens, but I fear that the pleas from concerned locals are falling on deaf Labor ears.

Leakes Road–Western Freeway, Rockbank

David ETTERSANK (Western Metropolitan) (18:31): (1568) My adjournment is addressed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Leakes Road services the rapidly growing Rockbank area in

my electorate. There are already some 14,500 vehicles travelling along Leakes Road every day, with traffic modelling commissioned by Melton council indicating that this will increase to over 22,700 vehicles by 2031. Most of these vehicles are fighting their way onto the Western Freeway. The intersection of Leakes Road and the Western Freeway is a particularly hazardous one. With no signalling on the on-ramp, cars are forced to queue up on this busy arterial road and simply wait for a gap in the traffic. It is little wonder that there have been 29 crashes along Leakes Road between the Western Freeway interchange and Westcott Parade in the last few years. This is the only section of Leakes Road that comes under state responsibility. All the other sections are managed by Melton council.

Melton council asked the government to install traffic lights, but the Minister for Roads and Road Safety ruled it out, citing technical issues:

Temporary traffic lights cannot be connected to the traffic light control system that allows for remote adjustments. This could lead to driver frustration, poor compliance, and safety issues ...

Presumably these would be beyond the hair-raising lunge drivers must take to merge onto the Western Freeway.

Melton council are considering building a roundabout next to Rockbank station at Westcott Parade so that people exiting the freeway can turn right at Leakes Road, do a U-turn at Westcott Parade and continue north. It is not the best model, and it is still two years away. However, the federal government announcement of a \$1 billion package to upgrade the Western Freeway could provide a solution. We know the funds will go towards improving safety and increasing capacity by adding extra lanes and upgrades to key interchanges. The council has written to the minister seeking information on the scope of this investment, on its delivery and on the installation of traffic lights. So the action I seek is for the minister to liaise with the federal government to prioritise the installation of traffic lights at the Leakes Road interchange, either as a permanent fixture or a temporary trial, to address the safety concerns at this dangerous interchange.

First Nations children's group

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (18:34): (1569) My adjournment is for the Minister for Children, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit a First Nations children's group in Eastern Victoria.

Cooba solar project

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:34): (1570) My adjournment action is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. I seek that he meet with the Colbinabbin Renewable Action Group to discuss their concerns over the tourism and economic impact of the Cooba solar proposal. Tourism is the economic heartbeat of many of our regional communities. It brings visitors, supports small business, creates local jobs and drives long-term investment. In Colbinabbin, nestled in the Mount Carmel range, locals have spent decades building a future based on wine, food, nature, art and tourism. It is now a sought-after destination, proudly dubbed the 'up-and-coming Barossa Valley', I am told, with over 60 wineries.

That vision is under serious threat. The Victorian government is considering a proposal for the Cooba solar farm, a 665-hectare industrial facility equivalent to the size of 415 MCGs. The site, right in the heart of Colbinabbin's wine and tourism precinct, would host more than 700,000 solar panels, a substation and hundreds of battery installations, some the size of shipping containers. Families like the Davies, who operate Colbinabbin Estate, have invested years into building a vineyard that does not just produce award-winning wines but draws people from all over Victoria. Just across the road they now face the prospect of losing their views, their microclimate and potentially their business. Nearby, long-term residents Claire and Peter Tuohey have expressed their heartbreak over the destruction of the scenic rural landscapes and the risk it poses to local tourism and agriculture. Their story is echoed by dozens of others, including captain Christopher Ryan at the Colbinabbin CFA, who has warned that

if fire broke out at the solar farm local brigades could not safely respond. These are not abstract concerns; they are real, immediate and being raised in good faith.

You do not need to be from Colbinabbin to understand what is at stake. This is a community that has done everything right – investing in agriculture, hospitality and tourism, creating jobs and drawing visitors. Their efforts have turned a quiet township into a vibrant emerging destination. To now have that progress threatened by an industrial-scale energy facility, one that would dominate the landscape and undermine the visitor experience, is unacceptable. It risks undoing decades of work and sends a troubling message to regional communities. We must protect and promote Victoria's visitor economy, and that means defending the integrity of every region that makes our state attractive to tourists.

Alpine Shire Council waste and recycling management

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:37): (1571) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Local Government, and the action I seek is for the minister to investigate the validity of the Alpine shire's waste disposal charge on properties not eligible for kerbside collection. Constituents from the Alpine shire have reached out to me with concerns over the shire's unfair waste removal charge. Out-of-town residents, who are not eligible for kerbside collection, are being charged the same amount of \$281 as those who reside in the townships. These residents are forced to find their own means of disposing of their household rubbish, generally at extra cost. Some have hired skip bins and others take a weekly trip to the local refuse centre, yet they are still charged the same fee as those who can simply wheel their bins out to the kerb once a week. In a letter sent to residents in May of 2023 the Alpine Shire Council justified this charge by saying:

The general waste charge is charged to all properties in the Alpine Shire, even if the property does not have access to kerbside bin services. This is because all ratepayers benefit from public waste collection, operation of transfer stations and waste education services.

It hardly seems fair that rural residents are being financially disadvantaged by this charge when they receive minimal benefit from it. Minister, the action I seek is for you to investigate the validity of the Alpine shire's waste disposal charge on properties not eligible for kerbside collection.

Renewable energy infrastructure

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:39): (1572) My adjournment matter, for the Minister for Local Government, relates to the fundamental unbalance in Victoria's planning system, a system that leaves local governments powerless over renewable energy projects despite expecting them to represent constituents who might despise these developments. This is not just a quirk of policy; it is a betrayal of regional Victoria, where communities bear the brunt of a state-driven renewables agenda they cannot influence. Under the current regime, shaped by past decisions like planning scheme amendment VC261, the notification, consultation and appeals processes that once gave communities a voice have been dismantled. As third parties, ordinary Victorians are no longer informed, consulted or able to challenge projects at VCAT. Instead they are left with the Supreme Court of Victoria, a costly and daunting option beyond most. Local councils, the front line of democratic representation, are reduced to being bystanders as renewable projects, wind farms, solar arrays and transmission lines particularly march across their jurisdictions. This is indefensible when we consider the scale of what is coming. Victoria's target of 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035 demands 16 gigawatts of new capacity. That is dozens of projects potentially consuming 40,000 hectares or more based on typical land use for renewables. No part of this state will escape the shadow of turbines, the sprawl of panels or transmission lines, yet while the state dictates this transformation, local governments cannot protect their communities from poorly sited developments or mitigate the monster transmission towers that blight landscapes and livelihoods and wreck the environment. This government justifies this by citing the need for energy security, but this mess stems from its own lack of foresight, a failure regional Victoria now pays for. The benefits might reach suburban electorates, but regional communities carry the can. Former Victorian Farmers Federation president Emma Germano hit the nail on the head:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The government have forgotten they represent the people. By sidelining local input, they have lost the social licence for these projects.

We are talking tonight about Campaspe, but just this week I heard the latest heartbreaking news, the approval of the Little River solar project opposite the most historic property of Mount Rothwell and Little River, a homestead used in Victoria's film and tourist industry. Minister, the action I seek is for you to give local councils and communities a voice in these matters which affect them so exponentially.

Viva Energy

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:42): (1573) My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to require Viva Energy to undertake a public and comprehensive maritime assessment process prior to any further consideration of its gas terminal project. The government's statutory authority for the provision of maritime navigation services, Ports Victoria, submitted letters dated 10 January 2024 and 20 November 2024 to the planning panel assessing Viva Energy's proposal to build a gas import terminal in Corio Bay. To provide context, I will send copies of the letters to the minister in case they have not seen them. Ports Victoria is concerned that further assessments undertaken by Viva Energy in a supplementary environment effects statement (EES) have not sufficiently progressed the marine transport transit risks, including navigation, mooring and emergency departure risks and control for the proposed operation of the import terminal. Concerningly, the letter validates community concerns that the Corio-based shipping channel is too narrow and too shallow for liquefied natural gas tankers, and significant dredging would be required to meet safety standards. The largest and most economic LNG tankers will be unable to access the proposed terminal and there will therefore be pressure to deepen and widen the Geelong channel. This further dredging is not considered in Viva Energy's proposal, and experts and submissions to the hearing estimate dredging could be as large as 10 times the proposed amount.

Ports Victoria state that the studies undertaken to date do not adequately determine whether the scope of operations are achievable within the proposed footprint without further modifications exceeding the design scope presented during the EES. Similar project risk assessments in other states, by comparison, have shown that the reconfiguration of shipping channels may be necessary to enable the safe navigation of the LNG tankers, with dire outcomes for the marine environment and community health. For example, the Gladstone dredging project resulted in hundreds of dead and dying fish with lesions on them and stranded sea life discovered with elevated metal levels, including arsenic and mercury, mobilised through dredging, causing a temporary fishing ban in the bay. The Geelong community has raised safety and dredging concerns with this LNG import terminal proposal for more than three years. The ports authority responsible for overseeing maritime navigation and safety is now publicly reiterating these concerns, and Viva Energy is still yet to submit information to Ports Victoria to allow for a comprehensive maritime assessment. Given the existence of these letters from Ports Victoria, how can the Minister for Planning possibly approve a project that has serious and unaddressed maritime safety risks raised by the port authority itself?

HeartKids

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:45): (1574) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. HeartKids is a wonderful organisation that has been providing vital support for thousands of families affected by childhood-onset heart disease, or COHD, for over 40 years. I recently met with the CEO Marcus Sandmann and chief operating officer Jessica Keating. Around 2500 babies are born with congenital heart disease in Australia every year, with many more developing heart conditions during childhood and learning to manage COHD as teenagers and into their adulthood. For families with children with heart conditions there are many challenges to face. They are dealing with emotional, practical and financial impacts which can be overwhelming. People impacted by childhood-onset heart disease not only have an often very challenging journey with their

heart health, but they are also at greater risk of neurodevelopmental impairment and disability, including developmental delay and other learning difficulties. And it does have a substantive economic burden on people impacted, especially those living in rural and regional areas.

HeartKids helps connect families with a range of services, which may include accommodation when travelling to access treatment or referrals to mental health support. There is also the HeartKids podcast *From the Heart*, sharing vital information and personal insights into living with COHD. For those families who experience the devastating loss of a child to cardiac disease, HeartKids is there to provide bereavement support. Funding is critical, and I understand that \$100,000 for the Victorian arm of HeartKids would fund a full-time regional support resource that would be a significant benefit for Victorian families in regional and rural Victoria who are coping on their own. This should be a priority of government. This sort of funding should not even have to be debated. It is to support those in need and not disregard them – not waste and mismanage taxpayers money, as this government does, but provide that vital support that means so much to so many of these families and their children. So the action I seek is for the government to commit funding for HeartKids to continue this important advocacy for more community awareness, research and resources for families at a time when they need this vital support.

Sjögren's syndrome

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:48): (1575) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for her to meet with Sjögren's Australia, a newly formed organisation advocating for better awareness, understanding, support and research for people suffering with this hugely misunderstood chronic illness. This is a matter that is incredibly close to my own heart. It is not something that I speak of often, but I was just 26 years old when I was diagnosed with Sjögren's syndrome. It came with a huge sense of relief to finally have answers to the symptoms and years of mystery hospitalisations. But it also came with a huge sense of sadness, knowing there is no cure and that it is a progressive condition, meaning that it only worsens with age. A Google search of Sjögren's will tell you that it is an autoimmune disease that is categorised by dry eyes and mouth, which is something that deeply frustrates and minimises the experiences of Sjögren's patients, because it is so much more than that. It is a chronic and rheumatic condition, also categorised by persistent fatigue, chronic pain and swollen glands. It affects the joints, the thyroid, kidneys, the liver, lungs, skin and nerves. Those with Sjögren's have a significantly increased chance of lymphoma, and as an illness that primarily affects women, it can create pregnancy complications, such as congenital heart block, foetal loss, preeclampsia and premature delivery. The worst part of this illness is that it is invisible. Despite being so open about parts of myself and the obligation I feel to share my lived experience in this role to help others, it is one of the things that I struggle to communicate about the most.

Patients are misunderstood as we often present healthy and well, while inside our bodies are literally attacking themselves every single day. Like all illnesses that cannot be seen, it makes managing work, parenting, relationships and everyday life hard, especially in the instance of flare-ups, a sudden and rapid onset of increased symptoms that can be debilitating.

Like so many autoimmune diseases, there is limited understanding of Sjögren's syndrome. Diagnosis is difficult, expensive and long, and funding for research or treatment is minimal. As a community we rely on each other for support, solidarity and understanding as we operate in a world that does not see or sometimes acknowledge our suffering in silence. The government can fix that by opening the door to this conversation. I truly hope that the minister can meet with Sjögren's Australia to learn more about this chronic illness affecting Victorians and to discuss the inclusion of Sjögren's syndrome in public health agendas and the expanding of funding, including for medications, treatments and financial assistance for patients, as well as research to make the lives of people with Sjögren's syndrome just a little bit more comfortable.

Water quality

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:51): (1576) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water. The action that I seek is that the government mandate PFAS testing and public reporting for all recycled water and recycled water biosolid products, starting with the Werribee catchment, and ensure that our farmers are not liable for any of the prior contamination from using these products. For over two years I have raised concerns in this place about recycled water, biosolids and the risks of PFAS contamination in my electorate and this state, yet despite these repeated warnings the government continues to roll out major projects, like the Werribee system reconfiguration project, without addressing the most basic question of all: is this water and is this soil actually safe? These projects promise water security, but they do not guarantee water safety.

PFAS, toxic long-lasting chemicals linked to cancer and immune disorders, are almost completely absent from Victoria's planning documents and risk frameworks. We know that reverse osmosis removes some PFAS from recycled water, but the biosolids and sludge left behind are still being spread across farms in Werribee, Melton and Bacchus Marsh without mandatory testing or any public reporting. If the land has already been contaminated from past applications, no-one is checking, no-one is warning landowners and no-one is measuring bioaccumulation in our food. Worst of all, nobody is taking responsibility. Even the government's own safe drinking water report, which was released yesterday, confirms it. PFAS is not part of our routine water testing. PFAS in biosolids and sludge is not covered at all.

While the technical standards may be the same statewide, the experience in my region is not. Greater Western Water recorded a 44 per cent increase in complaints about water quality, but Melbourne Water, which services the east, recorded none. This is not just a gap in infrastructure, it is a gap in fairness and transparency, because clean water and safe soil and public trust are just the very basics of good governance and the very least of what we deserve.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (18:53): Today there were 20 matters raised in the adjournment debate. I will make sure that all 20 are referred to the relevant ministers for a written responses in line with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:54 pm.