

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Thursday 3 April 2025

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Thursday 3 April 2025

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

Business of the house**Notices of motion**

The SPEAKER (09:33): General business, notices of motion 20 and 48 to 62, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions**Whittlesea-Yea Road**

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) presented a petition bearing 333 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the urgent need for surface and pothole repair on Whittlesea-Yea Road between Flowerdale and Kinglake West. The roads deteriorating condition, plagued with large, deep potholes, crumbling shoulders and failing surface puts drivers at risk of accident and causes damage to vehicles including busting rims and bursting tyres.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly organise the urgent upgrade and repair of the Whittlesea-Yea Road between Flowerdale and Kinglake West to ensure road users safety.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Public transport safety

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 257 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the current situation of public safety whilst travelling on both V/Line and Metro transport within the state of Victoria, particularly the Gippsland region. Communities are concerned that whilst travelling on trains and/or coaches passengers feel unsafe with the behaviour of some passengers who use offensive and abusive language and/or display dangerous, erratic and irrational behaviour. This has significant consequences for the safety of all ages, young, elderly and disabled who will not use public transport for this reason.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly make provisions for Public Safety Officers (PSO's) at major stations and that signage be made clearly visible and placed in every carriage and/or coach displaying a phone number, (not 000) to contact when they are feeling vulnerable whilst travelling on public transport in Victoria.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Committees**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee*****Report on the 2023–24 Financial and Performance Outcomes***

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:35): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the inquiry into the 2023–24 financial and performance outcomes, together with transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report be published.

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General:

Recycling Resources from Waste – Ordered to be published

Results of 2023–24 Audits: Local Government – Ordered to be published

Judicial Entitlements Panel – Advisory Opinion to the Attorney-General February 2025

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Return submitted by members of the Legislative Assembly – Primary Returns 4 March 2025 – Ordered to be published

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee’s Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notice of approval of an amendment to the Victoria Planning Provisions Planning Scheme – VC276

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 13

Victoria Police, Chief Commissioner – Report 2024 under s 96 of the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981*.

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

The SPEAKER (09:37): I have received the resignations of Chris Crewther and Meng Heang Tak from the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee effective from 2 April 2025.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That Rachel Westaway and John Lister be members of the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee.

Motion agreed to.**Economy and Infrastructure Committee***Reference*

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That, noting the Legislative Council’s Select Committee on the 2026 Commonwealth Games bid final report tabled on 1 April 2025 and particularly recommendation 6 that noted the failure of key ministers and former ministers to appear before that committee and recommended that the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee conduct an inquiry for the purpose of holding public hearings with those key ministers and former ministers, this house refers an inquiry into the 2026 Commonwealth Games and the progress of the regional infrastructure build to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee, for consideration and report no later than 23 July 2026, and in particular that the committee hold hearings with the Premier, the Honourable Daniel Andrews, the Honourable Tim Pallas and the Honourable Martin Pakula and consider:

- (1) the potential failures in governance, probity and procurement processes in the Victorian government’s bid, contract and termination of the 2026 Commonwealth Games;
- (2) the impacts of the contract termination of the Commonwealth Games on Victoria’s reputation, business community, tourism and major events;
- (3) the Victorian government advice received from government departments, councils, agencies, consultants and contractors;
- (4) the potential undue influence by the executive on the independence of the public service;

- (5) the timeline, progress and budget of the Victorian government's regional infrastructure and housing build;
- (6) the impact on community, social, amateur and professional sport in Victoria; and
- (7) any other relevant matter.

Leave refused.**Legal and Social Issues Committee***Reference*

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house refers an inquiry into cults and organised fringe groups in Victoria, the methods used to recruit and control their members and the impacts of coercive control to the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 30 September 2026.

Motion agreed to.**Adjournment**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:40): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 13 May 2025.

Motion agreed to.*Members statements***Aberfeldie Primary School**

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (09:40): I rise today to celebrate a very special school in my electorate. Aberfeldie Primary School has been an institution in the Niddrie electorate for 100 years, hitting that very important milestone this year. For a century this school has been at the heart of education in our community, providing students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. On behalf of the students and families in Niddrie and the surrounding suburbs, I want to thank the principals, the teachers and all the staff both past and present who have made a lasting impact on the school and its students. Their hard work and dedication have shaped the school into the valued institution it is today. Our Labor government has recognised Aberfeldie Primary School since we were elected in 2014, with some \$3.7 million invested into the school to ensure it remains a modern, safe and high-quality learning environment. These investments reflect our government's commitment to supporting the school's ongoing success, helping to meet the evolving needs of its students and continuing to serve as a cornerstone in our community.

I most recently had the opportunity to visit Aberfeldie Primary to celebrate the school's involvement in the SunSmart schools program. For 21 years the school has been involved in this program, promoting safe sun and promoting habits that will prevent skin cancer for generations to come. As they mark 100 years of educational excellence at Aberfeldie Primary, it is also important to recognise the school's ongoing efforts for the health and wellbeing of its students. Aberfeldie primary continues to set a great example, shaping not only the minds but also the futures of young Victorians in our community. Congratulations, Aberfeldie Primary School.

Elsternwick planning

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:42): The best way to fight hate, racism and intolerance is through education. It was a great privilege to join our two federal candidates, Benson Saulo the candidate for Macnamara, and Tim Wilson our candidate for Goldstein, in an announcement for an \$18 million Jewish arts quarter right in the heart of Elsternwick. This is our very own Lygon Street in Elsternwick that will provide a cultural precinct and educational precinct and bring the Jewish

museum, the Holocaust centre and the creative industries together. A big shout-out for the work that both of these candidates have been doing to make this happen. This is really important. There is some work that needs to be done by the Minister for Planning here to ensure we have cars and major traffic not turning into this precinct, endangering the whole idea of what this precinct is all about. We have got to make sure it is a real hub, a true hub. Our federal Liberal colleagues have done their bit; we need our state colleagues to do their bit as well to ensure we close it off and make this a true hub.

Federal election

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:43): Finally, when it comes to voting in Macnamara, the best way to ensure the Greens do not get a look in is to put them last. We cannot have any more deals with the Labor Party and the Greens, and we want to ensure that Josh Burns does the right thing and puts the Greens last. That is what the Liberals will be doing, and we will be calling on Josh Burns to do exactly the same. And in Goldstein – we have no more need for the teals in Goldstein. We need a good candidate and member in Tim Wilson in Goldstein.

Northern District Softball Association

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:43): I am excited for the future of young people in my electorate. Last weekend I had the pleasure of attending the Northern District Softball Association's end-of-season awards ceremony in Mill Park. Meeting so many talented young athletes was inspiring, and it was an honour to recognise and celebrate their achievements. I am especially proud that local Hannah Scott has been selected to join Aussie Spirit, the Australian women's national softball team. We all hope she will end up representing our country at the next Olympic Games. Additionally, I want to congratulate Matthew Bedwell and Ethan Scott, who have been chosen for the men's under-23 and men's under-18 national teams respectively. I want to thank the wonderful committee led by president Chaminda Fernando alongside Jacinta Byrne and Paula Laudani, who commit countless hours to volunteering in our community, not to mention the families who make it all possible.

Kinder kits

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:44): I also want to highlight the fantastic kinder kits that the Allan Labor government is providing to all three-year-old kindergarten kids. I was pleased to be able to hand out the kits to the children at Epping North Pre-school last week. Seeing their smiles when they received their kits was priceless, and they give children a fantastic start in their educational journeys. These kits include fun stories by Aussie authors, blocks, crayons, Play-Doh and seeds to help grow a green thumb. Kids will have a ton of fun and educational activities to choose from. This is a wonderful set of examples of all the great things that are happening in my community.

Ovens Valley electorate

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:45): The people of the magnificent Ovens Valley are demanding answers from Premier Allan on a number of fronts. Our region is home to some of the worst roads in Australia, while the Allan government has flushed \$589 million down the drain on the Commonwealth Games con. All of Victoria's regional roads could have been fixed if not for the absolute con by the Premier of this state. Where is the apology from Premier Allan? Where is the fronting up to the regions and asking for forgiveness for the brutal financial mess that she has put Victoria into?

The upcoming budget in Victoria is Premier Allan's chance to show some dignity to our communities who live outside of the Melbourne metropolitan boundaries and to invest in health, education and housing in Wangaratta, Bright and Mount Beauty. Wangaratta was promised the final stage of the high school that the coalition invested in in 2014, and that turned into a cruel hoax as the Victorian Labor government ripped that money out of the Wangaratta region and handed it to other communities. The

2025 Victorian budget must begin with an apology for the financial mismanagement of our great state and conclude with completing the Wangaratta High School build.

Yarrowonga is the fastest growing town in regional Victoria and still cannot get the Victorian government to agree on the new bridge route that connects Victoria to New South Wales. The delays and excuses are palpable. New South Wales is shovel ready, while Victoria is still looking for the garden shed where the shovel is stored. Premier Allan's behaviour towards regional Victoria is akin to President Trump's liberation day to protect America. The only problem is Premier Allan is demonising the regions to save her pet project, the Suburban Rail Loop. On budget day start with saying sorry and – *(Time expired)*

Macedon electorate schools

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:46): Here in the Education State I am proud of the investments our government has made in every school across my electorate. From bushfire preparedness to major redevelopments and two brand new school builds, to breakfast clubs, to prep bags and to Smile Squad as well as the school saving bonus, we are making sure that families are getting the help that they need so that their kids can access a first-class education.

Visiting schools is always a highlight for me, and I can tell you that good things are growing in spades at Kyneton High School. With support from VicHealth and their Growing Healthy Communities grants and Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health, the school's kitchen garden is undergoing a complete transformation, led by the students. More than 200 kids at Kyneton High will roll up their sleeves to create an orchard and edible food forest alongside a new pizza oven, with some bench seating made by the students themselves. Big thanks go to school leaders Sarah Dillon and Maverick Kelly for showing me around on the day.

At Gisborne Secondary I joined student leaders to cut the ribbon and officially open the stage 1 upgrades, which include a new admin building and first-class facilities for staff, a student wellbeing centre and a senior learning centre. But more is on its way: this government is building a brand new trades hub for kids pursuing hands-on learning at – *(Time expired)*

South-West Coast electorate sporting facilities

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:48): I call on the Allan Labor government to provide funding for an all-access change room at Purnim cricket ground for women's cricket. The sport is taking off and the women need a place where they can change under shelter and in private. This change room will also have benefits for a variety of local sports groups.

In the upcoming May budget I call on the Allan Labor government to provide funding for some more basketball courts in Warnambool. Basketball is a very popular sport and facilities are bursting at the seams. Because there are inadequate courts, the teams have to play late into the night to get through all the matches, which is unsuitable for young children. The facility urgently needs more changing rooms for male and female players and for home and away teams.

I call on the Allan Labor government to provide funding for extra netball courts for the Warnambool & District Football Netball League. Each precinct – Old Collegians, Merrivale, Dennington, South Rovers and Russells Creek – only has one netball court, restricting participation. Dennington netball club also desperately needs a toilet. These are the bare essential facilities needed so that sporting events can occur.

I call on the Allan Labor government to provide funding to resurface the netball courts in Panmure, which have degraded since the 2022 floods and are dangerous for players. The committee are concerned that there will be injuries as the surface has become so slippery.

David Cragg

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (09:49): David Cragg was a pillar of the Victorian trade union movement over three decades and a tireless advocate for workers rights. He served at the AWU Victorian branch from 1991 to 2009 before moving to Trades Hall as the elected assistant secretary from 2009 to 2018. I was at Trades Hall last week with hundreds of true believers and fellow travellers to celebrate the life of Comrade David Cragg as a touching speech was given by former federal Labor leader Bill Shorten.

I worked particularly with David back in the early 2000s on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 when I was an adviser with the then health minister, but that work was largely driven by the Parliamentary Secretary for Health at the time, the Honourable Daniel Andrews. Craggy played a critical role there because he was also a representative at the AWU for our cemeteries and crematoria workers. There was a lot of roting of public funds, accountability of management was poor and the workforce was treated poorly, and the changes and reforms there were very significant.

I also wanted to touch on the fact that Craggy was one of the eminent party elders charged with leading disputes at the Labor Party that came up from time to time. It is a common refrain in the Labor Party that disloyalty is not only a lifetime ban but plus 10 years. Craggy did lead the dispute with my predecessor in Ivanhoe and ensured that he had his membership revoked. It was a just excommunication, and I thank Craggy for his work then and his Labor values. We continue to struggle in his good name.

Gender services

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:51): Gender-affirming care is essential health care. It should be accessible and affordable, and despite desperate, hate-fuelled campaigns by fundamentalists and the far right recently, our inclusive Victorian community stands unwavering with the trans community. The Greens are calling on the government to commit to comprehensive gender-affirming healthcare services here in Victoria. At Monday's Trans Day of Visibility, the call from the trans community could not have been clearer: visibility without support leads to violence. They deserve so much more from our government than simply waving the flag or wearing a corporate lanyard.

A report by the coroner into the deaths of five trans women in Victoria made clear that medical discrimination and a lack of investment in transgender health care were major contributing factors in these deaths. Gender-affirming care is life saving. These healthcare services are currently out of reach for so many people. That is why we are asking the Labor government to invest more in free public health clinics. It must be affordable, it must be accessible, and we need it now.

Seaford Cricket Club

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:52): Congratulations to the Seaford Cricket Club on reaching 100 years. Reaching a century in cricket is always impressive, but reaching a century as a club is truly extraordinary. To all the past and present players, coaches, committee members, family and supporters, congratulations. A special note of thanks to club committee members Mathew Weaver, Ryan McQueen, Tony Cooper, Kym Bowles and Phil Clinch.

Carrum Surf Life Saving Club

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:52): Congratulations also to the Carrum Surf Life Saving Club on reaching 100 years. For a century this club has been a shining example of community spirit, resilience and commitment. Volunteers past and present have generously given their time for others, saving lives, educating generations and making sure that our beautiful beach remains a safe and welcoming place for all. I want to particularly acknowledge Ben Rooks, Nicole Rooks, Stephen Griffiths, Shane Rowley, Cath Paulsen, Charlie Barton, Emily Woods, Kay Hassell, David Hassell, Lucy Prideaux, Shane Wright, Joanne Wright, Cherie Ramsay, Tegan

Griffiths, Jodie Laphorne, Andrew Laphorne, Matthew Righetti and the hundreds of others who helped make this club so great.

Carrum Downs Cricket Club

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:53): I wish to acknowledge two incredible women, Nat Wenke and Kate Hamilton, for organising a truly exceptional Pink Stumps Day at Carrum Downs Cricket Club. It really was a special event, bringing so many of our community together in support of a wonderful cause and each other.

Carrum electorate student leaders

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (09:53): Congratulations to 2025 school captains at Patterson River Secondary College: Avi Jackson, Felicia Kumar, Abbie Culpin Watson and Wilbur Hunter. Congratulations to the 2025 school captains at Carrum Downs Secondary as well.

Gippsland East electorate crime

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:54): We all know that crime in this state is out of control, but it seems to be spreading to all areas. In East Gippsland we have a cohort of young people who are breaking into homes in the Bairnsdale–Paynesville area in particular and stealing cars. They then have the audacity to post this online as they are speeding down the street at 170 or 180 kilometres an hour. Our police are doing the right thing. They are catching these people and charging them with the driving offences and the burglary offences, but they get straight out on bail and they go and do it again. It is about time we started supporting our police by making changes that hold people accountable for their actions. It is simply not happening now. Our police do a great job in our local community. They need to be backed up by this government with real laws.

Road maintenance

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:54): I want to talk about the state of our roads. I want to give one example of the constant situations we are facing in East Gippsland. We had a massive pothole about the size of a small car fixed on the Princes Highway, highway 1, outside Orbost. Two days later it was back in the same condition. We do not fix our roads properly. We need to start fixing our roads properly, but we know what the reason is: we have got a government that is broke and that has cut funding to roads. We need to reverse that and invest in our roads network not only in East Gippsland but throughout the state.

David Cragg

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (09:55): I rise to remember the life of David Keith Cragg. Craggy was a fantastic stalwart of the Labor Party. He was always positive and always upbeat. David was from a time when the Labor Party really struggled here in Victoria. His views and his world were shaped by the reverberations of the split. He got to know Laurie Short, who ran the Federated Ironworkers Association out of Sydney, and had originally been a member of the Communist Party but then gravitated more to Santamaria and the groupers.

David understood that real change came about through constant work and incremental gains, and he recognised that there was a role to be played in relation to just being persistent and advocating. I was really delighted that David became a life member of the Labor Party. He became a life member of the great Australian Workers' Union. David played a really important mentorship role for younger activists in the party. I had a fantastic working relationship with David. He would always give you two thumbs up, 'God bless ya' – really, really positive. He was just such a great person. I recognise the great contribution he made to our labour movement and the Labor Party. Vale, David Cragg.

Sandringham Hospital

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:57): I recently attended the annual Sandringham Hospital Lunch by the Bay fundraiser. This year proceeds will support the upgrade of essential ultrasound equipment, ensuring dialysis patients receive the very best possible care. The incredible turnout was a testament to the vital role Sandringham Hospital plays in our community. A big thankyou to committee members Joan van den Dungen, Philippa Quigley, Jodie McDonald, Lynn Gilmore, Ella Gibbs and Kerry Stratford. Their dedication and hard work have made a meaningful impact, and our community is a stronger place because of it.

Professor John Buckeridge

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:57): The Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary is one of our community's most treasured environmental and ecological assets. Today I would like to recognise the outstanding contribution of Professor John Buckeridge to the preservation of the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary and his environmental leadership over many, many decades. Professor Buckeridge has been the lead author of six science-based books that have earned recognition from the International Union of Biological Sciences. This is a remarkable achievement, bringing global attention to our precious marine sanctuary. I applaud Professor Buckeridge for his hard work and look forward to seeing his outstanding contributions formally recognised.

Suburban Rail Loop

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:58): Finally, my community has asked me for many things. They have asked me for safer roads, world-class schools, investment in our Sandringham Hospital and a safer community. They have never once asked me for a train line between Cheltenham and Box Hill. They have not once asked me for that. We cannot afford the Commonwealth Games, we cannot afford the Suburban Rail Loop, and it is about time Labor understood that.

Neil Heatley OAM

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:58): I wish to congratulate Mr Neil Heatley, who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, an OAM, in the 2025 Australia Day honours list for his service to the community of northern Melbourne, which includes his contribution to Kingsbury Bowls Club. He has held just about every position at the club, including chairman for a 20-year period between 1995 and 2015, and he was awarded life membership for his dedication. Some say he was the best bar manager the club has ever had.

Neil has lived in the northern suburbs for nearly all of his 90 years, and his service to the community goes well past his outstanding service to the bowling club. Starting his career as a carpenter and builder, Neil went on to be a tech teacher in both secondary schools and TAFE, sharing his trade skills with young people. In the 1950s he completed national service NCO training at Watsonia army barracks and then completed his service with the 6th Battalion Royal Melbourne Regiment. He served on Kingsbury Primary School council and at Kingsbury youth club, and he has been a justice of the peace since 2007, actively helping people needing documents witnessed or signed, including at the Austin and Mercy hospitals in Heidelberg. Neil helped to run the men's shed at Bundoora extended care and was also on the community reference group for the Reservoir level crossing removal project – and anyone who knows that level crossing knows that anyone who helped get rid of it deserves two OAMs.

Neil has given decades of service to the local community, and he has been duly recognised with an Order of Australia. On behalf of my local community, I extend heartfelt thanks and congratulations to Mr Heatley.

Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:00): This members statement is to acknowledge Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, which this year commemorates the 110th anniversary of this horrific event inflicted on Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians, which began on 24 April 1915. The wonderful Armenian community is a vital part of our state, and the Armenian National Committee of Australia's Victorian office is located in Scoresby, not far from my electorate office. As a result, many Armenian families reside in my Rowville electorate and the surrounding areas, enriching our community with their history, culture and resilience. I am lucky enough to attend to regular Armenian community functions as their culture continues to inspire me. Their traditions, strong sense of unity and unwavering dedication to remembering their past reflect the spirit of perseverance that defines the Armenian people.

Gary Keisoglu

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (10:01): I would like to particularly pay tribute to one extraordinary local Rowville resident and proud member of the Armenian community, the late Gary Keisoglu, who sadly passed away on 19 January this year and whose funeral I attended on 23 January. Gary will be remembered as a great advocate for the Armenian community of Victoria, and his passing will be a great loss to his community. My sincere condolences to his wife Louise and son Matthew.

Ramadan

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:01): There has been so much happening across the Williamstown electorate over the last few weeks. As we mark the end of Ramadan, I want to extend my best wishes to the Islamic community for their Eid celebrations. I also want to recognise the invaluable contributions of the Australian Islamic Centre and the Australian Islamic Centre College in my electorate. Through education and charitable initiatives these institutions play a crucial role in fostering multiculturalism. It was an honour to attend the annual Ramadan iftar dinner at the Australian Islamic Centre, where I once again witnessed the generosity and hospitality that define this sacred month. I also had the pleasure of attending the end of school celebrations and the start of Eid with students and staff at the Australian Islamic Centre College, which now educates more than 150 people. Majida Ali and all her staff do an incredible job down there.

Williamstown electorate sporting clubs

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10:02): Beyond cultural celebrations I was delighted to host our local bowling clubs for Williamstown's annual bowling competition in Parliament. Congratulations to Newport Bowls Club on their victory. It was a great day.

In sporting news, the Williamstown Football Club is nearing completion of its new female-friendly facilities, including upgraded change rooms and football services. This \$2.2 million project is supported by the federal government, AFL Victoria and \$1 million from the state government. I cannot wait to attend their home game this Friday night.

Warrandyte Festival

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:02): It was wonderful to take part again in this year's Warrandyte Festival. With the annual street parade, market stalls, live music, billycart race and community spirit, it is an absolute highlight in our community's calendar. A big shout-out to this year's pink festival monarchs, Katie Taubert, Sandra Mills and Nicole Huseby, crowned this year for their tireless advocacy for breast cancer awareness and fundraising for the McGrath Foundation. Thank you for your energy and compassion and for inspiring us all. We are proud to call you ours.

Box Hill Hospital

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:03): Eleven weeks ago my husband Fraser and I welcomed our first baby into the world, our son Bobby. In the Warrandyte electorate our local hospitals are Box Hill and Maroondah, and as it turned out I gave birth to my first child at Box Hill Hospital, the same place that my mum gave birth to me as her first child 34 years ago.

[NAME/S AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I have long been an advocate of Box Hill Hospital and all who work there, and today I want to give a shout-out to all the amazing staff there that supported us: from Nikki at the front desk to Shan at the special care unit, Dr Amira and Dr Sandy, thank you for your amazing care and support. Finally, to my midwife, Vanessa: thank you. You are an absolute gift to your profession, and we will be forever grateful for your guidance, love and support. The midwifery group practice (MGP) program provides the most wonderful continuity of care for both the baby and the mother, as evidence has shown, and I can absolutely testify to this. And to our baby boy Bobby: we love you. You light up our lives, and we are so proud to call you ours; you are the best.

Oakleigh electorate early childhood education

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:04): It is a pleasure to rise and talk about the wonderful work that kinders do in the great electorate of Oakleigh. I continue a tradition that my predecessor Ann Barker had where she would provide a chocolate Easter hamper or a voucher to every kinder in the electorate to give them an opportunity to raise money by selling raffle tickets to win either the voucher or the basket of chocolate goodies.

But this is just really a way of recognising the extraordinary work kinders do. They have a whole community around them. They are aggregators, but at the fundamental level there are parents who care, teachers who care, staff who care and helpers and volunteers who are extraordinary. The kids are amazing of course. I had the pleasure this year of providing, again, every kinder with the opportunity to do a raffle around an Easter hamper. I delivered Easter hampers to St Patrick's kinder, which this government has invested in, and Germain Street kinder in Oakleigh, just two of the many kinders we have in the electorate. I want to acknowledge all the work they do.

This government's enormous commitment – and the federal government – to three-year-old kinder means more kids have greater opportunities because of that investment. We are basically adding more ballast to the work of the volunteers and everybody around the kinder community in Victoria but particularly in my electorate.

Bruce Knights

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:06): I would love to congratulate Bruce Knights, pathways coordinator at Keilor Downs College. Bruce has received the prestigious Career Practitioner Award at RMIT's Career Practitioner Seminar. He was nominated for his innovation and creativity in this career space, recognition he truly deserves. Well done to Bruce.

Loaves and Fishes

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:06): On another matter, I had the privilege of visiting the Loaves and Fishes food bank in St Albans. I saw firsthand the volunteers working very hard, and it was heartwarming to see the efforts continue in particular in the wake of the passing of Charlie Desira OAM, who led the food bank in the Brimbank community for over 24 years. Thank you very much to Gerard, Laura and Mary and the whole team at the food bank.

Macedonian community

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (10:06): On another matter, last Sunday I joined the Macedonian community as they came together for a candlelight vigil. Together we honoured and paid respects to 59 innocent victims of the tragic fire in Kočani, North Macedonia. I want to express my gratitude to Lidija Neskovski and the whole Australian Macedonian community for organising this meaningful event and for their ongoing support for the Macedonian community here in Victoria. May the victims of this horrible disaster rest in peace.

Assyrian New Year

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:07): It was with great pleasure that last Sunday I, along with the terrific members for Greenvale and Broadmeadows and Enver Erdogan in the other place, attended the Assyrian New Year festival 6775, hosted by Victoria's Assyrian Australian associations. This terrific event, held at Anzac Park, Craigieburn, was a vibrant celebration of Assyrian culture and heritage. It was great to see our community come together to celebrate this significant occasion. The festival, which marks the most important national celebration in the Assyrian calendar, drew thousands from across Victoria's large and growing Assyrian community, including many from Kalkallo. Throughout the day attendees enjoyed a variety of activities including delicious food, captivating music and traditional dance among a wide range of other festivities suitable for all ages. The atmosphere was filled with joy and camaraderie as people of all ages and backgrounds came together to share in the celebration.

It was a terrific opportunity to talk with our Assyrian community about the importance of St Joseph's Christian college for our local community. The official opening ceremony was a highlight showcasing the rich cultural traditions and the enduring spirit of the Assyrian people. It was an honour to witness the performances by the Assyrian Church of the East choir and the Ornina and Ashur folkloric dance groups and hear the keynote speech by His Grace Mar Benyamin Elya, Bishop of Victoria and New Zealand. It reflected the deep pride and resilience of the Assyrian community. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Joseph Haweil and all the organising committee.

Country Fire Authority

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:09): It was a wonderful opportunity to meet with a range of first responders, including Fire Rescue Victoria firefighters and members of the SES, CFA, Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police. I would particularly like to thank Mel and Lacey from the Nillumbik SES for joining me in Parliament.

Yesterday, 2 April, celebrated the 80th anniversary of the Country Fire Authority, eight decades of volunteerism in protecting lives and property and bringing communities together. The Yallourn fire of 1944 and its just devastating impact led to the creation of this regional firefighting, volunteer-based network dedicated to safeguarding communities. I particularly want to recognise the work of the fantastic CFA brigades in my electorate: Diamond Creek, Eltham, Research and Wattle Glen. We have amazing volunteers at these brigades, and I thank them and their leadership teams, including captains Noel Farmer, Steve Riley, Nev Stewart and David Reuter and all who served before them. The value of the leadership and service of our volunteers in all that they do in responding to emergencies, supporting our communities to be fire ready and strengthening communities cannot be overstated. Thank you to the tens of thousands of CFA volunteers for your commitment to Victorian communities.

Eltham Rugby Union Football Club

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (10:10): Thank you to the Eltham rugby club for their strong culture of inclusion,

most recently seen with their great International Women's Day event. Eltham rugby club is just one of the many incredible local sporting clubs that are championing women's and girls' inclusion in community sport. A big thankyou to Sylvia Metcalfe, Tim Adams, Russell Dunne and other committee members for their work in making the evening such a success. This is such a great inclusive club in my electorate, and I wish them all the best for the upcoming season.

Dandenong Valley Special Developmental School

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:10): In my members statement a couple of days ago I forgot to thank the amazing staff that have worked a really long time at Dandenong Valley Special Developmental School, one being the physiotherapist Donny, who has worked there for over 37 years; the assistant principals Kim and Michael; and of course Fiona, the incredible art teacher who teaches the kids most amazing artwork, which is just great.

Bills

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:11): I rise to speak on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. What this bill does, in simple terms, is extend the energy upgrades program from a legislated end date of 2030 to 2045. It was due to end in 2030, so extend that by 15 years. It changes and mandates a number of issues in terms of the operation of the program; it adds new legal and regulatory mechanisms around that; it also changes the mechanism of climate target setting, which I will come to in some great detail; and it does a number of other technical things, including reducing the public reporting requirements around changes in how the scheme operates. The coalition, I must say, has great, great concerns with this bill. Not just the coalition, Victorians have great concerns with this bill. We have seen what has previously been described, including by me, as perhaps one of the greatest sets of rorts under a government taxpayer-funded scheme in this state's history. Under the energy upgrades program we have seen some of the greatest rorts ever under a government-funded scheme, and at the end of the day the point that is forgotten and probably became so stark with this upgrades scheme is that the taxpayer pays for it.

So when you see a dozen fridges on the sidewalk being dropped into a business that did not ask for it so the company and provider who dropped them off can rip off the taxpayer, the taxpayer pays for it. The taxpayer pays for the whole thing. We saw, which I will come to in more detail, just an absolutely shocking level of rorting with fridges but not just with fridges. We have seen this when it comes to hot-water heaters which were not appropriate being pulled from the scheme after being eligible under the scheme for years. More recently we have started to hear reports of hot-water heater rorts in terms of upgrades. We are hearing about rorts now because the government has moved to hot-water scheme upgrades at the moment, in terms of priority of the upgrade process, and we are hearing of shocking rorts starting in that space. I feel very confident that this government is not looking deeply enough or frankly caring enough about taxpayer money, and in discussions about this bill they have confirmed that in terms of the level of auditing of the program; I will return to it later.

In terms of this bill, the government has confirmed that in terms of going out and looking at complaints under the upgrades program, over the last financial year – as in, the current financial year, but from the middle of last year to today – the department has gone out to 25 sites.

Roma Britnell: How many?

James NEWBURY: Twenty-five sites. I feel confident in saying that my office, I am sure your office and I am sure many of our offices, over that time will have received that many complaints

ourselves and over a year will receive double that. I am sure that many of our offices would receive a complaint a week. The government has confirmed that in terms of overseeing audits and inspecting those audits there have been 25 field inspections between July last year and early this year. It is extraordinary. There were more desktop audits, but frankly, what is a desktop audit going to do? Are they looking at the email that has come in and reading the email? Does that count as a desktop audit – receiving an email, seeing that they cannot find any further information other than the email that has been provided and setting it aside, job done. Twenty-five field inspections – we only have data for the period of time between July and early this year in terms of field audits. I feel very confident that the number of field audits over previous years would not be greatly higher, because we have seen stunning examples of rotting in relation to this program.

I should start by saying that the coalition cannot support the bill as stands. In addition, I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government explains the true costs of the extension of the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program from 2030 until 2045, guarantees no further instances of rorts, waste and exploitative practices will occur and concludes the ongoing strategic review of the VEU program.’

Could I have that amendment circulated. I will speak to the final point for a moment of that amendment. Mid last year the government announced a review into the energy upgrade system – in June 2024, a two-year review. There is the equivalent of almost eight staff working on that review, and the outcome of the review will not be released to the public until mid next year.

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: But we are legislating now, member. We are legislating in relation to a scheme that the government is currently reviewing. Can you believe it? One of the reasons why is actually to cover one of the changes in this bill, and it is something that we have spoken about in this chamber over a number of years and I have spoken about many times over recent years. What has been put into this bill is a change to the climate change target setting. I hear you ask, ‘But hang on, isn’t this bill about upgrading the energy upgrades program? Isn’t this bill about changes to how the energy upgrade program works?’ You would be fair to ask, if this bill is about the energy upgrades program, as the government have said – and they have been recently attention-grabbing in the naming of their bills, with ‘(Energy Upgrades for the Future)’ – why are we changing the target setting in this bill?

Many have not been aware that this bill goes to how targets are set in this state, and how targets are set in terms of the mechanism in legislation requiring target setting has been very, very contentious.

If I can take the chamber very briefly back through some of that history, a number of years ago the coalition took a leadership position in committing to legislating targets. It was a difficult but important decision. We took a leadership role in saying it is important for the community, it is important for business and it is important for Victorians, and more broadly Australians, to understand, if we are setting targets, what they will be, because you have to let the community know, you have to let business know what the measures will be, and frankly you have to be accountable for them. That is the point. When you set targets and legislate them, you have to be accountable for them – not just change them with ministers putting out numbers on press releases, but put them into law and be accountable for them. Give businesses certainty. Give the community certainty.

This impacts more than just our state. What we do in one state impacts everywhere else, so we need to make sure that we have certainty. We took a leadership role in announcing a commitment before the last election to legislate. At the time, what did Labor say? No. They said no. In fact I distinctly remember the former Premier and I having quite a strong argument in the middle of question time about it. The question was about something else, but he and I had a go at each other to the point that the Speaker – and in no way am I reflecting on the Speaker – decided to give me a short break from the chamber. It was a heated debate about the need to legislate. Basically the then Premier – I cannot

remember if these were his exact words – said something like ‘When hell freezes over’. He was strongly opposed to legislating those targets, and he did not.

To give the Minister for Energy and Resources some credit, I think the minister would have been an advocate for legislating targets at the time – not in the way that we would have legislated them with having the accountability mechanisms around them. Nevertheless, if I speak about the former Premier and the minister for energy, I would suggest that the minister probably had a different view on this. But I digress. The government said no.

Now there has been a change in Premier and we have seen targets legislated. What we said at the time the bill went through this place, and I spoke to the bill when the bill went through this place, was we need to have targets that work and, frankly, we need to have accountability mechanisms if we do not meet them. When we spoke about it, we said on things like wind energy, ‘The government’s legislating, but they ain’t going to meet the target.’ We said it from day one. The offshore wind policy in Victoria has been an absolute national disgrace. We have become a national laughing-stock on offshore wind because of a total breakdown in the government’s capacity to understand how the commercial sector works.

Then in terms of the engagement with the federal government on possible projects, we have seen a Labor government in Canberra overruling projects that the Victorian Labor government was backing, and then Victorian ministers coming out and saying, ‘These guys have no idea.’ To be fair, I do not think they are just saying that about this policy area. We have seen what the federal Labor Party what have said about the Suburban Rail Loop – not a dollar in the budget.

Roma Britnell interjected.

James NEWBURY: As my colleague has just said, it does not surprise us that the Prime Minister is not with the Premier. He is nowhere near the Premier.

But I digress. On offshore wind, when the target bill came through we made a point of saying, ‘Legislate, but make sure you reach the targets.’ We also made the point that there was no accountability mechanism in the bill. So if they do not reach them, guess what happens? Nothing.

You are changing how energy is provided in this state, and that is why we talk repeatedly about the need for energy to be reliable, secure and affordable. It must be. There have been many bills where we have made the point that those basic principles are not at the forefront of the government’s decision-making. Reliable, affordable, secure energy –

Roma Britnell: Have they brought down the emissions as well?

James NEWBURY: And we will get to that in just a moment. When it comes to the target setting, the member for South-West Coast has pointed out that the targets have been set with no accountability mechanisms.

What did not get much coverage and attention late last year was that the government snuck a little report, the *Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report* update, into the Parliament. On every emissions report, the government puts out a press release; it holds a parade, almost. The minister loves holding parades for herself, doing questions in question time – up, up, up, down, down, down. She is a very, very animated minister, ready for a show. But I do not know if you know, member for South-West Coast, that there was a report tabled at the end of last year, an update on the emissions in Victoria. I do not recall hearing a thing about it. There certainly was not a press release. Why would that be? Could it be because over the last two-year period reported total emissions have increased in this state by 5.4 per cent? The minister crows about climate emissions coming down, and over the two most recent reporting years they are up by 5.4 per cent. But where is the press release on that? Where is the minister doing a dance in question time on that one? ‘Up, up, up,’ she could say. We have not seen her come in and do a little up, up, up dance. Why not? We want to see it from the minister. Emissions

are up, up, up in Victoria. The minister had that report snuck through the chamber. She did not crow about that. And what has followed?

Roma Britnell interjected.

James NEWBURY: This bill – exactly, member for South-West Coast. What this bill does is change the target-setting process in Victoria, which is by legislation a five-year target. Every five years there is a target for that period. So what has this government added to the energy upgrades bill? The power for the minister to set targets for the next two years and then for the next three years, changing the target process. You might say to yourself, ‘Why would the government not have split the bill and included those heads of power in its own bill?’ – because the climate target-setting measures were dealt with as a single piece of legislation, as was appropriately the case. But then on an energy upgrades bill, the government has snuck in changes to climate target setting in Victoria, and I do not think Victorians are fully aware of that.

This Labor government, which crows about its achievements, certainly has not spruiked it and certainly has not spruiked the fact that emissions are going up. So that is what we have seen over recent months: confirmation that in Victoria emissions are going up, up, up. I feel like I do not do it justice without a minister’s dance, but that is okay, I will let the minister do that one. The emissions have gone up, up, up in Victoria and we have a bill that cuts, cuts, cuts the legislated target-setting process.

Just to repeat: emissions are up and the legislative process has been cut, cut, cut. Not only is the legislative process for target setting being amended but we see a process that has no accountability mechanisms built into it. It is an extraordinary, untold failure of this government. What this government would do if they were honest is say they are getting it wrong on climate and energy policy – clearly, because they are amending their legislation to change the processes and emissions are going up.

Why does that matter? It matters for many, many reasons, but one of the reasons is embedded in reducing emissions is the energy upgrades program. If you are spending literally hundreds of millions of dollars on a program giving people free stuff, the very least you would expect is that the program works. There are questions about whether the program is giving out too much money, whether or not it is being rorted. I think those questions are very well established, but then to know that emissions are going up at the same time, you say to yourself, ‘What’s the government doing with hundreds of millions of dollars on this program?’ All of this policy is hurting Victorians, because we know when it comes to the bills that they get, the bills are going up, the cost you pay is going up.

One of the core components of the bill you pay is an environmental cost. It is embedded into the Victorian default offer. The most recent Essential Services Commission default offer report shows that the environmental cost increased over the last year from \$132 to \$135 of the cost, and that is partly because, as the Essential Services Commission said, of the reasons for the environmental costs that are embedded in your bill – the energy upgrades program. This government program adds directly to a consumer’s cost.

Roma Britnell interjected.

James NEWBURY: The minister did say that, member for South-West Coast. What the recent default offer shows is the environmental cost that is secretly embedded in your bill. You do not get to see that it is because of the government’s energy upgrade program. As we – the collective ‘we’ – are all paying for it, you would say to yourself, ‘Gee, I hope this is working, because we’re all paying for it,’ and we know it has not worked. Emissions have gone up. Things like the environmental charge in your bill, which is hidden, are going up. I often hear from the government that, ‘Oh well, we know that –

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: I have got another 7 minutes, and I am going to put you through the whole thing. We know that the government then says the program reduces the average household cost to the consumer, through their bill, by \$110. But how much environmental cost is built into the bill – \$135. I know Labor are not very good at maths, but one is greater than the other, so we all pay more.

Frankly, and I spoke to it earlier, one thing that we as Victorians were really aggrieved about was the level of roting in this scheme. Hundreds of millions of dollars in a scheme that was rorted in a dramatic fashion – the biggest rip-offs in the state's history.

You can look to the comments of small business owners like Bearded Jaffle owner Todd Gawn, who said quite eloquently:

Whoever thought this scheme up needs to be hauled before any inquiry, because it's costing us more money that none of us have.

That is the point, because it is his money. It is all of our money, and the government is wasting it. We heard before their answer to the waste is 25 field inspections. Can you believe it? And they were not all of the figures. We know that the department did not give us reports of rorts to the department, so presumably when members of Parliament have been reporting rorts to the minister and the minister has been providing that to department, that is not included in the reporting that has been provided. Thousands of reports of rorts would have occurred; there is no question about that. Another business owner who runs a cellar door in Coldstream explained:

They gave us 15 and they wanted to give us 21 fridges ...

I started calling up businesses in Healesville and Coldstream and basically these guys are driving door to door and dropping off fridges.

There's a doughnut shop in the main street ... that's now got 10 fridges at the front.

I remember arriving at one of my local cafes in Hampton, and there were five fridges out the front. I said to him, 'What's this?' He said, 'I turned up to work, and there are five fridges out the front.' What is so extraordinary is that not only did the government allow this to happen but there was not outrage that taxpayers money was being wasted – and not just wasted. This is not 'we bought an extra BIC pen'. This is businesses seeing 21 fridges offered to them. It is a level of rort that frankly should be criminal; it is absolutely criminal waste. Another example from the general manager of Punt Road Wines:

To our surprise on Tuesday afternoon two blokes in a truck pulled up ... and literally put 15 fridges on the deck before anyone batted an eyelid, and seriously wanted to give us seven more.

That is a new record: 22 fridges offered to that business. What did the Essential Services Commission say when all of this was exposed?

We are aware of instances of large numbers –

this is government language; when they say large numbers they mean it –

of refrigerated cabinets –

they mean fridges –

being dumped on the street or –

this is the government saying this –

provided to customers who don't want them.

Well, thank you, Essential Services Commission – thank you for the candour in letting us know how much taxpayer money this government was allowing to be wasted.

Is it any wonder we say this government now wants to extend this program from 2030 to 2045 – 15 more years. What is this costing? What level of scrutiny is being overlaid onto this program? Clearly nothing, or nowhere near the level of scrutiny that is required, because we are now hearing circumstances of other types of appliances, including hot-water heaters, being rorted. I suspect and put

the government on notice that they are not properly managing this scheme. To learn that there have been 25 field audits tells me the government is not leaning in. They cannot say the number of audits was because of COVID and no-one could leave the house and the public service needed to be protected. This was from July last year to early this year – 25 field audits. It is extraordinary.

They have got eight staff working on a report that underpins the reason for these changes, but they will not announce the outcome of the report before legislating, supposedly, what they are currently reviewing. Can you believe it? How does it even make sense? It does not. So we have no faith in the government's management and in the government's simply legislating until 2045 a scheme that we know there are big issues with, and rorting has been widescale and exploitative. We have obviously called for the strategic review and the details of the strategic review.

I will finish on the point by saying this program has led to higher emissions in this state, and as a result the government are changing, through this bill, the target-setting mechanism to get around their failures. They have now been called out for it. The coalition will not support it, and we have moved an amendment to make those points. We hope every Victorian can see the minister get up and do a dance about how emissions have gone up, up, up under her watch.

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:41): I too talk on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I follow on from the member for Brighton, and he had one point right, which was that we extended the program from 2030 to 2045. He went through dozens and dozens and dozens of examples that he gets to his office all the time. He gets these complaints about the scheme. He might be a bit sad not to hear it, but he has had dozens and dozens of complaints. Unfortunately he decided not to pass those on. You would be shocked to hear that he decided not to pass them on. Now, I do not put that on his staff; his staff have a leader in the office, and that is the member of Parliament. My understanding is you could count one hand the number of times he has passed on those dozens and dozens and dozens of concerns. That is the advice I have. So is he just making things up in this place, or is he not doing his job? Because it is one or the other, it cannot be both. You talk about the dozens and dozens of problems that you are receiving all the time at your office, about how every week there is an overload of complaints and people lined up around the block, and yet you cannot shoot off a couple of emails; you cannot do anything about it. It says there is a real problem for the member for Brighton.

He mentioned rorts earlier. I always think about sports rorts. He spent a bit of time in Canberra. I do not think he was there for the sports rorts period, but he was talking a little bit about national policy. What I know about national policy for the Liberal Party is that when Dutton dials into Melbourne, Battin jumps, and after Battin has landed, he picks up the phone and says, 'What am I going to do, boss? Tell me about what's going on.' Because we saw this week –

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think you noted with your eyes and my eyes that the member has strayed somewhat considerably from the bill. This is not an opportunity for him to talk about things irrelevant to the bill. It is time for him to come back, perhaps, to the bill.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member. I will note that the lead speaker for the opposition did stay relatively close to the bill, and I –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Frankston will not reflect on the Chair. I would encourage the member to stay close to the bill.

Mathew HILAKARI: I do worry when the member for the South-West Coast is making eyes at people. That is always a concern. Deputy Speaker, you are in trouble.

I will go to the number of audits –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Mathew HILAKARI: You mentioned your eyes.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, frankly, I feel quite offended. I would like to ask him to withdraw if he is implying that I have some sort of sexual connotations with my eyes across the room.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Roma Britnell: ‘Making eyes at people’ – excuse me!

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member to withdraw.

Mathew HILAKARI: If it assists the house, I will withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Unequivocally, without explanation, withdraw.

Mathew HILAKARI: I withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Continue.

Mathew HILAKARI: Of the 500,000 upgrades that were done in the last calendar year, I understand 0.13 per cent had complaints. Twenty-one thousand desktop audits were undertaken. Why are desktop audits undertaken? Because often you do not need someone to go out onsite; a photo will suffice. A photo for most issues does suffice.

You pass on the photo and your complaint gets dealt with, and quickly it is rectified. There are always going to be some problems with programs when you are making new installations. This is a massive program of new installations that are improving the energy efficiency of this state.

In terms of our massive engagement with this, we have seen 2.4 million households, which is about a third of the households across the state, and 179,000 businesses benefit. Those on the other side might laugh at 179,000 businesses having energy-efficient products installed at their premises, but they actually find that this is an important program. It is an important program to improve the cost of living for households all across the state and for businesses as well. This is part of a broader regime of transitioning this state from carbon-intensive brown coal. We have had a great history with brown coal. We were incredible at developing brown coal, but it is no longer fit for purpose, and gas is no longer fit for purpose either. We have to make the transition or the transition will overwhelm us – and then we would be in real trouble in this state. The 2.4 million households and 179,000 businesses that have benefited since 2009 have benefitted from heat pumps, high-efficiency air conditioners, insulation, double glazing, public lighting upgrades and refrigerated cabinets. These are among the many energy-saving items that are part of this program. Just in 2023 it delivered rebates for 19,000 reverse-cycle air conditioners and 39,000 hot-water systems, and that is saving 28 million tonnes of emissions.

This program is not just about assisting those people who are the direct beneficiaries of this program, it is about reducing demand on the entire electricity system. That is a fundamental part of it. Of course that is a fundamental part of it. Of those opposite, some of them will be able to understand the basics of demand and supply, and when you have less demand on the system it is less expensive. Some of those opposite would be wise to think about how they could support this program instead of opposing anything that improves the lives and the cost of living for Victorians and the many businesses that have benefited from this program.

Between 2021 and 2025, the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program will avoid \$3.8 billion in energy systems costs, because it is not just direct costs on bills; a large component of bills is made up of the energy system itself – of the wires and of the new production that is going on. In Victoria this

production is all about solar and it is all about wind. In communities like mine in Point Cook you can look at the production on the rooftops of so many houses. It is an energy-forward-thinking community that is up for the task of transition. In the south-west of Melbourne – in Tarneit, in Werribee, in Truganina and in Point Cook – all these places are energy progressives. They have bought electric cars already, they have installed the solar production on their rooftops and they are getting energy-saving hot-water systems. Why? Because they know this transition is coming. It is right to get ahead of this. If governments do not get ahead of this, they will be overwhelmed.

I would like to take us onto the strategic review into the VEU, and this is about strengthening the scheme. It is not about moving the scheme on, it is about strengthening the scheme and improving the scheme. We set out that the scheme should be set out for two years instead of a five-year period, because we do not want to get ahead of the review. We want to make sure we understand the review and have set out the objectives for two years and from then on, from 2030 to 2045, in five-year lots, getting back to the regular schedule. This aligns our program with Victoria's legislated target of net zero by 2045.

This is something that is nation leading. Victorians should be very proud that we are part of changing the energy regime in this country by leading first in Victoria. We have brought back the SEC – I know I am running close to the time – and we have legislated ambitious targets for renewable generation: 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. Generation on rooftops as a share of renewable energy has more than tripled since 2014. Since we came to government it has more than tripled. We are now producing 39 per cent of our power from renewable energy in this state. That speaks volumes about the capacity of Victorians to get behind the transition that is going on.

The gas is not going to be here forever. The sun will keep shining for a very long time, so it is great to see that Victorians are getting behind this program. They are getting solar on their rooftops, they are getting hot-water systems, they are getting energy-efficient heating and cooling in their houses and they are moving to double glazing. I commend this bill to the house and I look forward to its speedy passage.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (10:51): I rise to speak on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. This is a bill that amends the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 to make changes to the Victorian energy upgrades program and the Victorian energy efficiency certificates, which are generated by the energy upgrades.

This program was set up by this government and it has been plagued with problems. It is a program that was supposed to assist in bringing down the price of power and reduce emissions. It is worth noting that the price of power has gone up under the watch of this government. In addition, the emissions for the last two years have gone up. There are major concerns with this scheme, not only because of the failure with the outcomes but also around the scrutiny of the program. This government has set up once again – as we have seen by Labor governments time and time again – a program that was subject to people rorting the system.

It was supposed to reduce energy costs and it was supposed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing access to discounted energy-efficient products and services – such as lights, fridges, air conditioners and heaters – for households and businesses in Victoria. Even if that is a good concept, unfortunately the government did not put the appropriate processes and controls in place, so we saw rort after rort after rort. Many of us had businesses coming to our offices. A local cafe owner rang me and said, 'I've had six fridges delivered. What's going on? This can't be a good use of taxpayer money.' In a cost-of-living crisis that just smacks of waste and mismanagement and somebody taking a really big opportunity because there was not the government scrutiny put in place for this program. That is why with this bill the government talks about 'making good' with one of the clauses so that they can force people to make sure things work. Shouldn't that have been done years ago? Prima facie, even if this is a good concept, the government's failure to put process in place has resulted in extraordinary waste.

We asked in the bill briefing for a list of the complaints to tell us what sort of complaint levels they have seen. What we did get told was there have been only 25 field visits. Only 25 times has the government gone out and looked at the problems the complaints were about. We asked for the amount of complaints, but apparently the government could not give us the amount that the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action had received. I am not sure why we would be surprised, but I am pretty confident it would be in the thousands given the amount of people I have had ring my office complaining about getting hassled and things not working, and I will come to that a bit later.

In this program the Victorian energy certificates that are generated are supposed to be delivered once the consumer's home has been upgraded, and one certificate represents a tonne of greenhouse gas emissions. The program requires large energy retailers to acquire and surrender these certificates based on the targets that are set by the government, and that is what is being changed in this bill. What we are seeing is a government who cannot meet the targets actually changing the legislation to be able to hide the fact that what they thought they could achieve they clearly could not.

Just remember, we as the Liberal-Nationals prior to this time suggested that we actually legislate targets so that government has to be accountable and actually meet the targets we proposed that we should all be accountable for. But the reality is that this government, who opposed that at the time, have now gone and tried to put some targets in place with no accountability factors for them to have to meet those targets, and they are certainly not meeting the targets. That is why we are here today.

But these rorts that people are seeing with fridges being delivered and hot-water services that are not up to scratch for people to use their homes – we have seen some in the scheme being withdrawn due to the fact that they are not effective – have actually cost money. That is what we see from this government time and time again. Rorts actually cost money. That is why we are seeing a government who cannot manage money. Today the figures are out: we are the highest taxing state in the nation. And that is because when you waste money someone has got to pay for it, and when you cannot set targets and you cannot give certainty to investors, then you are not going to get long-term investment into new energy schemes that will bring down the cost, because there is just no policy certainty. That is what this government have overseen. This debacle of the program is also an example of that.

What we have seen is the government's price of power. When families get their bill, they get a bill that is much greater than they were expecting, because every time they get a bill the price of energy seems to go up more and more. This scheme was supposed to bring down the cost of power by \$110, but embedded in the bill is an environmental cost. The government has said that the cost on the bill is \$135, so there is actually not \$110 saved but \$135 paid extra for this scheme to put your efficient lights in, which actually are not saving you money. So there is a real issue here with this energy upgrade scheme making people's electricity more of affordable, because it is clearly not. The environmental cost is actually costing more than the savings that the families are supposed to be achieving. That is clear when people get their bills and see their bills have gone up.

The energy upgrade program is afflicted by poor regulation and scams. Once again, remember all those fridges being delivered. Energy efficiency is something that we on the Liberal-National side of the house clearly support. An environmental action that delivers good business and housekeeping and lower costs is something that should be supported, but when a scheme has been so maladministered by the Allan Labor government, how can we trust them to administer any program appropriately?

The government commenced this two-year review, and they decided to move the parameters. In my office I continually get complaints about people being harassed and harangued. It has been five years since the member for Lowan and I approached the minister and said, 'Come on, put something in place to protect people.' I have got an example from my office of a 92-year-old lady in my electorate who got an electric hot-water system from one of these government energy schemes. She is 92. She does not use emails. It was all paperwork, and at 92 she could not find where that was, so when the unit was faulty she had no idea who to call for help with her warranty. These are the sorts of problems that people are seeing, but also this absolute harassment that has been allowed to go on under this

government, and it seems to be back despite the fact that, like I said, the member for Lowan and I particularly spoke to the minister and said, ‘Put some protections in place.’ Our people are concerned. They are getting hassled by people who say they are representing the government and who are getting into their homes and putting things in that do not work. Then they have no recourse, because they have not got any idea where it all came from. Apparently it was coming from the government. That is what they have been told.

It has been an absolute debacle of a scheme. It has cost more money than it has saved. It has resulted in more emissions, so the environment has not benefited. It has caused increased cost on the bills of families, and therefore it is an abject failure. And here we are trying to change the process so the government can reset the targets. They have absolutely failed families in Victoria and they have failed the environment, and they are trying to cover it up by changing the targets and putting it in a bill called ‘energy target amendment bill’. It is really just one big failure of a program that has been delivering equipment that people do not necessarily want. When it goes wrong, they have got no recourse. It is certainly not saving them any money on their power bills. That is what this government continues to do to Victorians.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (11:01): I am pleased to rise today in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I thank the Minister for Energy and Resources for all the work she has done in developing this legislation and introducing this bill.

Now, there is a lot to counter from what the other side has had to say. It is a bit of a joke on the other side with their comments, and to be honest, with the member for Brighton talking for 15 minutes about members on our side dancing, I do not know what he was going on about. I was rather confused and befuddled by the commentary on our minister’s bill, which is about a fantastic program. The Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program is a fantastic program, and many in my electorate of Mulgrave, businesses and families alike, have benefited. So to call this a rort is offensive to all of my constituents in Mulgrave. To call this program a rort is offensive and it is disgusting, to be quite honest. To say that my community is rorting the system by benefiting from a program that reduces emissions. I do not know what they were on about in terms of it not reducing emissions; that is a whole lot of rubbish, and I will go through that as I get through my 10 minutes. But really if that is all they have – 15 minutes of talking about ministers dancing – they do not have anything to talk about on this.

They disagree with a program that benefits communities and reduces bills. It does reduce them; just ask people who have benefited from this program. Ask them about the benefits that they have when they look at their bill. Ask them what they are getting out of it, because I know that my community of Mulgrave will tell you it is a hell of a lot. If it was scrapped by those opposite because, I do not know, they have got their hands in the pockets of gas companies or they want nuclear – maybe that is why: they want to promote nuclear and spend taxpayers money on nuclear plants. Maybe that is what they want – who knows. But what I can tell my electorate of Mulgrave is that I will continue to fight to reduce emissions and continue to fight to help and support them with paying their bills, and the VEU program is a great way to do that.

For the best part of two decades now the Victorian energy upgrades program has worked to lower emissions. I know those opposite are refuting that, but we know that our emissions have dropped over 30 per cent since 2005, and that is thanks partially to this program but also other great work that we do here in Victoria in the Allan Labor government. We are protecting our environment and ensuring that the average Victorian is spending less to switch on those lights and put that kettle on. It is going to cost them less. We knew back then, as we do now, that the need to pivot away from fossil fuels was paramount. These targets, established then, have successfully set us in the right direction. Time, however, necessitates course corrections, and that is why the amendments being considered today are so important for the future of our state. Reviews happen – we do need reviews. We need to look at how things can be changed, and while under review it only makes sense to set a two-year target now

so that industries have confidence in what we are doing. It does not make sense to set a five-year target whilst we are under review.

Those opposite are forgetting again the benefits to taxpayers with this program. I will just lay out a few examples. The program, since 2023, has delivered rebates for 19,000 reverse-cycle air conditioners and 39,000 hot-water systems, saving 28 million tonnes of emissions. Between 2021 and 2025 the VEU program will avoid \$3.8 billion in energy system costs, benefiting even those who do not participate in the program. This bill amends the legislation so that it is ready for its next phase of service, and this is crucial; the Victorian community needs and expects our efficiency standards to be fit for purpose for the next two decades. This bill provides certainty to households and the industry during the ongoing review, which aims to modernise and strengthen the program to support the transition away from gas and to lower energy costs.

This bill has three core intents. Firstly, it is safeguarding the legislation so that the benefits of the Victorian energy upgrades program continue to deliver a greener, cleaner and cheaper Victoria for all Victorians. Secondly, the bill introduces new provisions to expand the Essential Services Commission's compliance and enforcement powers, including new improvement and prohibition notice powers, additional civil penalty enforcement pathways and mandated training requirements for scheme participants. Finally, it is extending the program until 2045 so every Victorian, every consumer and every investor can have confidence that this state-building program is here to stay.

Since 2009 the VEU program has provided discounted energy-saving products and services to more than 2.4 million households and businesses, saving an average of \$110 for households and \$3700 for businesses annually. The program supports employment, investment and innovation in the energy efficiency industry in Victoria, and to have those opposite call it a rort is disgusting. Since 2009 the Victorian energy upgrades program has delivered energy-saving whitegoods and devices and goods and services to more than 2 million households and 179,000 businesses. On average, private residents – and I repeat myself again – have saved \$110 a year. For a lot of families and small businesses, those savings are that little difference that puts their mind at ease; the alternative being hard decisions about what supplies to buy, how much food they can afford or whether they can pay the rent for the next week or month.

Some people in this place pretend that the cost-of-living struggles that we are all facing are somehow a consequence of renewable energy. Those of us committed to telling the truth are sticking to the facts and acting on science to deliver positive outcomes for Victorians. That is what the VEU has always been about: providing practical solutions to a complex problem. For too long governments have fixated on short-term stopgap solutions to the long-term multifaceted issue of climate crisis. Successive Victorian governments have been broadly better than most at this, and the original energy efficiency target is a prime example of that. With today's legislation, we renew that commitment and signal to our community, our country and the world that our state is prepared to lead the way. Our destination? Away from fossil fuels towards net zero and a cheaper, cleaner energy sector for a growing Victoria. With this legislation, we are reaffirming that our ETA at that destination is 2045, the Victorian government's net zero target. This replaces the current 2030 end date of the energy efficiency target, thus providing reassurance to prospective investors that the projects they are backing are there for the long run. The bill allows for future VEU program discounts to be targeted to specific cohorts such as vulnerable and low-income consumers to enable greater access to participation in this program. That means many in the Mulgrave electorate will be benefiting from this program for years to come.

It means that there is more confidence for the whole of Victoria but also for my community. Mulgrave is a place where Australian dreamers and battlers settle, laying the foundations for the better future that everyone promises but only Labor can deliver. For families working hard to make ends meet and leave their children in a better position than they were, opportunities to work in rapidly growing crucial industries are the best ticket to that future. I call on my colleagues to stop thinking about this bill in the abstract and start thinking about what the legislation will mean on the ground in communities like

mine: new jobs, new investment, new paths to a better life for Victorian families and all the interests of a cleaner, greener, more prosperous state without nuclear, without gas, one that is healthy for generations to come, because that is what we need to think about. We need to think about our future generations. I commend this bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (11:11): It is a pleasure to rise with you in the chair this morning, Acting Speaker Addison, to talk on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025 – it is a long one to get out. This bill amends the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. What it is doing is extending out the legislated date from 2030 to 2045. We need to have rules and regulations about energy upgrades for the future, and we see that the program that is currently in place has benefits for the community. Whether it be getting their lights, fridges, air conditioners or heaters upgraded, this program is in place to allow our constituents around Victoria to improve how efficiently their houses use energy. I do not think anyone is immune at the moment: if you get your power bill, whether it be gas or electricity, these bills are going up and up, and they are steadily going up. This is the whole area that we talk about: the cost of living for people that are on the ground in Victoria at the moment. This bill is trying to help and bring in some things that people can use to alleviate their costs moving forward.

The issues that the coalition have around this bill are with how this program is rolled out and how we make sure that it is saving people money, for one, but also making sure that these air conditioners, heaters and so forth are being installed properly by the right registered people. I will give a couple of examples that I have seen, having been on the ground in a former life before stepping into politics. When they rolled out reverse-cycle air conditioners, people were lining up to get them. If they were changing over their air conditioners, sometimes unscrupulous people would come in and install newer, more energy-efficient reverse-cycle air conditioners, which was great for the consumer, but they did not follow the letter of the law when they were decommissioning the old ones. You have to decom the old units so that the bad greenhouse gases that are inside these units are taken out, and that costs money. The people that rolled up with a truck full of 100 air conditioners and who were trying to put as many in as they could in the shortest amount of time did not do the right thing. What they would do is they would either get their tin snips or their hacksaw and they would cut through the pipes, and all those bad greenhouse gases that we are worried about and trying to stop going into our atmosphere, up they would go. You would have that perfect little hole in the ozone layer above your house with the bad rays coming down. This was systemic, with people going from house to house and from suburb to suburb.

We need to make sure, as was spoken about before, that these audits are undertaken. We do need to get people to go out and check that these units are put in properly, because if they are not, then they become a liability and they do not save us energy and power as they are meant to do. That is why on this side of the chamber we are asking questions like: if we are going to extend out from 2030 to 2045, what program on the outside is making sure that the checks and balances are put in place so this does not continue?

Another area of concern is as a former president of a football club when they rolled out the new fridges. On this side I think there will be a lot of talking about these fridges that were rolled out. They had great intentions, but the unintended consequence was that some of the people helping to roll out this program were turning up at footy clubs, sporting clubs, clubs in our community and not dropping off one fridge but dropping off up to 15 or 20 fridges. We got to see it firsthand at our footy club, and questions were raised. Then there was a little bit of dealing in the background with other sporting clubs that were getting the same allotment. Hence we need to make sure we are auditing to make sure this program is running out properly. In theory it was great, fantastic, but practicably on the other end it was a little bit of a disaster. We need to make sure that we have our desktop audits and, as we heard before, and take a photo and send it in. We need a bigger picture to not only to protect the consumers but to protect the government so that they are getting bang for buck, because at the end of the day what it costs comes back to us the consumers and we pay for higher energy costs going forward. We really need to make

sure that we have the regulatory things in place, the audits – to make sure they are happening. We are talking about energy, and the member for Malvern just before was talking about fossil fuel and gas.

Michael O'Brien interjected.

Martin CAMERON: Mulgrave, sorry. I am making sure you are awake, member for Malvern. He is awake, and that it is great to see. In just over 1000 days the Yallourn power station shuts. That will take 22 per cent of current supply into our energy grid out of the equation. We need to make sure that we are counteracting that. We hear a lot of talk about our renewables coming on line, our solar and our wind. But we need to make sure that it is going to be connected to the grid in that timeframe, because we can have these batteries that are sitting out in paddocks and we can have these paddocks that are on farmland full of solar panels, but we need to make sure that we can get it connected to the grid so we can actually use it moving forward in just over a thousand days. People are starting to get a little bit worried about that timeline. If it is going to be a rush and a push towards the end to get it in, is that going to make energy prices more if it needs to be done in a mad panic? We really need to make sure that we are looking at that also when we are talking about energy prices moving forward.

Some of the other bits and pieces that were rolled out included hot-water services that were pulled out and changed. The issue of a hot-water service being changed over from gas to electric is not the concern; it is what was left when the gas hot-water service was removed. Was it removed correctly? Was the gas point terminated correctly? Moving forward, if we have a dodgy connection where the gas used to come into the hot-water service and it is just left dangling out in the middle of nowhere, it can be hit or it can be turned back on.

Some of the people that were installing were actually just turning off the gas cock and walking away. So this is the part that I would like to see really ramped up – regulation to make sure that we have people on the ground making sure these installations are done properly and safely as we move forward. As the member for Brighton said, we are going to be opposing this bill today, and we are opposing it because we are not sure how these laws and regulations are going to work to make sure that the community is kept safe when we are changing over hot-water services, heaters and air conditioners.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (11:21): I rise today to speak in favour of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I listened to the contribution by the member for Morwell keenly because I understand that in this chamber he has the most expertise in terms of this. I understand that all of his concerns and opposition to this bill are exactly what this bill is all about. It is all about protections for consumers. Consumer protection is the heart and centre of this amendment. Before I go on, I would like to rebut the member for South-West Coast. She said that people are harassed, by the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program particularly, all the time. To my understanding, we have banned doorknocking and telemarketing and there is strict enforcement of consumer protection by the Essential Services Commission. So this is very interesting, and it is odd to hear that the coalition and the opposition are opposed to this bill which is all about protections for the consumer.

Before I go on to talk about the protections for the consumer, I would like to join the hardworking member for Mulgrave in talking about the uptake by our community here in the south-east. We have seen a great deal of energy-related legislation come to this place in recent times. That is testament to the work of the Minister for Energy and Resources and testament to the commitment of this government to providing cheap, clean, reliable power to Victorians. I am talking about the Victorian community here in the south-east, in the City of Greater Dandenong and also in the City of Kingston, and the uptake of this initiative by quite a large number. I would like to go to that, given the data has shown how much support there is for this initiative. There has been fantastic uptake of the VEU program in the Clarinda district. In the City of Kingston alone around 57,000 households and around 6000 businesses have participated in the VEU program since its beginning in 2009, and around 20,000 homes will have fewer cold draughts this winter due to the insulation of weather seals with the support of the program. My home is one of the households that has participated in the program. There have

been 2600 upgrades in homes to energy-efficient heat pump hot-water systems, saving consumers money on hot water, and 15,000 homes have installed an in-home display to help them better track and manage their energy use. In the City of Greater Dandenong, around 56,000 households and 8000 businesses have participated in the VEU program since it began. Overall around 28,000 homes have fewer cold draughts this winter due to that insulation.

These are amazing numbers, helping households, families and businesses to access cheap, clean and reliable power, making homes and businesses more efficient and helping to ease pressure on energy bills and household budgets.

It is important to continue this work, and that is what this bill will do. It will extend the VEU program's legislated end date to 2045, because we know that this is very important and it is of benefit to the community and to businesses. Without the changes in this bill the benefits of the VEU program are at risk of not being fully delivered. Extending the legislated end date of the VEU program aligns with the government's net zero emissions by 2045 commitment and is critical to allow for incentives to continue to be available for consumers electrifying their homes and their businesses, supporting Victoria's transition off gas.

There is also a host of other changes here, including introducing a new provision to expand the Essential Services Commission's compliance and enforcement powers. This goes to the heart of the contributions of the member for Morwell. It is important, because improved enforcement and compliance powers are expected to increase the overall benefit of the VEU program, as there will be greater consumer protections and stronger program enforcement. The bill will enable the ESC to take prompt enforcement action and require mandatory training to be undertaken by scheme participants so that we do not have the unintended consequences that have already been alluded to. The ESC's enforcement powers will expand to allow for an improvement notice to be issued to noncompliant persons and require persons to complete rectification works for an activity undertaken under the VEU scheme. A prohibition notice power will prevent scheme participants from continuing to work under the VEU program. As a result of these improved enforcement and compliance powers, it is expected that there will be reduced difficulties or frustrations for consumers, and that will be reflected in a reduction in complaints received by the ESC.

The other broad changes in the bill are to clarify the intended operation of the existing head of power of prescribing activities in relation to the additionality requirement to confirm the VEU program can provide incentives in future specified circumstances where an action is required under another regulation or law. As well, there is the removal of an existing restriction relating to the eligibility or vintage of certificates that can be surrendered by energy retailers each year. These are important changes and amendments, and the bill will allow for future VEU program incentives to be better targeted specifically to a class of energy consumers, such as vulnerable and low-income consumers, to enable greater accessibility in the VEU program.

These are holistic changes, all directed at improving the quality and accessibility of the VEU program, an amazing program which has had huge uptake across my electorate and across Victoria. I am glad to be here supporting this legislation today that will help to continue and improve this important program and build on the government's work in delivering cheap, clean and reliable power for all Victorians, continuing our transition, helping households, families and businesses to access cheap, clean and reliable power, making homes and businesses more efficient and helping to ease pressure on energy bills and household budgets.

This is an important bill for my community and for all Victorians. I commend the minister for bringing it forward, and I commend this bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (11:30): I am pleased to rise to today to talk about the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. It has been an interesting debate. I have been listening to the debate from people on both sides of the chamber and

there have been some very good points put forward. This essentially is giving the government the ability to move the goal posts, I suppose, for want of a better term. One change is to, rather than setting targets every five years, they can change their mind on that and set them for every two or three years.

There are a few points I am going to go on this bill that I have picked up in the debate. As previous speakers have said on this side, I do not think the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program has been properly managed. We have heard various contributions in here today. The member for Morwell touched on it earlier, as did the member for Brighton and other members, where we had all these fridges turn up that either people did not know were coming or too many came for what was needed.

I am going to be very pragmatic in this contribution. I was not here obviously when this program started, so I am just going to put forward a few points. With any program that you introduce there should always be a review. There should always be checks and balances, because things do get rorted, maybe intentionally, maybe unintentionally, but it does happen. I think we should always put in place these stop points to check and make sure everything – and the taxpayers money – is not being rorted or wasted. I am not sure about the Traralgon Football Club issue that the member for Morwell was involved in, but I will use that as an example. I am not sure if the football club said, ‘We’ll upgrade four fridges.’ I do not know many footy clubs that have 15 fridges, but the member for Morwell might be able to give me a hint as to how many fridges they actually needed.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: One – okay. We do know the member for Morwell likes a vessel of happiness, as he likes to refer to it. This is what I do not understand about the program and how it got probably out of control: if a football club or a netball club or a soccer club or whatever club only needed one fridge, why did 15 turn up? Why did 20 fridges turn up? I think this is where we get into these programs where you do want to stop the waste and stop the rorting. I do not know how it was set up, so it is hard to be too critical about it, but from the outside looking in it seems a little bit unrealistic to me that 20 fridges would turn up when you only need one. There is a problem in the system for that to happen.

I am pretty sure I have benefited from this program prior to this life in this place, when I had a bloke turn up and replace all the downlights in my house. I got a phone call, ‘Do you want new downlights?’, and I went ‘Yeah, well, they look like crap. Let’s get new ones.’ I am assuming it was through this program. That is my assumption. But downlights are one thing. They are a pretty easy thing to replace. You just unplug them, plug them in, great, off you go. But as the member for Morwell pointed to earlier when we were talking about air conditioning systems, and I have had to remove many air conditioners in my previous life, there is a system you have to go through. You have to capture the gas. You have to de-gas the air con unit before you put in the new one. That has not happened, and I know the examples the member for Morwell was talking about because I had people say the same thing to me: ‘Wayne, aren’t they meant to capture the gas?’ Yes, they are. Those things were not happening.

This is what the government needs to do. They need to put in these checks and balances and they need to make sure that they have got the right people doing the right job, because we do not want to see a repeat of what happened under the Rudd government when we had the insulation scheme that Peter Garrett was in charge of. That was a disastrous scheme. People lost their lives because they were not qualified to do the work that needed to be done. You would think putting insulation in a house would not need a lot of qualification, but I can assure you, if you cut through a power supply, you will get electrocuted. This is where it is important. The government needs to put in these checks and balances, and this is where we are pushing back against the government on this.

I will reference the member for Mulgrave. Earlier she said she did not quite believe that the emissions had gone up. In fact they have gone up. The *Victorian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report* shows that admissions have gone over the past few years.

We can debate the amount that emissions have gone up – if they have gone up 5 per cent or 5.6 per cent – but they actually have increased. So when we see these schemes are pumping hundreds of millions of dollars of Victorian taxpayers money to reduce emissions, I think we have got to start to ask ourselves why emissions have gone up. I think it is a very pertinent question. We have more solar than we have ever had before. We have got more wind farms than we have ever had before, although I think our offshore wind farms are not doing too well at moment. We have electric vehicles, we have electric scooters, we have electric bikes, and cars that are diesel or petrol – they have less emissions now. So I think one question I would put to the government is: why have emissions increased? I think that is a fair question. If you are going to pump hundreds of millions of dollars into a scheme, you have got to sit back and ask yourselves: why have these emissions increased? Because if you are producing the VEU program and you are managing that program to reduce emissions but emissions are going the other way, then some questions have to be asked. I think that is a fairly commonsense approach to it.

The other issue with this bill, and probably another reason why we oppose this bill today, is that at the moment you are doing a review into this program. Wouldn't you wait for the review to come out and be published and then look at the legislation to support the review? The review I assume will make recommendations to the government on what is working and what is not working, so wouldn't we wait for that review to come forward? Wouldn't we look at those comments and the report and then go back and say, 'Well, now we need to bring in legislation to support the review and the recommendations that were made?' To me it seems a little bit nonsensical to bring this in now when there is a review underway. It does not make sense. To me it is a little bit cart before the horse, and we are seeing that quite often here. I do not know when the review is due to be released. My assumption is it will be very soon. I think we have really got to wait for the review to come out before we start to put through the legislation, because somebody could miss something. In that review there could be a very strong recommendation, and then you are going to have to bring this legislation back to the chamber to implement the recommendation that could come from the review. So I think at the moment this legislation is probably a little bit early.

Look, there is one thing I have often been critical of this government about, and that is when it sets its targets. I think sometimes the targets are aspirational rather than factual, and it is probably the case when we come to this bill as well. I heard this earlier on – I was not in this place then – that this side of the house tried to get targets put into legislation and that got voted down. When you set a target, to give yourself the ability to change the target because you did not achieve the target to me seems an easy way out. I would assume if you set a target and you are not quite getting there, you would work harder or find the problem with the system to actually get to that target. Sometimes your target might be 12 months late, but my assumption is the government or the department would work that little bit harder to achieve the target rather failing to meet it then winding the target back so they can say, 'Well, now we achieved it.' That seems wrong. I would turn around and say to the department or to the government: if you set a target, pull every lever you possibly can to achieve that target. Do not set an aspirational target; set a factual target. There are very big differences. The government is very good at this. They will come out and set all types of targets. One I will refer to is 80,000 homes a year. I knew that was never going to happen, but it is an aspirational target. It was never a factual target. That is my advice to the government: if you are going to set a target, pull every lever to achieve the target.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (11:40): I rise today to speak in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I have to say that when I was looking at this bill this morning and thinking about what I would say in Parliament I thought, 'This is a great good-news story.' Then I found that those on the other side have moved a reasoned amendment to stall this bill. I cannot believe that those on the other side would stop people in Victoria from accessing these extraordinary savings that we have seen for households and businesses. Those on the other side would rather play political, or perhaps even ideological, games, which would mean that the average Victorian could not access this important scheme.

On the sort of arguments we have heard put forward today, I was slightly gobsmacked when the member for Narracan decided to compare this to the pink batts project. Let us look at this. He wanted to talk about facts, so let us talk about some facts. Over half a million people have benefited from and worked with this extraordinary program for savings and advantage. And do you know what? Out of that we have seen 0.13 – can I just make that clear: 0.13 – of complaints arise as a part of this program. That is a pretty extraordinarily low marker when you look at the fact that over half a million people have benefited from this program, so for those on the other side to brandish this idea that we need to review and it is terrible and terrible consequences will come of it is just phooey basically when we are talking 0.13.

I also say, having listened to the member for Narracan, that I wonder if this is an ideological debate. He was creeping into not believing in climate change when he was talking about emissions –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Michaela SETTLE: I am getting to you. In his piece he was talking about emissions continuing to go up. What I would say to him is that since these targets came into place in 2005 there has been an over 30 per cent decrease in emissions. He wanted to call into question the last couple of years. I have had a lot to do with the energy sector in my electorate of late, and it is a very complex area. I am sure that the minister's office would be happy to brief the member for Narracan so he can understand.

On the figures he was talking about, there is a thing which is called nature, and within nature there are variations. We have all seen that. In the last couple of years what we have seen is that with the intense weather that we have had with rain there has been a lot of shift in soil make-up. There has been a small increase over the last two years, which is natural, not within the industries we are talking about. I will get to that. He is talking about a more general figure, and it is completely the norm to accept natural fluctuations. What has happened with the rain is that there has been more activity within the soil and more bug activity, which releases carbon. Carbon is held in the soil, and it gets released. We are measuring the emissions overall and those natural fluctuations. Imagine if we had a fire. There would be a lot more carbon in the atmosphere, so it is important to level out those natural events. It is important to see that since 2005 there has been more than a 30 per cent decrease.

Even more than that, what I would like to go to is that this bill is very much directed at electricity and electricity emissions.

We have seen a constant and steady decrease in the emissions from that sector. The member for Narracan is referring to the greater emissions of Victoria, not the sector emissions which this relates to, in which there has been a steady and complete drop-off.

Wayne Farnham: This is the government's own report.

Michaela SETTLE: I am well aware. As I said, I am sure the minister's office would be happy to explain soil biomes to you. Please get in touch.

What we are looking at here is a very steady decrease in emissions across the state. But look, that was me really just wanting to rebut some of the things that we hear from the other side. I first and foremost want to go back to the bill and to the importance of this bill. As many on this side have no doubt raised, more than 488,000 and 22,000 businesses have accessed these discounted energy-efficient products, and we have seen householders saving an average of \$110 and businesses saving \$3700. In anyone's book this is an extraordinary, successful program. As I said at the outset, I am slightly bewildered by the fact that those on the other side would seek to stall a bill which hopes to not only put money in Victorians' pockets but also move us towards the energy transition that we have to see. We have to see this for the sake of our kids and for the sake of our grandkids. That those on the other side would seek to block it – and really it is nothing more than blocking it. When one looks at the reasoned amendment, we are being asked to wait for a review to come out. This program has been rolling for quite some time, as we know, very successfully, and it is important to keep that program rolling.

The bill itself does actually strengthen the protections for communities. This bill is about making sure that Victorians can continue to access this much-needed money, continue to be a part of the energy revolution and be more protected. Those on the other side can pretend that it is around waiting for a review, but that can be seen as nothing more than a stalling tactic. As I say, I do not know whether it is political in that they just want to oppose all of the bills from government or whether in fact it is ideological and they do not believe in climate change – which terrifies me and should terrify people across Victoria. If we have an opposition who believe that we should not transition through into new forms of energy, then we are in all sorts of trouble. We do know that their mates in Canberra want us to go nuclear. Well, if the member for Narracan is concerned about the safety of this program, he should be terrified of a Peter Dutton government, which would bring in nuclear. We all know that it is, again, another stalling tactic, because of course nuclear energy will not be with us for decades and it will cost us so much more. Let us not forget that there are inherent issues and safety issues around the nuclear option. So to hear from those on the other side that they are worried about a program that has a 0.13 rate of complaints against half a million beneficiaries – I am amazed that they can run that argument while they are happy to stand by their mates in Canberra who want us to countenance a nuclear future.

This bill is an important bill. It is helping every Victorian to be part of an absolutely necessary energy transition. It is putting money in the pockets of Victorian families. It is putting money in the pockets of Victorian businesses. The bill itself puts in further protections so that we can ensure the program has an even lower rate of complaints than the 0.13 that it currently has. As I said, I think this is an important bill. It speaks to this government's commitment to a future for our children.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (11:50): What a load of waffle we have just heard there. We talk about inquiries that are done to make things better, and for people over that side to stand up and say it is a delaying tactic when an inquiry has been announced by the government and then to act on that by bringing a bill into this chamber before we have the results of the inquiry that the government is doing is quite bizarre indeed.

This program was released with very good intentions. But history tells us – and you simply cannot argue with this – that it has been poorly run and poorly managed. Even the mention of its name conjures up memories and thoughts and feelings of poor regulation and rorting. The Victorian energy efficiency target scheme has been characterised by surging spot prices for the certificates that are required to be obtained – three times the cost of other jurisdictions. The previous speaker just spoke about putting money back into the pockets of Victorians – they are three times the cost. And let us not get into things like the emergency services levy or the land tax or things like that or what our power bills actually say. It is quite an incredible piece of commentary. But this flows through to the additional costs for households and small businesses – three times higher.

The reason is that these programs and the cost of this are ultimately incorporated into our power bills, and we are paying in Victoria for these certificates three times more than other jurisdictions. How you can possibly twist that to say you are putting money back into the pockets of Victorians is beyond me. This is another bill, as I touched on earlier, that has come into this chamber where we have a review being done. We had a disability bill last year that came into this chamber that I have not seen back, as the shadow minister, for a year because we are waiting on reviews to be done. The ministers all had this light bulb moment of thinking, 'Well, we'd better hold this off,' so it is sitting between houses and has been for 12 months while we are waiting for a review to be done, and I am standing here now talking on another bill where we have change being implemented legislatively without the review being done. It is quite bizarre.

We also have big question marks over the review itself, because the review is being conducted by the department which is largely the subject of the review. Now, you cannot mark your own homework. If we are going to have a real inquiry into this and a real look at it, we need to not put the fox in charge of the henhouse. We need to have a separate set of eyes that will prosecute this program and investigate it properly. But given that, the fact that that has not even been completed and we are standing here is

quite extraordinary. That is why those on this side support the reasoned amendment, because while the inquiry is questionable, we should at least be waiting until it has provided its feedback.

I also have a few other concerns I want to touch on. Targets under the Victorian energy upgrades program are normally set in five-year tranches. That has been the history of this. This bill seeks to change this to single-year targets, and of course we would ask why 18 months out from an election we are going to single-year targets. Is the reason that the greenhouse emissions have been actually rising in Victoria for the past two years and this allows for a new striking of targets that will be more palatable to be able to sell in the lead-up to an election?

In theory anyone reading about this program would find it a very, very positive program, and run properly it would be a very, very positive program, because it aims to reduce energy costs and it aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing access to discounted energy products and services to Victorian households and businesses. But as has been spoken about – I think the member for Morwell might have covered off on this when he was talking, and I will touch on this at the current time – we had that example where multiple fridges were dumped on small businesses and were handed out door to door in some locations.

We also had this government having to act to ban cold calling and telemarketing following revelations of rorts and that misinformation was being given to the elderly and vulnerable in our community and they were basically being pressured to a huge degree by those who were promoting this scheme and getting a financial return from it. At the time when these rorts came about and this pressure was being put on our elderly and our vulnerable to subscribe to this scheme, the government came out and said, ‘We’re going to have a two-year strategic review.’ That was their response: ‘We’re going to have a review. It’s going to be sorted in house. The department’s going to look at themselves. But in June 2024 we’re going to have our review.’ Two years, it said, so that review should, I would hope, come back by June 2026. But here we are in early 2025, not even halfway through the forecast length of that review, and we are discussing a bill relating to this program. At that time the government’s commentary was that they were going to deliver an updated program that was fit for the future. They also said that it would enhance consumer protections, increase participation and improve the integrity of the scheme. That is not all covered off in this bill. Not all those goals and objectives have been covered off in this bill, which is another reason that we should not be debating this now. We should be waiting until it is over.

I will make a few short comments around cost. Under the Victorian energy efficiency program, when an upgrade is completed you get an energy certificate. One certificate represents around a tonne of forgone emissions. That is good. The program has annual legislated targets, and the target for 2025 is 7.3 million certificates. The spot price of a certificate has remained at over \$100 since May 2024 – again, around three times the cost of a certificate in any other jurisdiction in this country. Why? Why are we three times higher? People standing up over there continually reading from their prepared notes are saying this is a saving. If we are going to provide a saving let us at least for a start get in line with the offers that are being provided by other jurisdictions within our own country. What does it mean that the certificates are three times the price? What it means is the cost of the program will flow back to consumers in their bills, because it is in their retail bills that this cost is incorporated. The Essential Services Commission’s draft default offer determination for 2025–26 allocates \$122 per customer for environmental schemes. That is the allocation on the bill that is built in for environmental schemes. Of course this VEU program that we are discussing here today is part of that cost.

I will conclude my commentary by saying this bill should be held off until the review is over. There is no shame in letting it sit between houses when you realise you have gone off a bit early and a bit half-cocked. We have got a disability bill doing that at the present time, and I think there might be one other. We should be pressing the pause button on this. It is not a delaying tactic; it is a tactic to get it right. God only knows why we are here debating this now when it should be delayed. We are not even halfway through what the government announced was going to be the term of that inquiry. It was going to be two years, and we are less than one year in since that announcement was made. I can see

you smiling, Acting Speaker Addison. I hope that is in agreement with me that this is something that has come into this house earlier than it should have. I would hope that some common sense will prevail and this Parliament can work together to support the reasoned amendment. If that is not going to happen, at least let it sit between chambers while this review is completed, and then we can have a more comprehensive response to that review.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (12:00): I rise in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. This amendment not only represents a policy update, it also represents our collective ambition to build a cleaner, fairer and more affordable energy future for all Victorians.

We as the Victorian government are steadfast in our commitment to helping families and businesses with utilities expenses while also tackling the pressing challenge of climate change. We understand that these two goals, economic relief and environmental responsibility, are not mutually exclusive. In fact they are deeply intertwined. When we help Victorians improve the efficiency of their homes and workplaces, we are putting money back into their pockets and we are making homes more comfortable to live in and businesses more affordable to run. We are supporting jobs, attracting new investment and driving the uptake of cutting-edge technologies that reduce our dependence on expensive fossil fuels.

Since its launch in 2009, the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program has been a shining example of this vision in action, and it is now the largest and most successful energy efficiency scheme in the nation. More than 2.5 million households and businesses have already participated, and the results speak for themselves. Together we have avoided over 88 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. In 2024 alone, nearly half a million households and 22,000 businesses accessed discounted energy upgrades – real-world improvements with real-world benefits. For households these upgrades translate to average annual savings of around \$110. For businesses the average is \$3700, and for those that undertake bespoke, site-specific upgrades, the savings can soar into the tens of thousands. They are not just numbers; these are Victorian families and local employers who are seeing their energy bills go down and their confidence go up.

The benefits of the program extend far beyond those who participate directly of course. Improved energy efficiency across the state helps to reduce overall demand on our energy grid, which in turn helps to lower prices for everyone. Between 2021 and 2025 alone, the VEU program is expected to avoid \$3.8 billion in energy system costs. Those are savings flowing back to consumers and businesses across Victoria regardless of whether they have participated in the scheme or not.

The bill before us today strengthens and extends this important work. It ensures the VEU program can continue to serve Victorians long into the future, right through to 2045, aligning with our state's very ambitious and essential goal of reaching net zero emissions. Because we are entering a decisive decade of transition, electrification is key to our climate strategy, and it is already underway. Our homes, businesses and vehicles are steadily moving away from gas and towards cleaner and more efficient electric alternatives. The VEU program will be a cornerstone of support during this transformation, ensuring that the switch is affordable, accessible and inclusive.

To support this, the bill clarifies that energy efficiency activities required by other laws or regulations, such as minimum standards for rental homes or electrification requirements for new buildings, can also be eligible for discounts under the VEU. This may seem technical, but it is vitally important. It ensures that financial support remains available even when certain upgrades become mandatory, and it ensures that no-one is left behind in our journey towards a more sustainable built environment. Without this change, there is a risk that households, particularly those on low incomes, might delay or avoid important upgrades simply because they are too expensive up-front. That would not only leave them with higher energy bills but slow down the broader system benefits of electrification for us all. By making these changes now we are planning for a smooth, fair and coordinated transition.

This bill also enables the program's targets for 2026 and 2027 to be set by regulation, allowing more time for the outcomes of the current strategic review of the VEU program to be fully considered before setting longer term goals. That review is asking more important questions about participation, equity, effectiveness and readiness for the challenges ahead. It is smart and responsible to build in the flexibility that we need to respond to its findings.

Importantly, the bill also modernises how the program is managed and enforced, because the credibility and integrity of the scheme are just as important as its savings. It gives the Essential Services Commission, the program regulator, expanded powers to protect consumers and uphold standards, and this includes the ability to issue improvement and prohibition notices to scheme participants who are non-compliant and to mandate training and competency requirements for those installing upgrades. These are commonsense measures that bring the VEU program into line with other modern regulatory frameworks, and they ensure that every Victorian who accesses an energy upgrade through this program can do so with confidence and trust.

The bill also introduces civil penalty provisions that will allow the regulator to act with flexibility and discretion, ensuring that enforcement is proportionate and effective. At the same time, it removes outdated technical restrictions that were making it harder for electricity and gas retailers, the obligated parties under the scheme, to meet their targets. These streamlining reforms will make the system fairer and easier to administer, ensuring we get maximum emissions reductions for every dollar invested.

Finally, and crucially, the bill opens the door for future enhancements to the program that target vulnerable and low-income Victorians. By allowing discounts to be tailored to specific consumer groups we are ensuring that those who need support the most can access it as well. And that is not just good policy, it is good ethics.

Energy efficiency is one of the most powerful and cost-effective tools we have to address climate change, but it is also a tool for fairness, resilience and opportunity. This bill ensures that the Victorian energy upgrades program can continue to be a leading example of how we turn climate ambition into practical everyday benefits: lower bills, warmer homes, cleaner air and stronger communities.

Experts in the field have backed these reforms. The Energy Efficiency Council, a leading voice in this space, has made it clear this proposal is a winner. Their CEO Luke Menzel said:

It signals that the Victorian Government understands energy efficiency and electrification are critical to Victoria's energy transition, and that the VEU will continue to help households and businesses invest in the technologies that will save them money and cut emissions.

Electrification of homes and businesses has another benefit too – it helps us deal with gas supply shortfalls.

AEMO's 2025 *Gas Statement of Opportunities* paints a stark picture. The gas we have relied on from the Bass Strait is running out, and the backup supply options are costly. Mr Menzel went on to say:

The good news is that households and businesses switching from gas to electric appliances and equipment are already helping prevent serious gas shortages.

This bill builds on that momentum and avoids wasting money on expensive supply-side solutions that may ultimately burden the very people we are trying to help. I will further quote Mr Menzel:

Programs like the VEU, which help build on that momentum and get even more households and businesses off gas, mean less money spent on pricey supply side options.

Finally, I want to highlight what I believe is one of the most important elements of the bill, the emphasis on protecting vulnerable consumers. Expanding on the ESC's oversight will ensure safer, more reliable upgrades. Mr Menzel said:

We are 100 per cent behind any changes that improve customers' experiences with the VEU – particularly vulnerable households – so expanding the ESC's oversight of installations is a welcome improvement to the scheme.

This is the kind of policy that delivers not just now but for decades to come. It reduces emissions, it lowers bills, it prepares us for future energy challenges and it helps those who need it most. I am proud to support this legislation, and I commend the bill to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (12:09): I rise to speak on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025, and I do so with the frustration of a growing number of Victorians who are frankly sick and tired of the chaotic and dysfunctional approach of the Allan Labor government to energy and the energy transition. None of us should debate the importance of bequeathing to future generations an environment that is in as good as, if not better, condition than the one we inherited. But this bill and the reasons for our reasoned amendment are why Victorians are losing confidence in this government's ability to manage what is an important transition and a historic transition. This bill is amongst the best pieces of evidence that you can find that this government has lost the plot on the energy transition, and I will come to that in a moment. The government's own words will be my best piece of evidence.

We have a program that is totally discredited. The concept is good. We like the concept. We have never opposed the concept, under a responsibly managed and well-administered program, of helping people who can afford it, when they can, to electrify appliances in their homes and in their businesses. That concept should be non-contentious. But this program has been riddled with rorts – rorts nobody on the opposite side of the chamber can explain away. They try to ignore it, try to dismiss it, but they cannot account for it or why it has occurred and what steps are in place to prevent these rorts from occurring again. There is no plan from the government in its presentation of this bill to the house about how it proposes to put in place steps to stop those rorts from occurring. And they have been well traversed in the course of this debate.

It makes no sense to Victorians to proceed with this bill when you have a review into the very regime we are discussing here. Why not wait for the outcome of this review, as others have pointed out and I certainly strongly believe, particularly when you have rorts which have been identified over a number of years since the commencement of this scheme in 2009? Why the government wants to proceed defies comprehension. I support strongly the reasoned amendment moved by the relevant shadow minister representing Mr Davis in the other place. The government should adopt that reasoned amendment, go away and do the work.

By the way, I too have concerns about whether the review underway is truly independent and whether those conducting it are truly in a position and genuinely able to be as critical of themselves and their own administration of the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program as they need to be. We want the public to have confidence in this program, but it will not happen unless there is a truly independent review. It makes no sense for us to proceed with this bill, and that is why we have taken the very sensible step to propose this reasoned amendment.

It is also important to understand that the scheme is obviously not working well. It cannot work well if we are paying around \$110 per certificate and in other states they are paying a third of that. Something is not right about the way these certificates are being offered to the market in Victoria. It is also important to acknowledge the evidence. If this program is as good as all of those on the opposite side of the chamber say, why are emissions rising? We all want emissions to come down. We are all committed to net zero – in this place we are – yet we see emissions going up by 5 per cent on average over the last two years. How is that happening if this scheme is working as well as it should be? We have concerns that this scheme is just not delivering on the objectives that it was supposed to offer.

Even the Essential Services Commission in its default market offer provides an increase this year consistent with other states – maybe not as high this year as in other states, although default market offers in previous years have gone up by a lot more than in other states – yet \$122 of that is attributable to programs like the VEU program. When you collectively look at the evidence – the rorts, the fact that there is a review, that the review is not independent, that Victorian energy efficiency certificates are more than three times that which you will pay in other states, that the default market offer is being

driven up for those who can least afford because of schemes like this – imagine what we might see if this scheme was well administered and responsibly overseen. We might see the default market offer come down or not rise by as much as it has been, so the reasoned amendment is very sensible.

I do want to talk about the backdrop in which this debate is occurring. When I said at the outset of my remarks that this government's approach to the energy transition is confused and dysfunctional, it is, and I doubt anybody on the opposite side can understand why. Let me give an example. Last month Victoria's Minister for Energy and Resources went to the energy ministers conference, spearheading a proposal for the Commonwealth government to underwrite LNG imports. That is this Victorian energy minister spearheading a ministerial proposal to the Commonwealth to provide that guarantee for LNG imports in Victoria. Those on the opposite side, the minister and the Premier talk unceasingly on the need to get off gas, yet they are recognising now, because they are being mugged by reality, that this drive, which is obsessed with ideology, with rhetoric which itself is emissions rich, is driving us to the point where we now have to re-engineer reliance on gas, which this government is hoping no-one will recognise. This is what the minister said when asked about the looming gas shortages in the southern states, principally Victoria and New South Wales, in 2028–29 and beyond. The minister was asked about LNG import facilities. This is what our own Labor minister in Victoria is quoted as saying:

“That's the quickest way – and probably really right now the only feasible option,” says Victorian Energy Minister Lily D'Ambrosio.

So much for the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*. Reconcile that, colleagues across the chamber, with the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*. Reconcile what is in the *Gas Substitution Roadmap* with what was in the *Economic Growth Statement* which this government released late last year. Here is what it says. This government, despite all the rhetoric we have heard from those opposite in the course of this debate, will:

Fast-track new gas projects through the Development Facilitation Program

Not only are they recognising the reality that we need more gas to underpin our economy and our standard of living but they are now saying they will do it and they will abolish third-party rights in the process. They will recognise that:

All new potential gas projects can access the accelerated assessment pathway for new planning permits – and the like. Here is a government which on the one hand has the *Gas Substitution Roadmap* saying gas is bad, we do not need it and we will not have it. Then in their own comments and in the *Economic Growth Statement* they say, ‘We're going to fast-track it.’ Who is to be believed? Who knows what this government is going to do. That is why I say the government's approach to energy transition is not responsible. It is not orderly, which is what we would do. It is dysfunctional. It is riddled with internal contradictions about what this government's identity and approach to energy and the important process of transition actually is.

We see offshore wind. How is offshore wind going to evolve under this government? We have got people getting knocked back. Flotation Energy's investment in the Sea Dragon project off Gippsland got knocked back. The Southern Ocean zone got reduced by 80 per cent and now even has the independent candidate for Wannon running away from it. I recognise the great work that Dan Tehan, the member for Wannon, has been doing on that. This government needs to come clean on how it will deliver offshore wind if it is so true to its own words.

My final comment is I think the government needs to be up-front with the Victorian people about what is going to happen with our ageing coal fleet. It has already entered into an underwriting contract with Energy Australia and AGL in relation to Yallourn and Loy Yang, but we all know – it is probably the worst kept secret in the world – no-one who is involved in those two plants recognises or believes that Yallourn will be ready to shut in June 2028. If it is, the government should tell us. I say to the government and the Premier and energy minister in particular: come clean. Tell us what is going to happen with those two power stations and whether they are sticking to the closure schedule.

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:19): I am delighted to have the opportunity to discuss, make a contribution to and support the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. This is an important bill, and I have been listening very, very closely to the outstanding contributions on this side and also the contributions of those on the other side. I am very interested in debunking some of the ideas put forward by those opposite, particularly the member for Narracan and the member for Hawthorn. Let us be very, very clear about this: much to your disappointment, emissions have gone down. They have gone down dramatically and consistently, and the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program is an important contributor to that. I am glad that the member for Hawthorn – he was here for a moment – talked about ‘confused and dysfunctional’ because he might have a PhD in ‘confused and dysfunctional’ in terms of his leadership of his party. To tell us that we are confused and dysfunctional is somewhat of a joke.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Wendouree is clearly not sticking to the bill. She may very well be edging in the direction of being in contravention of standing order 118, which I am sure you will be familiar with, regarding imputations and personal reflections on members. I would ask you to bring her back to the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): There is no point of order, but the member to return to the bill.

Juliana ADDISON: I want to talk about this bill because this is an excellent bill and an important bill, but there are also some other things that I need to address in the contributions of others that have come before me, including the contribution of the member for Narracan. I listened very intently to both the member for Narracan’s contribution as well as the member for Gippsland East with much interest. We know that there are some issues within the Liberal–National parties. They do not want to talk about renewables and they do not want to talk about reductions in emissions, because we know they want nuclear. They have made it very clear. I am not being hypothetical, as per the Chair’s discussion yesterday. They believe that nuclear is the answer. I would just put on record my support for what our Premier has said about nuclear energy: that it is risky, that it is expensive and that it is toxic. But we are not going to talk about nuclear today, because we have so many good things to talk about: renewable energy and reducing energy emissions in our area. The other thing I did want to talk about, though, is with regard to the review that the member for Gippsland spent much of his contribution focused on. I really want to take up this opportunity to respond in this debate and be really, really clear.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, could you ask the member to refer to the member she has mentioned by his correct title? He is not the member for Gippsland; he is the member for Gippsland East.

Juliana ADDISON: The member for Gippsland East said he was very concerned about the review.

Peter Walsh: Darren Chester might take offence.

Juliana ADDISON: That says more about the member for Gippsland East than what I have said about the member for Gippsland East. Let me be really clear and explicit: the review is looking at improvements to the scheme, not at whether the scheme should exist. It clearly already is highly effective and beneficial, and the member for Gippsland East said that he would like a commonsense approach to that. What I want to say is that this review will ensure that if there are improvements that could be made, they should be made. It could not be more common sense than: ‘We’ve got a fantastic program. Let’s review it to see if it can be better.’ That is common sense, and that is something that I want to talk about as well.

The other matter that I want to talk about is just this idea that we are going to be getting consumers to pay more for the VEU. I want to debunk that as well, because the VEU program is actually reducing the cost of Victorian power bills, and this is supported by the fact that there is a net reduction for all households, including households that have not even signed up. Households that have not even

accessed the VEU are getting benefits from lower power bills. I can see the member for Murray Plains is very confused by that, so I am going to walk him through it. It is important to be helpful, and I want to be helpful here. The VEU is driving down demand for energy, which reduces the wholesale price of energy. It is supply and demand; if you reduce demand, costs go down, so that is all good.

This idea that is being peddled, that we need to pause this, we need to not do this, I disagree with wholeheartedly. A pause is a waste of time. If we can improve it through the review, we definitely should. We should look for efficiencies. We should look for ways that we can do things better. But pausing it is certainly not the answer.

What is the answer? Our strong record of commitment to delivering real progress on climate change. That is what we do. That is what we have done in government, because we know that climate change is real. Whether it is the dreadful bushfires that we have had in the Grampians, the floods that we are seeing in Queensland and New South Wales, heatwaves, tropical cyclones or floods in the electorate of the member for Murray Plains, all are because of climate change. That is why we have ambitious targets for renewable energy generation, energy storage and offshore wind energy. I am also proud that this government, the Allan Labor government, has truly world-leading emissions reduction targets. That is what Victorians want and that is what they are embracing. We are well on the way to achieving these goals, with 39 per cent of Victoria's power now generated from renewables, which is triple that of 2014. Since the member for Murray Plains was a minister in 2014, way back then, we have tripled the amount of energy that is generated by renewables, and that is something that I am incredibly proud of. I am proud to be a part of this government.

We are also doing the work to reduce emissions, making our state better off. Victorians' wholesale power prices are consistently lower than those in other Australian states, and this is down to our record investment in renewables, which can shield our market from fossil fuel price increases. We are also putting in place the necessary arrangements for a transition away from gas, and I know that there is certainly not agreement across this place on that. Victoria's supplies are dwindling, and we need to act to ensure a measured and methodical transition. That is why we are enacting policies to support households to electrify and move away from gas. I have already done that in my house. We have got our solar panels up and we are no longer using the gas central heating. We have got two split systems, and we are doing that rather than using our gas central heating. That is something that we do, and we love our solar panels. We were able to support a local company to install our solar panels, and whilst there is a lot of conjecture about Ballarat weather, our solar panels do very well for us during the summer months.

I also just want to talk about biogas. Biogas can also play a crucial part in accelerating our transition away from fossil gas. That is why we are capitalising on the potential of Victoria's industry by investing millions in targeted bioenergy, which I think is a really important part of the market that we need to be looking at, talking to and engaging with.

A major component of our emissions reduction agenda is the Victorian energy upgrades program, which lowers household energy bills and incentivises a range of energy-efficient products. Through the VEU program, Victorians can access subsidies to replace major appliances including cooktops, heating and hot-water systems, in addition to low-cost and no-energy energy-saving upgrades such as energy monitors and weather sealing. The weather sealing is particularly popular in my community in Ballarat. We have had over 25,968 homes in Ballarat take advantage of weather sealing. I live in a weatherboard house that was built about 100 years ago, which very much feels the cold. We have got heritage windows, and we have got a heritage property. To have weather sealing on a range of heritage weatherboard homes across Ballarat, when we do have very icy cold mornings and under-zero temperatures, is really, really important. We know that being able to keep the cold out in winter and keep the heat in reduces costs for my community, and that is a great win.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:29): The Greens will be supporting this legislation, which makes several reforms to the Victorian energy upgrades program. One of the things that this bill does,

as others have canvassed, is extend the Victorian energy upgrades program from 2030 through to 2045, which is the date when our state here in Victoria is meant to hit net zero greenhouse gas emissions. We support that extension very much which protects the VEU, especially against a future coalition government who might want to rip up this important part of our state's response to climate change, probably at the behest of the gas industry, who are working very, very hard against this program and many others that we have here in Victoria. Let us make no mistake about it, let us call a spade a spade: the gas industry want to rip up programs that reduce their profits. How unconscionable is that, to put your private profits as so much more of a priority than literally the lives of Victorian communities, their health and safety and the future of our kids, our grandkids and future generations when it comes to the impacts of climate change. I find it unconscionable, the things that the gas industry is doing right now – putting ads on TV, getting to installers and telling them mistruths about electrification and about heat pumps. The VEU is a really important program that gives subsidies that make it cheaper and easier for people to get off gas, which is expensive, it is polluting, it is bad for people's health, it exacerbates childhood asthma in people's homes – all of the bad things – and the VEU is aiming to get off gas. That is a good thing, and that is why we will be supporting anything that strengthens it.

If we think about the 2045 target that we have here in Victoria to be at net zero greenhouse gas emissions, that is only 20 years away. 2045 feels quite far in the future, but it is only 20 years away. It is quite hard to believe that here in Victoria we are going to have to go from releasing about 85 megatons of carbon dioxide per year to hitting net zero emissions. We need to do absolutely everything that we can. That is really just the fact of the matter, and every 0.1 of a degree of climate change that we avoid makes an impact. We do not want to be defeatist about this. Yes, we have a lot of climate change already locked into the system, but every single 0.1 of a degree that we can avoid will avoid some pretty horrific impacts when it comes to natural disasters, heatwaves, floods, fires, you name it.

The VEU is part of that journey. It makes our homes and buildings more efficient. It gets our homes and businesses off dirty, expensive gas. It gets us onto cleaner, cheaper and more comfortable electric and energy-efficient options. We have almost completed the transition in our house as well, not using the VEU but using, for example, an electric induction cooktop in our home has made just the world of difference. Not only am I not worried about my three young kids breathing in all the fumes of gas or turning it on and leaving it on – because the two-year-old is wont to do that – but it also means that our cooking is just better. It goes from zero to hot in just an instant, and as someone who quite likes to cook I find induction just so much more pleasant to cook with as well.

We know that Victorians do want to get off dirty, expensive fossil gas as soon as possible and the public is actually already doing that work. There are thousands of incredible people out there who are already going around and helping other people get off gas and already giving people information on how to do that. The public is doing the work, and I am pleased to see the Victorian government also incentivising that work that communities are already doing.

The bill delivers some other reforms that we are glad to see. It will allow VEU incentives to go towards government-mandated upgrades – for example, the new energy efficiency standards for rental properties that we very much hope will come in at the end of the regulatory impact statement process, the RIS process, that is happening at the moment. We expect minimum standards for rental properties to come into effect this year, and we would love Labor to be bold. Victorian renters deserve homes that are warm in winter and cool in summer. Just because you live in a rental property does not mean that you deserve to freeze in winter or swelter through summer. That means we need to do things like requiring insulation, efficient electric appliances and draught sealing in rental properties to make sure that renters are protected. If Victoria follows the standards set by the ACT, the new standards combined with the Victorian energy upgrades program could create a really strong carrot and stick approach.

We can require landlords to finally fix their draughty, gas-guzzling properties but also give them financial support to make those upgrades and to create cheaper, more comfortable homes that renters can actually live in without freezing or dying of heat in summer. We know that heatwaves kill more people than almost any other natural disaster, and we could put a stop to this, including for people who live in rental properties.

The bill also provides the regulator, the Essential Services Commission, with a range of new and expanded enforcement tools. We hope that the new powers to target third-party installations and enforce take-back requirements will result in fewer broken walls, fewer old light bulbs left at properties and fewer problems.

The bill also enables interim targets of 2026 and 2027 to be set in regulations to allow that current review to be considered in future hard targets. Looking beyond the review, the bill also allows for future VEU program discounts to be created specifically for vulnerable and low-income consumers. That kind of objective could potentially be quite a powerful reform if it is able to be implemented in a way that that works with the scheme. We know that a lot of social organisations and a lot of environmental organisations have been calling for that targeted discount to ensure that the benefits of the VEU are actually accruing to those who might be least able to afford the up-front costs of electrification.

Taken as a whole these are all very positive improvements to the scheme. There is one thing the scheme is still missing, and that is insulation. Talk to any renter in Victoria and they will have a horror story of living in a draughty, leaky home, sweltering in the summer, freezing in the winter, letting rain in the roof and shaking in storms, and they are still living through these extreme events. In Victoria our homes are essentially glorified tents. The low standards of building that have happened in the past mean that so many of our homes are uninsulated. My home, which was built in the late 1990s, is uninsulated, and once your home is uninsulated, it is incredibly difficult to then retrofit insulation to your property. The best thing to do is put insulation in at the start, but the second-best thing to do is make it easier and cheaper for people to retrofit insulation.

Insulation means that you can save 45 per cent of the hot or cool air that is in your property. Sustainability Victoria says that about 45 per cent of the heat in your home is lost through the roof, the walls or the floor if your property is uninsulated. Adding insulation to the Victorian energy upgrades scheme would mean that it is cheaper and easier for people to retrofit insulation in their homes, and that is 45 per cent of energy costs that could potentially be saved. What a huge, amazing thing that would be for our homes. It would mean that we are all so much more comfortable in our homes. Draught-proofing and installing more efficient appliances can only go so far if all of that energy is still being lost through our walls and roofs and ceilings because we do not have insulation, so putting insulation in the scheme I think is a no-brainer. I understand that there are some issues around industry capability, and we need to make sure that it is safe and that it is installed properly; those things can be overcome. I would love to see that after this review insulation is absolutely announced as being part of this program so that people can afford to put it into their homes.

The other issue with insulation is of course that the up-front cost is quite high. There was a woman Jessica, a home owner living in Mildura, my original home town, who spoke to the ABC last year about this, and it really brought home some of the issues that people face. She said that she was forced to leave the aircon running all day so her dog did not overheat while she was at work. People who have lived in Mildura know you can get subsequent days over 45 degrees during summer, so air conditioning is not a luxury, it is actually a necessity so that you do not die. This is adding up to hundreds and hundreds more on her energy bills every month, but she is in a 1970s home. Insulating costs would be up to \$6000, and she just does not have that up-front. Most people do not have that up-front. Even if they would make that back in their energy bills, it is pretty hard to find that amount of money up-front. So we know that there are some real benefits to cost of living as well when introducing insulation subsidies. Hopefully those workforce issues and those industry capability issues can be overcome, which I understand is being considered as part of the review.

I did want to just talk a little bit about some of the amendments that we are planning to circulate. One of them is in relation to insulation and the ability for insulation to be included in the VEU. The other one is around time-of-use emissions being factored into the scheme. We think it is a power the government will want to explore as the grid increasingly deals with the highly distributed renewable energy that we are seeing in the market and the interrelation between batteries, with more and more batteries in people's homes.

I will explain those a little bit, but under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill and request that they be circulated.

Amendments circulated under standing orders.

Ellen SANDELL: When it comes to insulation, I also understand that there have been some stakeholders talking about a potential solution being around the residential efficiency scorecard and that under that scorecard program accredited assessors could inspect individual homes and deliver tailored energy-efficient assessments, ratings and solutions. That is part of the system currently. The Victorian government set the national standard for the scorecard, so credit to the Victorian government for doing that. It is currently being adopted as part of the nationwide house energy rating scheme, or NatHERS. Victorians can access scorecard assessments under the Victorian energy upgrades currently, so you can get a discounted assessment of your house under the VEU, and they can identify where you might need extra insulation – if it is better in your roof or if it is better in your walls, for example. They can also look at what is the most appropriate insulation for your home to ensure you are getting the safest solution possible. Some stakeholders have told us there might be an opportunity to link the two programs. That is why the Greens are proposing this prescribed activity for the VEU insulation where a scorecard assessment has been provided, to there is a linkage there.

In terms of my other amendment, in the same way that the government is planning future additions to the VEU with the vulnerable community sub-target that I talked about earlier, the Greens propose a new power to incorporate peak demand management into the scheme. That is because we know, with the growth of solar, the reduction in household gas and the slow-but-sure death of coal and gas plants, Victoria is going to require more and more household batteries to manage peak demand. Years back we did have in Victoria subsidies for batteries in homes. That has been replaced by with government with zero-interest loans. I get that there is some logic there. Loans get people thinking about the long-term savings associated with batteries. They do take longer to pay off than solar panels. That lack of a rebate is still a barrier for everyday Victorians who might have to face \$10,000 or \$15,000 for a battery. Understanding how we could improve time-of-use emissions in an emissions trading scheme is a power we think the government will want to explore as the grid increasingly deals with this distributed renewable energy. Some of our amendments go to some of those matters.

Finally, I do want to take a moment to talk about fossil fuel use in general. I made some comments earlier in relation to the gas industry and their concerted campaign to undermine anything that chips away at their profits. I just want to make some comments about coal and gas right now. We have a Labor government federally that has opened more than 30 new coal and gas projects in the last three years. Here in Victoria, on Tuesday we had a new gas-drilling project start. We are seeing gas drilling happening off Victoria's coastline, in state waters and in Commonwealth waters. We are seeing gas drilling happening near the Twelve Apostles, one of our most iconic sites in Victoria. The impacts on the marine ecosystem are significant. But even if you wanted to put all of that aside, which you should not, we cannot afford to burn one more drop of oil or gas or one more lump of coal if we are to have any hope of protecting ourselves from future climate change. It is simple science. I think it is just astonishing that we have a federal Labor going to an election right now which has approved 30 coal and gas projects right across our country, and here in Victoria a Labor government that has approved projects in both state waters and in federal waters.

I just think it is absolutely outrageous that they can be pouring fuel on the fire of climate change while on the other hand saying that they are dealing with it. It simply does not add up when it comes to the

science, and I urge all parties to think about it. It is a difficult problem; I get that. Climate change is a difficult problem, and we should have acted years and years ago. We did not, which is what has got us to this moment now. But it is incumbent on all of us to think about the future that we are leaving for ourselves, for our kids and for future generations. To have a Labor government that has opened 30 new coal and gas projects right across our country is an absolute disgrace.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:46): I too rise to speak on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. Everyone here in this place knows I love getting up and talking about our fantastic legislation – which it feels like every sitting week, time and time again, we put before the house – that is related to our government’s record on energy. I have totally lost count of the number of bills that have been brought as part of this energy law reform over the past six-odd years since I was elected to this place.

The main focus of today’s bill is our government’s fantastic Victorian energy upgrade scheme. When I first saw that we were debating this bill today my actual first thought was, ‘Oh, this is going to be another amazing opportunity to highlight the incredible impact this program has had for Victorians.’ Whilst those opposite and their mates in Canberra are contemplating rolling out a \$600 billion nuclear energy industry here in Australia and here in Victoria, we are getting on with delivering cheap and affordable renewable energy right across the state. With Victoria now smashing through our renewable energy targets, on top of that, the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program is a heavy part of reducing energy and utility bills for households and businesses right across this state.

Since the program was introduced by the Bracks government back in 2009 – it feels like a lifetime ago now – more than 2.4 million households and 179,000 businesses have taken up the program and installed discounted energy-efficient products through this program. That is a hell of a lot of people. In 2023 the program went all electric, and in just two years we have seen more than 19,000 reverse-cycle air conditioners and over 39,000 hot-water systems installed in households, and that is a saving of 28 million tonnes of emissions.

The best part about this program is that even if you do not participate, guess what, you are still going to benefit from this scheme. By reducing energy demand for households, these energy-efficient products put downward pressure on retail energy prices, and what we know is that for the past four years the program has saved Victorians around \$3.8 billion in energy system costs. It is not just all about electricity, the scheme supports important things like water and gas usage as well.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Quite recently – and I love this story; these are two wonderful young women in my electorate – I was handed letters by two fantastic year 7 students from Sunshine College. I was there for an International Women’s Day morning tea, and Kiana and Alexandra had written me letters. They were learning about, of all things, sustainability and the environment as part of the year 7 curriculum. They had written a couple of letters to me, and I wrote back to them last week. They had a lot of questions and interest in how households could reduce their waste and energy usage.

One of these students came from Albion Primary School, which is a great local primary school in Albion. They have just been awarded their fifth star as part of our government’s ResourceSmart Schools Awards for energy sustainability. That program is all about doing things at schools like encouraging recycling. I know Albion Primary School was even encouraging the recycling of toothbrushes and toothpaste, which I thought was really clever because it was also encouraging kids to clean their teeth. What do you do with your toothbrush after it is a bit manky and needs to be replaced? You could take it to Albion Primary School, where they will recycle it for you. They had gone on from Albion Primary School, where they had learned great environmental sustainability habits as part of that program in that primary school, and in year 7 they were learning even more about how households could reduce their waste and energy usage.

I wrote to them. I just signed off the letters as of last week, and they go on for pages and pages because there is so much happening in this space. I was really keen to tell them all about the wonderful things that the Allan Labor government is doing to promote sustainability.

One of the things I told them about was the Victorian energy upgrades program and how households could reduce their water usage through this program by installing water-efficient showerheads. This was something that the girls were really interested in. I mention this because very soon Alexandra and Kiana will graduate, and they are going to live and they are going to work, hopefully, in our local community. They will be able to own or go ahead and rent their homes and maybe even run businesses of their own. They will be thinking about their own households and how they can be more energy efficient, not just to support the environment but also for their own cost of living. That is why a program like this one can make the changes they need for their own homes, and at a discounted price. It is better for the environment, and it is better for the hip pocket. Overall, that is what this program does for Victorians. What we do know on this side of the chamber is that it is overwhelmingly successful and overwhelmingly embraced by the local community. The local community loves these kinds of programs.

Late last year our government announced a review of the program, ensuring that it can continue to support Victoria's transition to electric utilities. What this bill actually does is give households and the industry the certainty they need to continue taking part in this transition whilst this review is underway, because this program is an adaptive feature of our state's climate change and energy policy agenda and one that directly impacts households. We know it is working. We know the public love it. They use it, they buy into it and it is working. What we do want to see is how we can make the scheme even stronger to go ahead and support this important work of making households and, importantly, businesses so much more energy efficient so they can go ahead and reduce their bills.

At the end of the day I do think the two of them go hand in hand. I am out in Williams Landing on a regular basis, and I remember a visit by the minister and the Premier on a Sunday morning. We were out in Williams Landing. There was a great young couple who just bought a Tesla, their first Tesla, and they invited us into their home. It was interesting to see how it was all switched on in the garage, as I am someone who does not yet own one. They also took us through why it was important for them to have solar panels on their roof, why they bought that Tesla and why they were thinking about the emissions that they as a couple were emitting and looking at reducing them. They were very much aware of their impact on climate change and wanted to reduce their footprint. But also what was fantastic, and the Premier and minister and I went through it, is they pulled out one of their bills and started going through it and showing us the cost saving. One of the things the Premier asked this couple about was that it was a lot of money to have saved. They had saved hundreds and hundreds of dollars. She said to them, 'What are you going to spend it on?' They were going to go on a holiday together, which I just thought was wonderful. Some of these incredible initiatives that this government over its time has gone ahead and rolled out here in Victoria do have real monetary impact, and it is wonderful to be able to see that.

One of the first things that the bill is going to do is extend this program for another 20 years, which is fantastic to know. It will still be in place. That is going to go all the way to 2045. It means that even though we will be reviewing the program and continuing to do that, Victorians can, most importantly, continue to take part in the program and continue to upgrade their homes, giving certainty to both them and the industry, supporting hundreds if not thousands of jobs right across Victoria, including plumbers, electricians and other trades who support this program.

This bill makes a number of important changes to the operation of the VEU program. We know that it is a program that Victorians have wanted to see in place. They have embraced it, continue to use it and have reduced their footprint when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions, but they have also saved so much on their utility bills. At the end of the day, this is just another way that our government is helping just regular folks with the cost of living by making sure there is more money in the hip pocket to do the things that they want to do, whether it is having a holiday or whether it is going out for dinner

or ordering a pizza on a Friday night. This is just another way we can help with the cost of living. This is a great bill, and that is exactly why I commend it to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:55): In making my contribution to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025, can I thank the member for Wendouree for staying in the chamber to give me a chance to respond to some of the comments that she made in her contribution about the fact that climate change is driving fires and floods and that somehow before the last 20 or 30 years we did not have fires and floods in Victoria. Can I remind the member for Wendouree that the biggest flood of all time was in 1956, which was literally feet above any other flood that we have seen in our in our lifetime. Prior to that, in 1909 there was another huge flood. So I do not think it is just climate change that drives floods. I also remind the member for Wendouree that 1939 had probably the next worst bushfire compared to the 2009 bushfire. We have had floods and we have had fires. I agree with the science that the intensity of the extremes of weather is happening, but it is not all caused by climate change. Climate change may be making some of it worse, but it is certainly not causing the whole lot.

The other comment I would make to a number of the economic gurus on the other side of the house who say that somehow this program is putting money in the pockets of Victorian families and in the pockets of Victorian businesses. Let us just work out or speak about where the money comes from to pay for these units. It actually goes onto the power bills, so people are actually paying for the cost of this program in their power bills. If there is any subsidy coming from the state government, that is still taxpayers money. There is nothing for nothing in this world, and for the other side of the house to paint it like somehow this is a free program that magically gives someone something for nothing is just an absolutely misleading, because it is built into the power prices. There is nothing for nothing, as I have said, so I think all those on the other side that are somehow trying to paint this as a program that is giving people something for nothing are totally wrong: it is not for nothing.

I think we can all remember the number of people who fell victim to some of the rorts of this particular program. I have got cafe owners in my electorate who suddenly had a truck pull up and deliver some fridges. They said, 'Where did these come from? Why have we got these fridges?' And apart from the fact they did not order them, they were not fit for purpose – they actually did not keep the contents as cool as they are supposed to under the Health Act 1958 that they have to follow in a cafe. That is just one example of where this system can go wrong, and it did go wrong in that case. I am not saying that is the case for all of it, but there does need to be good oversight to make sure these things do not happen in the future. The other one, and I think the member for Morwell might have mentioned it, was where a number of football clubs all of a sudden got a huge bank of heat pump hot-water systems that went out the back of their football sheds. They were not as efficient; they were a lot more expensive to run, and those football clubs found that they had a much larger power bill after those heat pump hot-water systems were put in.

The other things I will touch off on before actually talking about the bill are the Greens comments about what a future Liberal or National government may or may not do, and they mentioned the word 'unconscionable'. I would say that is the kettle calling the pot black. Some of the things that the Greens said are just as unconscionable when it comes to how they dramatise and overmagnify the issues that they are talking about. They demonise the gas industry. I think they need to do an analysis of what actually keeps the lights on when we need peaking power in this state. It is gas. What actually powers industry is gas.

There are a lot of industries that use gas for furnaces and for heating. At the moment it is just not economical or practical to use electricity, so there is a need for gas as we transition to renewables. It is not about one or the other, it is about a sensible, affordable and transition. If we just say we are not going to have gas or do not want gas, the world will stop. We need to have gas as we transition to renewables into the future. Our side of politics is about a sensible, affordable transition. It is not about huge leaps that someone wants to do to be politically popular in a particular part of the state. It is about how you do it for the whole state.

That is the other issue that I want to raise. People think the renewable projects that are being built are somehow not impacting on someone in this state. If I look to my electorate, there is this huge community fight going on at the moment and huge stress on the community with the VNI West powerline that is going to go through that area. There was no genuine consultation and no genuine discussion with the community about how that project was actually going to go through. It is important that this transition actually happens –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak): Sorry, member for Murray Plains, it is time for me to interrupt business for lunch.

Sitting suspended 1:01 pm until 2:02 pm.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the Honourable Kate Jones, a former minister in the Queensland government.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Corrections system

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Port Phillip Prison holds some of Victoria’s most violent and dangerous offenders. How can the Premier justify prisoners like Julian Knight and Raymond ‘Mr Stinky’ Edmonds having their security classification downgraded from high-risk because of her government’s ideological decision to close Port Phillip Prison?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): In acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition’s question, can I reject his claims in the question regarding ideology. I also need to correct the claims that he has made around capacity in our prison system, because of course we have constructed and supported the construction of the Western Plains Correctional Centre, which will open in coming months, so in terms of bringing extra capacity to the system, we understand that. I also want to be clear, and I would have thought that for someone who has a bit to say about his time in the justice system the Leader of the Opposition would be aware, that decisions around a prisoner’s security classification are made independently – operational assessments are made independently – by Corrections Victoria –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Cranbourne! The Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: But anticipating that this might be another piece of information that the Leader of the Opposition is not quite across, I have also received advice that the decision made by Corrections Victoria is not related to capacity in the system. Let us remember too that for one of the individuals the member named in his question – one of them in particular – the Parliament passed legislation to ensure that that individual never leaves prison. He will die in prison. That also is something that Corrections Victoria are well aware of, because this Parliament made that change.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Premier, isn’t it a fact that due to the downgrading of the security classification of Julian Knight he no longer had to be handcuffed when he attended St Vincent’s Hospital, risking the safety of patients and staff?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): As we have learned from this Leader of the Opposition, we need to always check because the Leader of the Opposition has a lot to say but is not always across the detail. I say this in the context that what the Leader of the Opposition has claimed is a reflection on the hardworking operational staff of Corrections Victoria who make these decisions.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance and the Premier being factual, any person who is downgraded to a B rating no longer has to be handcuffed when leaving the prison walls to go into hospitals. Why is this happening now with Julian Knight?

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to make a statement to the chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: He has changed his tune. The Leader of the Opposition has changed his tune from his question to his point of order. The Leader of the Opposition said it was a fact that this was happening with this individual, and now it is just a broad policy he is referring to. The Leader of the Opposition is attacking the workers who make these independent decisions in Corrections Victoria.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will be removed without warning.

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

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: economy

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Victorian graziers produce some of the highest quality beef you will find in any paddock on this planet. Our producers make great wine and great cheese that would hold up against any province in France, and of course our fishing industry hatch and catch some of the best seafood swimming in any river or ocean in the world. Victoria is Australia’s food bowl. We are proud of it, and I say this clearly: we will fight to protect it. We will fight for jobs, we will fight for livelihoods and we will fight for that world-class reputation that our producers have worked so hard to achieve.

What we are seeing is that Trump’s tariffs that were announced today are totally unjustifiable. They put pressure on working families around Victoria, around the country and around the globe. They risk harming our state’s hard-fought-for and important protections around our biosecurity standards and of course that worldwide reputation for world-class produce. This is why I want to make this point absolutely clear –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: They can defend Trump’s tariffs; I will not. I will fight Trump’s tariffs because my government will never lie down. We will fight against any measure or pressure that hurts Victoria’s hard-earned food and biosecurity standards. I strongly support the Prime Minister’s response in protecting our national biosecurity arrangements. We back Victoria’s producers, businesses and manufacturers. We have done it by making sure that we have local content requirements in our level crossings and of course in our trains that are running on our tracks. Those opposite wanted them made in South Korea or India; well, they are made right here in Melbourne because this government supports local businesses.

Corrections system

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): My question is to the Premier. How many bikies, terrorists, murderers and rapists have had their classification downgraded due to the government’s ideological decision to close Port Phillip Prison?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): Once again we have the Leader of the Opposition choosing to attack workers and to attack the independent assessments made by Corrections Victoria, and I find that outrageous.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I realise the Premier has not spoken for very long yet, but the Premier was debating the question. It was a very narrow question about how many murderers and rapists, and we would ask you to ask her to come back to that very narrow question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for 10 seconds. The Premier to continue answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I said earlier, decisions made around a prisoner’s security classification are operational ones that are made independently by Corrections Victoria staff. Let us also reflect for a moment on the work that Corrections Victoria staff do every single day.

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to relevance on this issue, the very simple question was: how many? If the Premier does not know, she should just sit down.

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, a Premier or minister is ‘to relate remarks to the question asked’ – Brooks. The question went very clearly to classification, and the Premier is right to point out, as she has, that the classification is a matter for Corrections Victoria. In fact, a former corrections officer should know it is the sentence management branch that does the classification –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Premier will resume his seat. Leader of the Opposition! You are not immune from being removed from the chamber, and nor are you, Deputy Premier. I will not tolerate points of order being used to make statements to the house. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker, and I share your lack of tolerance for attacks on Corrections Victoria staff. The Deputy Premier made, I thought, a very excellent point as he was explaining, because it clearly needs to be explained to the Leader of the Opposition, how the system works. When we reflect in this place on what Corrections Victoria staff do, they do work in dangerous conditions. They do work in difficult conditions. That is why I will not stand by and have these workers attacked in this place.

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The question was: how many? I ask you to bring her back to that point.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): The closure of Port Phillip Prison means the loss of 40 high-security hospital beds, which will mean more prisoners in public hospitals are alongside members of the public every day. Will the Premier guarantee the safety of patients and healthcare staff who will be side by side with high-risk prisoners in Victorian hospitals?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): In thanking and acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition for his question, I again refer to what I said earlier in terms of how we are going to respect – I will respect – the independent assessments that are made by Corrections Victoria staff. Those assessments are made –

Brad Battin: On a point of order, Speaker, this is specifically not in relation to the classification, on relevance. This is in relation to 40 hospital beds that will be closed in the prison system and therefore end up in the public health sector, taking away beds from people who need them in the community.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for a short time, but I remind the Premier of the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: These assessments are made independently, and they go into consideration also of the support and the protection for frontline workers. Only people who cut funding to hospitals would think the way the Leader of the Opposition does.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question again. It was very narrow about the risk being put to healthcare workers under this decision of the government.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not need to be reminded of the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: international students

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:14): Melbourne is ranked the best student city in the country, and that does not happen by accident. By working with our fantastic universities – some of the best in the world – and providing support and services through Study Melbourne, we attract students from all over the world to Victoria. I want to acknowledge those students who stepped up as our 2025 Study Melbourne ambassadors, helping other students to connect with each other and connect with the best student city in Australia: Melbourne. These students support the success of our international education sector, which employs some 63,000 people and contributes almost \$15 billion to our economy every year.

The Allan Labor government will always stand up for workers and our students at our world-class universities, but what we are hearing from the Liberals and Nationals is that they will slash international education. With Peter Dutton –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister needs to be factual, and the fact of the matter is it is the federal Labor government that is cutting international students and international education.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Colin BROOKS: Peter Dutton is talking about a flat cap on international students. I wonder if we will hear a peep out of those opposite, aside from points of order, to defend the 63,000 jobs from Peter Dutton's caps. I am not holding my breath, because they sat there for over a decade twiddling their thumbs and refused to stand up for Victoria when Canberra refused to give Victoria its fair share.

We know that international students that come to Victoria often stay, providing essential skills or setting up new businesses, and those who return to their home countries stay connected with Victoria, building stronger social and economic ties between our state and global markets. That means that the short-sighted, xenophobic caps that Peter Dutton is proposing would not only damage our economy today but deny our state –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the fact of the matter is that this is an Albanese government policy and will impact a \$15 billion economy here in Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Colin BROOKS: While those opposite continue to take their marching orders from a bloke in Queensland who wants to live in Sydney while he slashes investment in Victoria, the Allan Labor government will continue standing up for our students and the 63,000 people that rely on the international education sector.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit can leave the chamber for an hour and a half.

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:18): My question is to the Premier. The Labor government's new emergency services levy will see hardworking Victorians having their tax doubled and farmers

hit with a 189 per cent tax increase. Rural Councils Victoria is calling on the government to ‘abandon this flawed levy’. Why won’t the Premier listen to Rural Councils Victoria and abandon this dog of a tax her government is imposing during a cost-of-living crisis?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): I am very pleased to receive a question from the member for Brighton, because I have been a bit worried about him. We have not heard much from him in question time over the last five weeks. We have not seen much of him at the dispatch box asking questions over the last five weeks, so I am very pleased to see the member for Brighton has got a question up in his question tactics committee. I am particularly pleased to answer this question and say just how wrong the member for Brighton is in terms of the claims he is making in his question about the emergency services levy.

Bridget Vallence interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Evelyn, you are warned, and I do not give warnings lightly.

Jacinta ALLAN: The member for Brighton had a lot to say in the way he characterised this levy. The way we characterise this levy is protecting homes, businesses and farms right across the state by backing in our hardworking emergency services, career and volunteer, by making sure that they have the resources they need to continue to keep our community safe. I also say this to the member for Brighton, who has had a lot to say about this levy – he quoted Rural Councils Victoria and their calls about this levy: the Liberal Party have not said what they would do with this levy. They are calling on the government to do all these things.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: No, but you have not said you would abandon this levy.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 58, the Premier is required to be factual. We voted against the tax.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to continue.

Jacinta ALLAN: Let us be clear: the fire services levy that is in place right now and we are wanting to expand through these changes is what you opposed. That is what you introduced when you were in government, and it would leave emergency services like the SES without the support that they need. We think the SES deserve support. We have seen many members of the opposition go out there for the photo opportunity, standing there with the SES in their orange overalls. We want to do more than that; we want to back them. We want to back them because, you know what, those SES volunteers back us. They back us on the most dangerous of days; in windstorms and storms they back Victoria.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and the fact of the matter is that the volunteers will actually have to pay the tax up-front.

The SPEAKER: Order! I am not countenancing points of order on facts. I made a ruling on facts yesterday. There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: The fact is this: the opposition has not said that they would scrap the fire services levy, because of course they introduced it. We are wanting to say to all emergency services: you deserve our support because you support Victorians every single day. It just demonstrates once again to Victorians that we cannot trust this opposition. We cannot trust this outfit to do what is needed to be done to support our emergency services.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:22): The Treasurer has said that this \$2.1 billion tax hit is targeted at those who ‘can afford to pay more’. Why should any Victorians be asked to pay more because Labor cannot manage money?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:22): The member for Brighton is wrong because the purpose of this levy is to support the emergency services. Whether they are career members – like

those career firefighters who turned up on Black Saturday, the ones that the Leader of the Opposition attacked – or whether they are the volunteers in the CFA or the volunteers in the SES, we are going to support them. Every dollar collected through this levy is going to go back into those emergency services, because when you consider it, whether it is storms, wind damage, fires or floods, they are supporting us.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual. This government collects tax that goes to core government services.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: road projects

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:24): How good is it to have a partner in Canberra? Over the last couple of weeks I have been out and about with my federal counterpart Minister Catherine King announcing funding for important local road projects in our outer suburbs, all part of the \$1.2 billion suburban road blitz. We are supporting Victorian families by investing in the road upgrades our fast-growing communities want and need. We are able to do this because we have done the work to plan and sequence for a pipeline of upgrades across our road network – projects that will bust congestion and boost safety, getting families home sooner and safer.

As the members for Frankston and Carrum know, we have been improving road safety and improving connections in Seaford and Carrum, and nearby the member for Cranbourne is very excited to share with her community the huge investment we are making in Clyde. Last sitting week I was out with the member for Point Cook announcing a crucial upgrade to Central Avenue, which builds on our investments in Point Cook Road. On Monday I was out with the members for Sydenham and Sunbury to announce an upgrade to the Calder Park Drive interchange, and of course there are the works that will happen at Donnybrook Road. Not only that, we are investing in planning for future works too, like upgrades to High Street Road in Wantirna South, and Western Port Highway as well, because this ensures that we can continue to deliver long into the future.

On top of that, we do not neglect our colleagues on the other side of the chamber. The communities of Warrandyte, Croydon and Narracan will see what real action on congestion and safety looks like from a government that gets things done. While those opposite are backing more federal Liberal cuts in Victoria, we are out there delivering the projects that we know Victorians care about, no matter where they live.

Greenhouse emissions data

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:26): My question is for the Minister for Climate Action. Every few weeks we read of or hear about another climate-related disaster. We have had fires in the Los Angeles winter, there is an area in Queensland twice the size of Victoria under water at the moment, we remember the recent floods in Spain that piled cars high up at the end of streets and now there is a drought in western Victoria. But the most recent greenhouse emissions data from Victoria has only been published up to 2022. When will the government release data for 2023 and 2024?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:27): I thank the member for his question. The federal government publish climate emissions inventories and they periodically release the figures by state and across the country, and as soon as they are released, we will be glad to provide them. But can I just say, we do not wait for those reports to come out. We do not wait for reports; we keep doing the work to take us to the emissions reduction targets that we have set Victoria on a course to achieve. We are absolutely within the ranges that we have set for ourselves and our state, and we continue to do the hard work to ensure that we continue to decarbonise. We are decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, of any of the jurisdictions, and we will continue the hard work to achieve just that.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (14:28): The fossil fuel companies know exactly how much coal and petrol and diesel and gas they sell, and that is the vast bulk of our emissions and should be available in much shorter timeframes. The federal emissions data is available online up to March 2024. Does the minister know and can she tell us: did emissions go up or down in 2023 and 2024?

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:28): I thank the member for the supplementary question. I think they know the answer to it, but what I will say is that emissions calculations can go up and down depending on the measure that is in place. We know that emissions from land use within a particular period of time can go up and down quite significantly, which is of course reflected in the figures that are released. No-one can do anything about that, not even the magical pixies at the bottom of the garden that are the Greens party – no-one, no matter what promises they make. What I can say is that our government are absolutely within the range of our next target of achieving a reduction in emissions of between 28 and 33 per cent by 2025, and we achieved a reduction of 31.3 per cent in 2022. Our state is decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, and we will continue to do the hard work.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:29): The Allan Labor government is absolutely committed to building more homes for Victorians. Over the past 18 months this government has conducted the largest consultation and engagement with the Victorian community ever undertaken in this state, and the response has been enormous – more than 110,000 Victorians engaging with us and helping to write our *Plan for Victoria*. Ten thousand more participated in community engagement for more homes in our 10 pilot activity centres. The message is clear: we need more homes, we need them close to public transport, to services and to jobs, and we need them now. With every day, more and more Victorians, particularly young Victorians, are getting left behind, and it is just not fair. Decisive action is needed, and decisive action is what the Allan Labor government is taking.

Whether it is planning for more homes near our train and tram stations, kickstarting the townhouse revolution or getting on with delivering Australia's biggest housing project, the Suburban Rail Loop, we start now. Victoria's townhouse code will help make Victoria the townhouse capital of the nation, building more affordable, comfortable, sustainable and well-located homes right across Melbourne and regional Victoria. The Suburban Rail Loop will be Australia's largest housing project, delivering 70,000 homes in some of the very best locations, and there is our new train and tram zone activity centre program to build 360,000 new homes in places where it makes sense to build them. But all of these homes are under threat. The opposition home blockers are hatching a secret Liberal plan to overturn these important reforms. This is a politically motivated attack on more homes. I have never seen a group so eager to deprive Victorians of a new home. We will build more Victorian homes.

Commonwealth Games

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:32): Today this Labor government refused leave to refer –

Jacinta Allan: Who's it to, mate?

Sam GROTH: My question is to the Premier. Sorry, Premier.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Broadmeadows withdrew from chamber.

Sam GROTH: My question is to the Premier. Today this Labor government refused leave to refer an inquiry into the failed 2026 Commonwealth Games bid that would have compelled the Premier to

appear. Why is the Premier afraid of accountability and answering questions on the Labor government's \$589 million waste of Victorian taxpayer money?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Transport Infrastructure can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Glen Waverley can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Minister for Transport Infrastructure and member for Glen Waverley withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:33): I thank the member for Nepean for his question. As I said to the house yesterday and as I have said on previous occasions – and I will come to the number of previous occasions in a moment – it was the right decision. It was a decision that was agreed to by the committee and by the former Leader of the Opposition, and we are getting on and delivering more homes and more sporting infrastructure and attracting more visitors to regional Victoria as a result of our attraction program, as a result of the \$2 billion that is being invested right now in these benefits. In terms of the –

Sam Groth: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, the question asked why the Premier is afraid of accountability.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for 20 seconds. Premier, come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will give the member for Nepean a hot tip: I am certainly not afraid of answering questions from the member for Nepean. I will also say this to the member for Nepean: perhaps he missed an important part of the role of what we do during question time. You ask questions. What I will happily do, whether it is questions during question time that I have been asked or whether it is a number of appearances at press conferences where I have been asked questions on this matter, is go away and do the research, which clearly the member for Nepean or the Liberal Party cannot do, and add up the number of times I have been asked questions in this place and answered them on this very matter.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. She could answer some more questions and be accountable at the inquiry.

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, be succinct with your points of order, please. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:35): The Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery torched \$589 million of Victorians' money and was promoted to Premier, the Attorney-General weakened our bail laws and was promoted to Treasurer, the Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy left no legacy but debt and was promoted to Minister for Suburban Rail Loop, the Minister for Education oversaw the VCE debacle and remains the Deputy Premier, and the Minister for Police continues to oversee a crime crisis and chaos in Victoria Police and still holds his job. Is this what accountability looks like in the Labor government?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:36): I will say this to the member for Nepean when it comes to the work of my government: one of my proudest moments as a member of Parliament is the work that my team has done in passing the anti-vilification and social cohesion bill this week. If you want to talk about the work that we do on this side of the house –

Sam Groth: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, the Premier is not even close to answering the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for a few seconds.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was getting to the point of relevance, and it is this: we are absolutely accountable for what we do. I say this to the member Nepean: the former Leader of the Opposition

sacked from his party room a member who organised a rally where the Nazis turned up. Today they are led by a member who organised a rally where the Nazis turned up.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on both the question of relevance and the fact that the Premier cannot attack the opposition in answering a question, I ask you to bring her back.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier, on her feet, was being entirely relevant, and she is entirely able to draw contrasts between our government and those on the other side. Certainly no-one on this side of the house turned up to a neo-Nazi rally.

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, on the point of order and also *Rulings from the Chair* – your rulings, Speaker, at pages 54 and 55 – the Premier and now the Leader of the House in her point of order are using language that disparages colleagues personally and it is unparliamentary. I would ask you to rule that it is unparliamentary.

The SPEAKER: On the point of order in relation to relevance and not attacking the opposition, I ask the Premier to come back to the question. In terms of my own rulings – thank you for pointing that out, I am so happy I made it into *Rulings from the Chair* – Leader of the House, I remind you not to make disparaging remarks against other members in this chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was making that point because the member for Nepean's question contrasted the actions of individual ministers in my government, and we are proud to work as a team to strengthen hate laws, to have the toughest bail laws in the country, to ban machetes and to stand with our proud multicultural, multifaith and gender-diverse communities. You cannot say that about those opposite.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, finding 62 in the Comm Games report says the Victorian government avoided public accountability.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I make that point in contrasting the performance of the former Leader of the Opposition with the current one.

Ministers statements: workplace safety

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:39): There is no greater privilege than being elected to stand up for the rights of injured workers and workers that get up out of bed every day and go to work. That is what we on this side of the chamber are about, workers like those I got to meet with on Sunday: retail workers, transport workers, hospitality workers – workers that just go to work every day but face acts of intimidation, power imbalance and aggressive behaviour. That is why on Sunday I launched a new campaign with the support of the Victorian Trades Hall Council and a range of unions including the ANMF, the ASU, the SDA, the TWU, the RTBU and the UWU, public-facing unions that every day support their workers to be safe at work – like young Alex, who was pushed around for making sure a customer had paid for their items, or Chanel, an RTBU member who was sworn at while just trying to make sure a customer could get to the next train station.

It is not part of anyone's job to face acts of power imbalance, aggression and intimidation. That is why the Allan Labor government, through WorkSafe Victoria, has launched a new campaign called Don't Cross the Line. Everyone, no matter how frustrated you are waiting for that coffee or paying for those groceries, should always remember it is predominantly someone under the age of 25 that is helping you, and often it is their first job. So we are calling on our employers and our unions to work together to educate the community. This is a community issue. We know that after the pandemic and after a range of interest rate rises people are doing it tough, but there is never any need to cross the line. Support workers who are just going about doing their job.

On this side of the chamber we restored common-law rights. We voted down WorkChoices and made sure that WorkChoices did not become a part of our great nation. The Allan Labor government will

always stand on the side of workers – everyday workers, often young people with their first job. That is why this new initiative of WorkSafe will be running across all our media channels very shortly. It will support workers doing their jobs every day.

Constituency questions

Bulleen electorate

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (14:43): (1090) My constituency question is to the Minister for Agriculture, and I ask: when will the minister increase penalties for people who flout dangerous dog legislation, particularly when those dogs cause harm or death to other animals? Recently in my electorate of Bulleen in the suburb of Templestowe a 15-year-old was walking a small cavoodle along Serpells Road, in the middle part of that suburb. There were two large dogs, both Cane Corso breed, which is an Italian mastiff, off lead with an individual who did not intervene when these two dogs mauled the small dog being walked by the 15-year-old boy. This resulted in the death of that young man's pet dog. I have raised in this chamber before and I again raise the necessity of increasing the penalty in dangerous dog legislation, and I ask the minister to do so.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:44): (1091) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health and concerns the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department. Minister, how does the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department initiative support people in my electorate of Narre Warren South to access health care when they need it? The Allan Labor government's Australian-first virtual emergency department recently hit a major milestone, providing more than half a million consultations for urgent but not life-threatening health care. This government is always looking to ease the significant pressures on our hospitals and emergency departments, and it is important we free up our hospital staff and paramedics to respond to emergencies to help save lives. Of course 000 is still there in life-threatening emergency situations, but this VVED service, alongside Nurse-on-Call and our urgent care clinics, provides more after-hours care options than ever before. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:44): (1092) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. How will the minister address the disproportionate concentration of rooming houses in Morwell? According to the consumer affairs register, there are 17 rooming houses in Morwell, making up 106 bedrooms, but many suspect the number is much higher, with rogue operators not on the register operating unregistered and unregulated. Rooming houses have a role to play in offering housing to disadvantaged individuals, but the over-representation of rooming houses in Morwell is having a disastrous impact on public safety. These individuals, many of them recently released from prison, are being moved from Melbourne and pushed into Morwell because the rent is relatively cheap. Police have told me it is having a huge impact on their resources. The Business Licensing Authority, which is responsible for providing licences for rooming houses, is meant to balance the interests of businesses, consumers and the public when granting licences for rooming houses, but I would argue the BLA is failing to do this.

Bayswater electorate

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:45): (1093) Construction is well and truly underway on the new and safer intersection at the Alcester Village shops in Boronia, so my question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety: what is the latest update on when the construction will be complete and the new intersection open? I want to thank all of the residents and the community for advocating for this years ago, back when I was first elected to Parliament. We have now replaced the roundabout. Construction has removed and moved services, and it is now creating a larger intersection with pedestrian crossings at all legs, adding more capacity, which will make it more efficient. Importantly – I probably mentioned this – it will make it safer, considering the schools around it as well as the

shopping centre. I want to thank everyone for their patience. I want to thank all of the traders for their patience and understanding during these works. I am very proud that the Allan Labor government is continuing to make local roads safer.

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:46): (1094) My question is for the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier extend the exclusion zones around Port Phillip Bay beaches and do something about the safety risks associated with jet skis? Elwood resident Ernest recently contacted me about the lack of state government action to protect the community at our local beaches. As a swimmer he is worried about the physical harm from jet skis. As local resident Andrew said:

It's beyond a joke ... police and councils are lamenting they can't control jet ski behaviour, injuries and accidents are rising.

Ernest and Andrew have cause for concern. We know about the tragic death of swimmer Robert Brewster at Port Melbourne beach in 2012. As Robert's daughter Alexandra recently said, the jet ski driver:

... ran over him and didn't actually know he'd even hit him –

he –

just kept driving.

Many members have contacted the Minister for Ports and Freight and the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, who instead of taking action simply devolved responsibility to Parks Victoria. Premier, do something. Make a decision. It is time to act and keep the good people on our beaches safe.

Greenvale electorate

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:47): (1095) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. This week Peter Dutton and the neglectful member for Northern Metropolitan's Liberal candidate for Calwell went to Marnong Estate to announce a raft of cuts to rail projects in Melbourne's west. Marnong is located on Mickleham Road, a key arterial that runs through the heart of Greenvale. Despite literally standing on it, the Liberals failed to announce a single cent in funding for Mickleham Road, exposing their ongoing contempt for the people of Greenvale and the north. By contrast, the federal and Victorian Labor governments are jointly committing \$250 million to complete the duplication of Mickleham Road from Greenvale to Craigieburn, building on the benefits of stage 1, completed ahead of schedule, and delivering more road capacity to serve our growing community while reducing congestion, improving travel times and enhancing safety. Minister, how will Labor's Mickleham Road upgrade, stage 2, benefit residents in my community of Greenvale?

Mornington electorate

Chris CREWETHER (Mornington) (14:48): (1096) My question is for the Premier. What is the Victorian government doing to give Greek, Assyrian and Armenian Victorians, including in the Mornington electorate, hope by recognising the generosity and courage of everyday Victorians who came to aid survivors during the 1915–23 Ottoman Empire genocide, as has been done in New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia? The Mornington electorate is home to about 2000 people of Greek, Armenian and Assyrian heritage, many of whom are direct descendants of survivors of the Ottoman Empire genocide over 100 years ago. Around 1.5 million Armenians, 300,000 Assyrians and 250,000 Greeks perished due to death marches, massacres and forced starvation. From 1915 to 1929 the Armenian Relief Fund, established in Victoria, raised funds and aid to support survivors. The state government must do more to respect and honour survivors, their ancestors and these humanitarians, particularly with Armenian genocide remembrance on 24 April and Greek genocide remembrance on 19 May.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:49): (1097) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. One of the big hot-topic projects in my electorate at the moment is the Boundary–Derrimut–Hopkins roads intersection upgrade that our government committed to in the 2022 budget. For anyone travelling between Wyndham and Melton this intersection has been an absolute nightmare and prone to accidents. It is why we have put up permanent/temporary traffic signals at the intersection to regulate traffic as an important stopgap solution. It has been quite the journey working through outstanding issues, but locals will be very pleased to know that we now know what this intersection will look like, with two new turning lanes going each way, including a dedicated left-turn lane on Derrimut Road. For folks travelling to work between Wyndham and Melton in the morning this will make a world of difference in travelling around this area. My question for the minister is this: when will works commence on this critical intersection upgrade in my electorate of Laverton?

Narracan electorate

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (14:50): (1098) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I am asking when the minister will intervene and make the intersection of Hope Street and Nar Nar Goon-Longwarry Road in my electorate safe. There has been accident after accident, and even as late as Saturday there was another accident. On Monday there was another accident, where a lady and her two young children were in a car that was T-boned by a car. This is the most dangerous intersection in my electorate. I have brought this up at least half a dozen times in this chamber, and I am fearful that one day there will be a fatality. The local vet has had cars careening through his front fence. It is getting beyond a joke. It is an extremely dangerous intersection. I would like the minister to actually take some action on this, because the last thing I want to do is to ask the minister in this place, ‘Was that death avoidable?’

Ashwood electorate

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (14:51): (1099) My question is for the Minister for Local Government, and it regards some news I had yesterday about the early redundancy of Ruth, the crossing lady at Parkhill Primary School, who has been there nearly 30 years. Monash council in their wisdom have apparently decided even just last week or the week before to tell Ruth that she is no longer required as an employee and to possibly give her some other chances through an outsourced company. My question is: what steps can the minister take in regard to Monash council’s decision to end the service of Ruth, the crossing guard at Parkhill Primary? The community is up in arms; I have had many emails from many constituents. Ruth has been there, as I said, for nearly 30 years. She is much loved. At the very least, can we give her the courtesy of letting her see her time out as an employee at Monash? I would appreciate the minister’s assistance.

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, I have a point of order, again on a number of questions that remain unanswered for constituents. I have one adjournment to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; it is adjournment 1019, which is overdue; question on notice 1930 to the Minister for Water; question on notice 1972 to the Minister for Ambulance Services; question on notice 2078 to the Minister for Agriculture. And I have six questions to the Minister for Finance, and I have raised this point of order many times before: questions on notice 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086 and 2087. I would appreciate responses for my constituents.

The SPEAKER: Could you please hand the list to the clerks, member for Evelyn.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, noting it is the last day of the session, when the changes were made in relation to raising points of order on outstanding matters, there was an undertaking to constantly review the number of outstanding matters. I have just had a review myself, and there are a huge number of outstanding matters from ministers. I do remember that the Speaker gave a statement on the number of outstanding matters and did read those into the house. Considering

the number of outstanding matters and the fact that clearly ministers are not addressing them, could it perhaps be an opportunity on this last day to do so again?

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, I will take your point of order as a question to the Chair. I am happy to discuss this matter in my office with you later.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I did just raise a point of order in the chamber, not for a discussion somehow privately. I am entitled to take –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: Speaker, my point of order is that I raised a matter in relation to the management of constituency –

The SPEAKER: And I have responded.

James Newbury: If I misheard, I think you just said to please talk to you about it outside.

The SPEAKER: Indeed. You are welcome to come and meet with me in my office, member for Brighton.

Bills

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:55): Just to refresh, when I left off I was giving a lecture to those on the other side of the house that somehow think they get something for nothing when it comes to these particular programs. These programs are factored into people's power bills, so there is nothing for nothing in this world. That is another example that those on the other side somehow think that you can charge someone something or you can tax someone something and give it to someone else and then they think it is free. Nothing is free, and these are not free as well.

I also want to put on the record that I support the reasoned amendment that has been moved by our side of the house on this particular issue. To announce a review, to have it half finished and then bring in legislation before that review is done is illogical, not good corporate governance and not good parliamentary oversight. Let us have the review. Let us see what the review says and then talk about having legislation. When it comes to the review itself, I have also personally got some concerns about that. To have a government department review itself has no veracity. I just do not see how that is logical. The member for Gippsland East talked about putting the fox in the hen house. I think it is actually putting the poacher in charge of the game reserve, because a department reviewing itself is not fair dinkum. You need to have someone independent, someone from outside come in, so there is some veracity with that particular review. Because as I said in my contribution before the lunchbreak, it was a while ago and I would hope the systems are much better, but a lot of people had fridges magically turning up in a truck. Not only did they get fridges, but they were fridges that were not actually fit for purpose. Someone actually got the credits out of that; someone actually made money out of that particular program. So let us make sure the government goes back and gets someone from outside the department to do that review and, most importantly, makes that review public.

The government has a habit now of using every excuse they can, and we have seen recent cases at VCAT about getting freedom-of-information information, but the government uses every reason it can to make sure that if there is anything that comes out that may be in any way critical of the government, it is hidden. They do not want anyone else to see it, they do not want anyone else to know what the mark of their homework was: 'Let's stash it away. Let's make it so hard that someone can't find it or can't access it publicly so there's no actual scrutiny of this government.' I think the Labor government that we have now has lost sight of the principles of the Westminster system, where the executive

government is actually accountable to the Parliament. I would like to think that this particular review might actually be tabled in Parliament, rather than making it an interdepartmental review that, if it is damning, someone will walk through the cabinet process or attach cabinet-in-confidence to it. Let us make sure those sorts of reviews are actually tabled in Parliament so everyone knows exactly what has gone on there.

Others on the other side talked about how this is giving cheaper power to people, and how somehow there is this magic pudding where if you give people money that they have already paid for, it is giving them cheaper power. The thing that most people do not realise, I think, is that the huge investment in renewable energy and the huge investment that is going to go into VNI West through my electorate, through the member for Mildura's electorate, through the member for Lowan's electorate and through the seat of Ripon is going to be paid for by power consumers. It is not some magic pudding where all these powerlines are going to be put in to transfer power around this place to make renewables cheaper. It is actually going to be paid for in power bills.

I noticed that some on the other side, and the Greens, made comments about actually getting cheaper power because of renewables. The rhetorical question I would ask those on the other side, and particularly the Minister for Energy and Resources, is: if we are getting cheaper power through renewables through all these programs, why has the price of power gone up so much? Why have people's power bills gone up so much if there is all this cheaper power out there? There might be cheap power out there when no-one wants it, but when you actually want that power, you have to pay. So I just do not know where the logic is. Somehow we are being told we are getting cheaper power, but on the other hand our power bills are going up by a significant amount. The Minister for Energy and Resources is at the table and has made comments over time that we will see this happen. I am yet to see it.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (15:00): It is a great pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025, and wowie, that is a mouthful. Can I first just start by acknowledging and thanking the fantastic Minister for Energy and Resources. The minister for energy was actually out in the Bayswater electorate recently talking to some local businesses and hearing about the wonderful work that they are doing. This is not the first time the minister for energy has been out to Bayswater. I also had a visit with the member for Monbulk – the Acting Speaker at the moment – and the minister for energy, and it is always wonderful to have the good minister down in our patch in conjunction with doing all the important work outside of getting out into local electorates. That includes the detailed and important work to get this bill to this place for consideration and for debate. This is another important bill when it comes to the Allan Labor government's commitment to renewable energy and to driving down the cost of energy for Victorian households, whether it be in Bayswater or whether it be in all parts of our state. So I thank the minister. I thank her team and of course the department. I think it is very important to acknowledge the people who get the work done.

I want to acknowledge a few speakers who have spoken before, the members for Eureka and Mulgrave, who gave fantastic contributions to this place. And the member for Clarinda as well spoke fantastically and spoke about the importance of the Victorian energy upgrades program for his constituency. And I know that the member for Laverton, who is always fantastic on her feet, gave an absolute ripsnorter of a contribution. I always enjoy the energy and passion that she exudes.

I also want to just briefly touch on the member for Murray Plains opposite. I feel like for a moment he was channelling the energy I sometimes come into contact with on Facebook where people say, 'It's not free; it's taxpayer funded', and it is like, 'Yes, I know. I know.' There is a way that government works. You see, we have revenue and we have expenses. Yes, there are programs that are funded by government, and yes, there are ways that we take money in through revenue measures. And yes, of course the Victorian energy upgrades program is subsidised by the government. It is a fantastic program, a very successful program, and I think most people do not need the reminder that things that are run by the government are in part or wholly paid for by government. Think of free TAFE. Sure,

we could put a brochure out that says ‘taxpayer-funded TAFE’, but I think the idea people get, and it is actually easier for people who want to access that service to understand the message that for them there is no cost. But thank you to that member and to everyone who wants to comment on my Facebook about that. I look forward to receiving future comments and feedback on that exact matter.

This is a very important piece of legislation. I do not believe those opposite in the coalition are supporting this legislation. I cannot remember the last time they did support legislation that was energy related. There is always a reason. I am not sure what the reason is this time. I think I have heard a bit of it around the review, and I know there are sensible reasons why it is occurring as it is occurring, but obviously they have their views. They have found their angle, which is all good and well, but some of the reasons why energy legislation is not supported by our friends in the coalition – most of these people are here because they want to serve their communities – you cannot help but think are a little bit ideological. We hear the word ‘ideological’, and this legislation is about securing this program to help drive down the cost of energy and support Victorian households. We talk about cost of living and we talk about those important things, and yet those opposite cannot find it in their hearts to support this legislation to continue to support Victorian households and families doing it tough.

You cannot help but think it is ideological. When we talk about ideology, obviously we know the track record of our government, the Allan Labor government, and the previous Andrews Labor government, which has taken strong and bold action when it comes to renewable energy, when it comes to climate action and doing everything we possibly can to drive down the costs of energy through sensible policy in working with a range and raft of stakeholders and not ignoring the signs and not ignoring the facts as we see them. And we know as well, I will add, that we have got a fantastic partner in Canberra in the Albanese Labor government and energy minister Chris Bowen, a fantastic bloke. He is doing great work. I have thoroughly enjoyed his Instagram reels of late. I think for one of them he might have got the idea from me. I was not the first person to do it, but I am just saying I have inspired at least one other colleague in the country, so I am very happy to help. Chris Bowen is doing a fantastic job, he is a great bloke and obviously he has been a fantastic partner in Canberra.

But we know when we talk about ideological matters, we had 10 years of leaders getting essentially cut down – you had Abbott, you had Turnbull – obviously Malcolm is having a renaissance at the moment. He was at the press club the other day, good for Malcolm, good on you, citizen –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Bayswater has strayed a long way from the bill, and I ask you to bring him back to the bill.

Jackson TAYLOR: On the point of order, it is fair to say it has been a very wideranging debate, Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): I was about to say it has been a fairly wideranging debate, but I will draw the member back to the bill.

Jackson TAYLOR: Fair enough – talking about Malcolm’s renaissance is probably pushing the limits of wideranging debate. However, what I will say is we had 10 years of inaction in Canberra, and that has put us back. I thank the Minister for Energy and Resources for bringing legislation to this place in a form which continues to do the important work and that does not ignore the science, does not ignore the facts and supports Victorians and Victorian households. Essentially those 10 years were about delaying and blocking and delaying and blocking. You can probably easily argue that that is what those opposite in this place have done when it comes to energy; again, they are not supporting this legislation, which is disappointing. But we have now got a federal opposition led by Peter Dutton that wants to introduce nuclear power into Australia, which is –

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Indeed, shame, member for Point Cook, shame. However, it is interesting that at no point has Mr Dutton explained how it will reduce prices. At no point has he explained what the

future for industry is with nuclear in this nation. He has not explained how much waste there will be. I think he famously, or infamously – did he? – talked about it being the size of a Coke can. I think he did. Clearly that is not the case. Nuclear waste is a very sensitive and careful matter that deserves proper and correct attention, and Mr Dutton is absolutely missing in action when it comes to the facts of his ill-thought-out policy which is not backed in by Victorians, and it is not backed in, from my understanding, by any state leader in the country. Nor is it backed in by the Leader of the Opposition. I think the best we have got from the Leader of the Opposition is asking people for their thoughts – ‘What do you think?’ No state leaders want it. In the budget reply Mr Dutton made, he mentioned nuclear once.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: And it is illegal in Victoria. Thank you very much, member for Frankston, that is bang-on. Thank you for the – I was going to say fact check, but –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would like you to remind the member on his feet that it is unparliamentary to respond to interjections.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): It is out of order to respond to interjections, member for Bayswater.

Jackson TAYLOR: I am sure the member for Eildon will pick up every other member. She herself will not take up interjections in the Parliament, I have no doubt. Decorum is important, Decorum absolutely is important. I want to ask Mr Dutton: how much will your nuclear cost? How much will it cost? Is it \$500 billion? Is it \$200 billion? Is it all taxpayer subsidised? Like, what is the go, man? What is the go? It is just absurd.

Here you have in Victoria a sensible minister and a sensible government who are standing up for Victorians, who are getting on with the important work of seeing through our nation-leading, world-leading renewable energy targets and our storage targets. We are absolutely kicking goals. That is not to say we are perfect. There is more to do, but we will be sensible about it. We will not support nuclear. We do not want nuclear reactors in our neighbours’ backyards. I commend this bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:10): It has been a wideranging debate, but I am always more than happy to participate in a debate centred around energy and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. Because it has been such a wideranging debate, it does give me another excuse to put forward my community’s view on energy and the reasons, which the member for Bayswater asked about in his contribution, that we oppose energy bills. For this bill there has been a reasoned amendment submitted by the shadow minister relating to the review – and why wouldn’t you finish a review before legislating and amending bills? But like I said, energy bills give me an opportunity to discuss my community’s perspective.

Last Sunday the Speaker of the house and I participated in a Women’s Climate Congress panel around climate change and renewables. No-one is saying we do not want a cleaner, greener future; we just want it well planned and well done – right the first time. But this prompted me to reach out to a group that has come together out of necessity in the Wimmera and the Southern Mallee and up through the electorate of the member for Murray Plains, who was discussing the VNI West project – transmission lines to get the renewable energy that we are producing in the north of Victoria to the city. I reached out to this group, Farms for Food, and I have been talking a lot to this group. They advocate really well in a measured, considered, appropriate way. They do it so well. Like I said, this group has come together out of necessity, and they are very, very good. They are very clear in their messaging. I reached out to them and said, ‘If you could get something on the record, what would it be?’ I am going to refer to my notes throughout, because I do not want to leave anything out. What Farms for Food had to say was this:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I guess it's really about destroying the very fabric of our communities and lives. It's insidious and impacts us on every level. It's destroying the social fabric. People are divided. People are feeling disempowered and hopeless within their lives due to the uncertainty and the certainty exuded by proponents and hosts of projects. Mental health around uncertainty and certainty is a huge issue.

And it already is for farmers, more than you could ever imagine.

Business and property ramifications – how will our businesses be impacted, our homes, our future plans centred on these things? Health impacts – we don't want to raise families near open cut mines. Promises that the radiation levels will be contained are not reassuring.

Of course mineral sands mines are needed for the mechanics that go into batteries and a lot of mobile phones and a lot of renewable, cleaner things that we use and would need built.

An apology for broken promises won't bring back someone's health. Similar concerns regarding proximity to turbines which will be at a scale not built inland before. What of blade shedding, electromagnetic fields, transmission lines? Some of us are looking at all three of these things entering our lives – it's too much. People can only cope with so much, and this is too much.

We worry about the longevity and sustainability of our communities, as we have no doubt that people will feel forced to leave. There will be those who would like to leave but may not have the financial ability, and they are the ones who will be most hurt by the exodus from our towns – those services, businesses, people and vibrancy gone. It is appalling to think of what is likely to happen.

We worry about suicide rates. Never mind that our districts will no longer be farming districts. The landscape and environment will be irreparably changed. We have made the decision to remain and push back while there is some hope.

they still have hope –

But when it comes to the crunch, we feel we would have to leave, and that is devastating. We are committed community people whose families have been here for generations.

Leaving has its own set of issues. The loss of a community you are strongly tied to, the loss of proximity to family and friends, the loss of homes, dreams, hopes and a farming future.

It is going to create waves of renewable refugees who will experience anguish over what's been lost. We are most angry about what leaving would do to our children. They feel such a sense of belonging and connectedness within their community. Losing that will be hard on them.

Another concern is the future of agriculture and therefore the existence of agricultural communities and small towns under threat. The lack of respect for country towns and living the last true village lifestyle, where people are so connected and interconnected, is being fractured and wiped out by government and corporations on three fronts: property rights have been erased, land access, compulsory acquisition and caveats. Our highly productive food-producing soils are being degraded by industrialisation and mining. It should be protected for food security into the future.

Land banking – the government is allowing international corporations to buy up our farms for energy production, mining and tree plantations for carbon farming – our best land.

it is important to stress that; soil is really important –

As long as corporations are given free rein to buy up and put caveats over our prime farmlands, we will lose more and more farming families and therefore towns.

They keep saying our towns are in decline, but they are driving them to extinction through poor planning, money grabs –

and I will add poor policy decisions and a reckless drive to renewables without proper planning.

Lily D'Ambrosio: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I know that the debate has been wideranging. Notwithstanding the absolute sentiments that the member quite rightly holds on these broad matters, I really think it is important for us to come back to the aims of the bill, please.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Mildura, it has been a wideranging debate, but I will draw you back to the bill, as I did for the member for Bayswater.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:19): Victoria is proud to be leading the country in delivering climate action and transitioning to renewable energy. We are bringing back the SEC to drive down power bills and create thousands of jobs, and the Allan Labor government has legislated ambitious targets for renewable generation of 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035 and nation-leading storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. We have also legislated offshore wind energy targets of at least 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. These are critical in achieving our world-leading climate targets to reduce Victoria's emissions by 45 to 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and achieving net zero emissions by 2045.

Why am I discussing these? They are directly relevant to the subject matter that we have before us. I just want to respond because there were a number of aspersions cast about us reaching these targets: 'What have you got these targets for? Are you getting there?' Victoria is well on the way to meeting these targets. We have more than tripled the share of renewable energy since 2014 and are now generating 39 per cent of our power from renewables. I hope that allays some of the concerns raised by the opposition, but I must say if there is ever a reason to oppose renewables, they will find it. Let me tell you, they will find it. Every time we debate bills on renewables they will find many reasons why we should not transition.

I want to acquit some further queries that were raised. One was regarding the cost of certificates. It was alleged by the opposition that the cost of certificates would outweigh any benefits of transitioning to renewables. Let me just make a qualification to that. This claim compares the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) certificate price to the price of Australian carbon credit units, ACCUs. But ACCUs are a carbon offset scheme, not an energy sector efficiency scheme, so we have to be careful about comparing apples and oranges. I feel there was a little bit too much latitude in the comparison that was put forward by the opposition, so I just want to clear that up. Comparing the price of planting trees in outback Western Australia to the price of installing a heat pump hot-water system in Victoria just does not make sense. That comparison, frankly, is not credible when we are talking about the debate we have before us, so I just wanted to clarify that.

Also there were claims made about the VEU, and aspersions were cast about how it is able to put downward pressure on electricity prices. Of course the VEU leads to lower power prices even when you account for the cost of certificates – this is a very, very important point, so I really want to drill down on this – because it has a big impact on reducing overall demand for power and therefore wholesale prices. To put it simply, if we did not have the VEU, power bills would be higher. I hope that also allays some of the concerns, because that has been a continuous theme today in the opposition threads, so I just wanted to counter that with a factual rebuttal.

We know that the opposition have consistently opposed the VEU and tried to abolish it when they were last in government, which actually makes no sense to me when you consider just how popular it has been with Victorians. We know that since the project commenced in 2009 over 2.4 million households and 179,000 businesses have installed discounted energy-efficient products using the program and have seen the savings on their bills every day since then. I was reflecting on a visit I had with the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources. We went to Equinix in Port Melbourne, and through energy rebates from our government they have installed solar panels as far as the eye can see. They are actually futureproofing their company. They have done the math and they can see the economic benefit, let alone the environmental benefit. Even if you strip away any belief whatsoever in climate change – because the opposition appear to have zero belief in that – the economics simply stack up in making this transition, and the sooner you make it the better. It is really encouraging to see the investment of private industry. They get it, so if they get it, I do not know why the opposition do not. It is a little bit perplexing.

Another really strong and important element of the Victorian energy upgrades program is that it has created benefits for both participating and non-participating households and businesses through reduced demand for energy brought about by improved energy efficiency, which in turn puts

downward pressure on retail energy prices. Between 2021 and 2025 the VEU program avoided \$3.8 billion in energy system costs, so even those who do not participate in the program save on bills. There is a collective benefit, when we are talking about cost-of-living pressure, which is also at the centre of any energy discussion, whichever side of the fence you sit on, and you can see there is a clear and evident benefit for Victorian consumers as a result of the program.

Another criticism that was put forward by the opposition was about the timing of this bill. I do wish to speak to that also. Many of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 amendments – that is, the bill that we are on now – proposed in this bill are time critical and need to be implemented as soon as possible to ensure optimal outcomes for consumers and industry; in particular the amendment allowing interim targets to be set for 2026 and 2027 by 31 May 2025 and subsequent targets for 2028 to 2030 to be set by 31 August 2027 needs to be passed before the legislated deadline to set targets of 31 May 2025. This is so the VEU targets from 2028 onwards can consider any changes to the program as a result of the strategic review. Further, it is important for the Essential Services Commission as the regulator of the VEU program to have strengthened enforcement power as soon as practical to ensure the industry complies with regulations and improve consumers' protection and experience in the scheme.

I do question the opposition in not wanting these elements to be implemented. Why do they not want strengthened enforcement power? Why would they not want it as soon as practical to ensure the industry complies with regulations and improve consumers' protection and experience in the scheme? Now, you will notice I have repeated that point, but so many times they have again tried to find any reason under the sun to not pass this bill, to not pass reforms with regard to renewables and to not help Victoria move along even further in the transition yet again, yet again, yet again. Here we can see there are time-critical elements and hence a really important imperative to pass this bill before us, so I hope that has also allayed those concerns. I will give them the fact that they are creative. That is something, but when we are talking about Victorian consumers and the cost of their energy bills and the emissions that are being sent into the atmosphere, now is important. Now is the time to act, not sit on your hands hoping for a miracle or maybe just saying, 'Look, we'll burn those fossil fuels as long as possible and then we will just have to go nuclear.' I think that is more where the thinking is by those opposite, and that would not seem to be a terribly prudent or proactive approach when it comes to our energy market.

The other thing, because this is an economic question, as I said earlier in my discussion, is we know that moving from expensive gas appliances to energy-efficient electric ones will save Victorian households and businesses money on their energy bills. It is why we are providing support to make this easier and cheaper to do. There is logic here. We can see that. The VEU program provides discounted energy-efficient electric appliances through the Victorian energy upgrades program. For example, swapping out a gas heater for an efficient reverse-cycle air conditioner could see you getting a discount of somewhere between \$1050 and \$5000. This is real money, these are real savings and we are talking about Victorian consumers. They should be prioritised in this discussion. That is exactly what we are doing in bringing forward these reforms. I will go further. On a hot-water heat pump, the discount is around \$420 to \$1500. When you combine this with our \$1000 hot-water rebates through Solar Homes, you can install an energy-efficient – *(Time expired)*

John LISTER (Werribee) (15:29): I rise today in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. This is a vital piece of legislation giving real relief to families across Australia, and I thank the minister for her hard work in not only shepherding these changes through since she has been minister but also having the foresight to plan for the future. After spending a little bit of time with our young people at the YMCA event just before I know that this is a particularly important thing for young people that I represent in my electorate and that we all represent in this place. The Labor government knows that reducing emissions and cost-of-living relief go hand in hand.

I am proud to sit in a government which is working towards actual change and relief for Victorians, continuing towards meeting our world-leading climate targets and nation-leading action in the transition to renewable energy whilst delivering energy bill relief to countless Victorians.

Unlike the Liberal–National parties, who are going back to the 1950s with their expensive nuclear plans, this side knows that renewable energy is our future. This bill today is part of that support, working towards an energy grid in Victoria that is cleaner and will help lessen the effects of climate change and its resulting consequences in Victoria whilst delivering cheaper energy bills and supporting an energy-efficient transition for Victorian households and businesses.

This bill already builds on a lot of the work that we are doing around our energy efficiency targets and the original legislation which was done – it feels a bit retro — back in 2007. It is certainly retro for me. These amendments include extending the Victorian Energy Upgrades program from where it is currently sitting, at 2030, to 2045 – and I will get to talking about that later on today; introducing new provisions to expand the Essential Services Commission and their compliance and enforcement powers – given some of the concerns that those opposite have raised, I think it is really important that we are supporting that change; clarifying the intended operation of the existing head of power for prescribing activities in relation to additionality requirements to confirm the VEU program and provide incentives for the future; specifying circumstances where an action is required under another regulation or law; and introducing things like new mandatory training requirements for scheme participants.

Given the complexity of these sorts of jobs that they are going to be working on, where we are moving to electrification, this morning I met with representatives of the Electrical Trades Union and spoke to them about the complicated systems that they are now installing into our new homes, many of which are in my electorate of Werribee, and some of the challenges that they are facing. The changes that we made back in the retro year of 2007 and the programs since are already having an effect, with the scheme preventing 4.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in 2023 alone. Over 2.4 million households and 179,000 businesses have installed discounted energy-efficient products using this program. In Werribee alone over 26,000 upgrades have taken place as a result of this program. The 26,000 were not just to new homes; existing homes have been getting upgraded to make sure that they are the best they can be when it comes to energy efficiency.

This support has gone a long way in providing tangible benefits and real cost-of-living relief. We have heard the figure, and I think it is really important to reflect that \$3.8 billion in energy system costs have been avoided between 2021 and 2025. This has meant almost \$2 billion in annual bill savings for businesses and households across this state. I think it is important that, as recently as January, when I was out knocking on doors the main concerns that a lot of people raised with me were bill prices and the cost of living. These sorts of programs are ways that we can not only reduce our greenhouse gas emissions but also provide that support for people to go onto more efficient electrical systems which do not cost as much – as a lot of those good old gas burners – and make sure that they have that option. This bill forms part of that support.

I would like to add some figures about the uptake in Wyndham to further show how it is having support. In the Wyndham City Council local government area 99,519 households and 5099 businesses have participated in the program since it began in 2009 – retro. I was in year 11 – scary. Around 73,000 homes will have fewer cold draughts this winter due to installing weather sealing from support from the program. We spoke a little bit about renters before. This is really important because it means that a lot of those existing properties that are cold and draughty are getting that sealing done so they have less draughts and they are more energy efficient when someone is using a heater in the house. There have been 3085 upgrades in homes to energy-efficient heat pump hot-water systems. While I was out marching around Manor Lakes and Wyndham Vale and places like that knocking on doors, quite often I would come across these new heat pump systems, and I had a chance to chat to some of the people who were running them. They said that compared to gas, they are seeing savings when it

comes to their bills using this heat pump water system. 45,955 homes in Wyndham have installed in-home displays to help them track and manage their energy use.

While I have not had this same kind of system set up in my own property, I have been using a monitoring app that my energy company has provided. Even just being able to see when we are using energy across the day is really important, because it means that we can make decisions around those high-energy appliances that we might be using, like a washing machine, and be able to time that and also game the system a little bit and use the energy when it is cheaper at night-time or during the day, depending on what sort of arrangements you have with your energy billing.

There have been 58 space heating and cooling upgrades in businesses and 3356 upgrades in homes across Wyndham when it comes to space heating and cooling upgrades. There have been 4910 building-based lighting upgrades and 88,526 residential lighting upgrades. In 2025 around \$30 million will be saved across the Wyndham City Council LGA due to energy efficiency upgrades under the program. That is about as much as the member for Point Cook would recall is in his development contributions. That is \$30 million going back into the pockets of people in our electorates across Wyndham.

A member interjected.

John LISTER: It is huge, and I think it is really important that we do not support the reasoned amendment from those opposite, because it will cause delay. I will talk a little bit about what that delay would mean specifically for Wyndham in just a moment.

In Werribee the program has delivered \$34 million in discounts for households and businesses across the last five years, allowing thousands of homes to upgrade their appliances to cheaper and more energy-efficient alternatives. There are a lot of figures here about savings, but I think the most important thing to remember when we talk about these savings is that it is not just figures on a page and it is not just a program that you look up on a website, it is there and it is intangible. These are tangible differences. It means that more people in Wyndham are able to spend money on things like going out with their family or on school sport. It means that they might be able to afford some other upgrade in their house. It means more money in the pockets of business owners and residents across my electorate, and these savings are going back into other things. This is good economics.

I briefly want to talk to the reasoned amendment from those opposite. I understand the minister's office have addressed the sequencing of the review and their concerns around it. In growing communities like mine we need certainty. Subdivision and planning for precinct structure plans are underway, and those projects will break ground around 2030 when this scheme is due to end. A lot of those people doing that planning need to know whether or not these sorts of programs are going to be around when they are going to develop these new estates. It also means certainty for the industry when it comes to some of those things that they need to import or the costs of the products that they are bringing in or manufacturing here in Victoria. We need to have that certainty by extending the program. The review can occur while the program runs. It is already happening that way. We do need to keep this going. If we do not go ahead with this, it means that we have that uncertainty for businesses, and we have that uncertainty for residents who may want to use this.

This bill and bills like it are vital for a growing city like Melbourne and for my community in Werribee, Manor Lakes, Little River, Wyndham Vale and surrounds. We have seen that countless new and existing homes are taking up the cheap rebate opportunities, and countless more will follow through to 2045 should the program be extended, and it will be. I have spoken about what the program has done. There is so much hope and opportunity for what it can do for the decades to come. In concluding, I would like to reinforce that it is really important that we support our families through programs like this, and I commend the bill to the house.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:39): I am pleased on this Thursday afternoon to have the opportunity to make a contribution on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for

the Future) Bill 2025 and follow on from the outstanding member for Werribee as he departs the chamber.

John Lister interjected.

Josh BULL: No, he has not departed; he has just moved over to speak to some colleagues. Making some reflections, on listening to the member for Werribee's contribution and some of the reflections that he shared about doorknocking his terrific community, and knowing just how engaged and hardworking he is in his seat and in sharing those reflections of conversations with local residents on the doors, and understanding just how important many of the programs that the member for Werribee referenced in his very crisp contribution are, I understand the importance of these programs to local residents and to local communities, not just in terms of savings but in terms of those benefits that they bring to the planet and the environment.

This government has had the opportunity to deliver over the best part of a decade a raft of reforms that go to both saving those within local communities dollars and devising initiatives, programs, rebates and loans that help people with the cost of energy but also do good things for the environment.

I only reflect on what could have been if we had had some sort of federal leadership from Canberra from the former coalition government over the best part of a decade. Up there it really was a circus when it came to energy policy, when it came to making sure that we were transitioning like many other nations across the globe. Unfortunately we saw chaos up there, but fortunately we have moved on from that position. We have now got a team in Canberra that recognises not just the importance of transition but the importance of knowing and understanding the market, listening to those providers and rolling out a series of programs and initiatives that help people with cost and generation, and most importantly – or equally importantly, I should say – making sure that we are providing for a range of programs that incentivise the delivery of these programs.

The other reference I want to make before I go into further detail on the bill is to a visit just a couple of weeks ago the fantastic minister at the table, the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission, had with Adam and Effie in Sunbury. It was a terrific opportunity. The minister came to my community, and we sat down with Adam and Effie. To hear of their experiences was very important. What it showed – and we go back to that word 'incentivise' – was the delivery of the heat pump, solar panels on the roof, a battery, battery storage technology and the take-up of their family in this space. They very kindly shared their story with both of us, and it was yet another example of just how important these programs are and just how important it is to make sure that we are working with local communities such as mine, yours, Acting Speaker, and those right across the state to ensure that we are delivering a program and a series of initiatives that enable people to transition and to make these decisions. It was terrific to see that Adam has an app on his phone which tracks usage. We shared some stories around different points throughout the day, depending on who was home and what was happening within the household, with a couple of teenagers who live there and a very affectionate cat, who joined us at the meeting as well – it took a very strong liking to the minister, I must say. It was great to listen to those experiences.

What is important about this legislation is to be able to ensure that we continue to build on and deliver the strong pathway, the strong pipeline of initiatives delivered by this government. If you compare and contrast that policy position with what we have seen for as long as I can remember, which is a divided set of – you may call them policies – sort of half-baked positions from those opposite in this space, and the difference could not be more stark. That is to say that listening to science, understanding both global research and the incredible research that is done in our country in this space, shows the importance of such transition. It shows the importance of investment in solar and wind and renewables and battery technology, and making sure that we are providing for those sets of circumstances goes to what is required.

We grow as a state by more than 100,000 people per year. We know that to meet the growing energy demands, in terms of both efficiency and production, we need to continue to invest in this space. That is why it is really pleasing to have what is an incredibly strong pipeline of investment and initiatives that have been delivered over a significant period of time. Unfortunately, the 3-odd minutes that are remaining do not possibly allow me the time to be able to list the power of work that has been done within this space, but I think for –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Josh BULL: I could indeed. I might never finish, member for Frankston. What is important, though, is that the investment remains strong, the science is backed and we are incentivising at a local grassroots community level, at a commercial level and also at a large-scale production level all of those programs that I mentioned earlier and making sure that the provisions that are contained within this legislation are given safe passage through the Parliament. What is needed is certainty. We know that the changing mix of energy – the change within the market – and the provisions that are put in place are of course incredibly important. That builds upon that certainty that we know consumers need and desire, and it also makes for additional advancements in technology. If we take this back 10 years, 20 years, a couple of decades, we know, just like so many other areas of technology, things have changed incredibly. To think about what it may be in 10 years or another 20 years, it can certainly be something that we know both through the targets and through many of the programs that were mentioned earlier goes to the importance of that investment but also listening to local communities.

What I often love most about this role is having those opportunities to sit down with local residents and hear their experiences of what these programs have been able to deliver and understanding that there are pressure points and challenges for families in every single community. People have different programs within their own homes; they have different challenges and different needs. It is our role to hear those and to tailor many of those messages within the energy space and of course across all portfolio areas to make sure that we are listening to residents and enacting what will be a very strong pipeline.

In the final 30 seconds, as I mentioned earlier, I will finish where I started. We remain committed to making sure that we are increasing supply, driving down cost and ensuring that we work with and listen to local communities each and every day. This builds upon many of those initiatives that have already been and will continue to be delivered. I know that the hard work of the Minister for Energy and Resources, her office and the entire government are right behind this. I commend the bill to the house.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (15:49): It is always good to follow my good friend the member for Sunbury. He always gives a good contribution, so it is great to hear.

Cindy McLeish: Is it cheerio time?

Steve McGHIE: Well, we are getting towards the end of the sitting week and everyone is looking forward to having a bit of a break. But I rise today to contribute to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I want to acknowledge and commend the Minister for Energy and Resources, who is at the table, for introducing this bill, and her team that have done a lot of work on this. It is fantastic to see; thank you.

There are over 2.5 million households and businesses that participated in the Victorian energy upgrade program since it began in 2009.

The program provides discounts for the installation of energy-efficient appliances, such as heating and cooling systems, hot-water systems, induction cooktops, clothes dryers, fridges, freezers, TVs, showerheads and lighting upgrades. These energy-efficient appliances can help Victorians save hundreds of dollars on their power bills, and we also know it reduces our CO₂ emissions and that is one of the great aims of this bill. It reduces the cost of living for some of the vulnerable Victorians and

those with low incomes. What I mean by that is that it will assist them with these types of things, and it will reduce their energy bills and provide new appliances for them for greater heating, greater cooling and even better cooking, and far more energy-efficient appliances. There are benefits all round, to all families, but in particular those that are more vulnerable.

The Allan Labor government recognises just how important this program is. That is why we are amending the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 to strengthen the Victorian energy upgrades program and to extend that program through to 2045, in line with the government's net zero emissions commitment. It allows further discounts to be introduced in the future and will introduce new mandatory training for service providers. These measures will strengthen consumer protections, and they will ensure that more Victorians can benefit from this excellent program.

I have seen firsthand just how important the Victorian energy upgrades program is for the constituents of my electorate in Melton. With the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources I recently visited Ben and Joan Antony at their family home – what a lovely family they are. These long-term Melton residents installed a 10.32-kilowatt rooftop solar system with Solar Homes rebates, and they have made the most of the energy upgrade incentives, including draught proofing, heat pump hot-water systems, LED lights and showerhead replacements. They replaced their gas-ducted heating with reverse-cycle air conditioners.

Of course the Antonys are just one household of many in Melton who have taken great advantage of this program and these great discounts offered by the Victorian energy upgrades program. In fact almost 59,000 upgrades have been completed through this program in Melton over the last five years. I think Melton is one of the highest take-ups in regard to solar panels. Over the last five years, the 59,000 upgrades have delivered \$33.6 million in discounted appliances, and that is an enormous amount for my constituents. It has reduced the bills of my constituents by \$15.5 million thanks to these upgrades, and that is \$15.5 million of savings that can be spent by my constituents in other ways to support their families. That is an enormous saving in regard to these upgrades.

We all know that the impacts of the cost of living – we hear it a lot – are hitting Victorians hard. I would like to mention the member for Tarnait, who mentioned yesterday the many times I have discussed my concerns in here about the obscene fuel price gouging going on in Melton. It is something that we will get to the bottom of and we will have addressed. Maybe the ACCC will get off their hands and do something about it, hopefully. We have called on them and we will see what happens there. But our government has introduced the fair fuel policy, which is fantastic and will assist my constituents in Melton. There are other bonuses that we are assisting families with with the cost of living, like the \$400 school saving bonus, and we have just recently changed the public school uniform policy. This bill is about addressing cost-of-living support. I went to some of those figures and how my constituents have benefited from this over the last five years, and it will go on.

Melton is one of the fastest growing areas in the state, if not the country, and the projection on houses is that 109,000 houses will be built in Melton by 2050. That is more than doubling the house number that is there now, and I would make a fair assumption that most of those houses will be connected to solar, some of them will certainly have batteries, and a number will be instalments from this VEU program. This program supports more than 2200 jobs on an ongoing basis, and they are important jobs for people; it is important for our economy to keep people in work and for them to have the money that they need to support their families. Those opposite might not believe in the science of climate change, but their opposition to this bill shows that they do not support these workers and the 2200 jobs and workers that work in these positions to assist this program.

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Steve McGHIE: Well, yes. I mean, if you believed in climate change and that, you would believe in all of the jobs. That is what we are up for; it is not just about saving on the cost of living and energy bills, it is also about providing work for people to support their families and support their communities.

Of course on our side of the chamber we care everyday about Victorians and Victorian workers. How could you be against jobs and cheaper bills for Victorians? That is exactly what we are striving to achieve here. It drives long-term investment in the energy sector and creates jobs and many types of jobs. It is not just engineers and not just business managers, it is technical workers, tradies, clerical workers and administrative and sales force staff. A whole range of jobs will be created by this program.

Meeting our renewable targets and storage targets will deliver around \$9.5 billion and in the longer term around 59,000 jobs to Victoria's economy over the period 2023 to 2035, which is not that far away. So over the next 10 years we are talking about an enormous number of jobs. I know I have only got a short period of time to go, but there are some things that I really want to go to in regard to other things that we have delivered.

I will quote just some facts and figures. Since 20 October 2024, 48 per cent of electricity in Victoria has been generated by cheap, clean renewables, and that is what supports this program. That is exactly what we are delivering. I do drive in from the western district many, many times during the course of the year, where we have got the wind turbines, the solar panels and the solar farms, and we know that the transmission wires and transmission towers are coming to transmit that energy from the Western District and the south-western district into Melbourne to be shared by all households.

The other thing is that this energy program will save, as I said, on a family's energy bills, with households saving \$150 and businesses saving \$870. That is a substantial amount each year for families. We have seen on average the wholesale energy price drop by about 2.2 per cent, so there are great benefits from the introduction of this bill. It is a very important bill for our communities. I know my constituents will benefit from it. It is a great bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:59): I rise also in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I did worry that I would not have the chance to get on my feet. In fact I am grateful to the member for Melton, who offered to divvy up the time if we ran short. However, as Hansard will record, the opposition have run out of puff. Thus there are only Labor speakers left and we all have plenty of time. I will note the member for Brighton did fill his full 30 minutes, mainly by repeating himself at some length, but the final opposition speaker, the member for Mildura, did touch mainly on VNI West. I appreciate the passion and the views she holds on that issue, but as the Minister for Climate Action, who was the minister at the table, pointed out, it is a matter that is entirely independent of the bill that is before us today.

The bill that is before us today concerns of course the Victorian energy upgrades program, and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak directly about that. It is a very important – really a venerable – program now within our energy efficiency mix. It dates back to the Bracks–Brumby government and really paved the way for Solar Homes, the federal schemes that picked up on its initiatives and the full range of offerings that we have today. I think it is important to remember that back when the Bracks–Brumby government introduced the Victorian energy efficiency target, the VEU and the Victorian renewable energy target it was against the backdrop of a very high-profile national debate about the ETS and the CPRS initiative, which was led by then Minister for Climate Change Penny Wong. People in this place may know the Melbourne writer and scholar Dr Adam Carr. Dr Adam Carr has written at particular length about that infamous December 2009 vote in which two Liberals, Sue Boyce and Judith Troeth, a senator for Victoria, bravely crossed the floor to support the CPRS. Of course it was voted down, shamefully, by the Greens, in collaboration with the remaining opposition senators and Family First. As Dr Carr wrote of that vote, it was probably the single most harmful piece of short-sighted political opportunism in recent Australian history.

The result was that Australia would wait another 20 years to get the more patchwork carbon trading scheme we have now. It is a good scheme, thanks in part to the work of Minister Bowen and his recent amendments to the safeguard mechanism, but when we look at the VEU scheme, as the minister knows, you see the hope that was in it then. I think partly they would have hoped that that scheme would segue into a more comprehensive national scheme, and because of that vote by the Greens we

stand here today and it never did. But, fortunately for us, it is a huge credit to that government that they persevered despite the disaster – and I think ‘disaster’ is not too strong a word – that was unfolding federally with respect to climate change policy. What they did deliver was a VEU program that was essentially a niche carbon trading scheme for energy efficiency improvements specifically. As other speakers have touched on, the big advantage of that was not only did we get emission reductions but of course the people who participated got their energy bills reduced. I think the member for Point Cook argued very compellingly that all of us benefited from lower energy bills as a result of this program. I understand about 2½ million households and 180,000 businesses have participated. As we understand, when all those businesses participate and reduce their energy demand, all of us benefit because it means that energy that is dispatched in our national energy market is cheaper energy, and so average wholesale prices and therefore average retail prices come down. So we can see why the VEU program is such a strong policy both in theory and in practice.

It is effectively a win-win because it just deals with the tendency of most of us to be a little bit short term sometimes in our thinking. We purchased our current house a couple of years ago, and I know when I moved in I had grand plans of fixing up the garden, fixing up the bathroom and indeed implementing a number of energy efficiency measures in our home. Of course, as happens with all of us, these things that would most benefit you if you did them immediately you put off, even though in the case of energy efficiency improvements we know they would pay for themselves. But all of us can be a little bit short sighted, and the great thing about this program – the reason it is a win-win for everyone – is it just encourages all of us to get on the front foot, make these changes to the energy efficiency of our homes, drive down our own bills and in doing so benefit the broader community, who get both lower bills and lower emissions.

I think we should take great pride that the VEU program, which has been so good at that, survived what was a tumultuous period for climate change policy back in the late 2000s. We heard the member for Werribee talking about the fact that he was in high school at the time. I was a bit older, but those of us who do remember it well know that there was a great deal of pressure on this program. Part of that of course originated from the quite tragic circumstances around the home insulation program rolled out by the federal government, which was the subject of a subsequent royal commission. But there was a lot of pressure, and I think it is a huge credit to those involved that the program is still here today. It has been reformed several times and it is now a very strong part of our overall energy efficiency program, and it has, most importantly, reduced carbon emissions significantly. I believe when the program was first introduced in the early period of the coalition – I should say the Liberal–National – government we were producing about 135 megatons of carbon dioxide or equivalent thereof. We are now producing I think just over 80 megatons or thereabouts – a very significant reduction, down by 50 megatons or by 40 per cent or so – and this program, as I understand it, has been a significant contributor to that reduction. It is certainly a double-digit, possibly a 20 per cent, contributor to that very significant reduction.

We did hear a very strange conspiracy theory from the member for Brighton, who stood up here and claimed that emissions are up. I mean, they are not. They are down in the long term in the very significant way that I have set up. But he stood up and said they are up because of a minor fluctuation of a few megatons or so that has gone back up –

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Nathan LAMBERT: I can see the member for Eildon interjecting, but the overall trend is strongly down. As the minister herself had the opportunity to point out in question time, there are fluctuations related to land use and fires and floods and those kinds of things. Overall the trend is down, and the member for Brighton tried to claim that it is up and then tried to claim that this bill was a conspiracy to adjust our climate targets. Frankly, that was incoherent and wrong. I am not sure if the member had read the bill. There is nothing about our climate targets. Our government’s climate target of net zero by 2045 and the interim targets there remain exactly as they have always been. The targets in this bill, had the member read it a little bit more closely, are the Victorian energy efficiency targets; they are

separate. They are a subset, if you like, of our overall carbon target. And of course, as with all of the subsidiary targets, we will adjust the VEET to the degree that is effective in helping us reach our main target. So the idea that any adjustment to it is an abandonment of our main target is completely wrong.

The VEET supports the work that we will do to get to net zero by 2045, and it has done that very practically, as we know, by upgrades to lighting, and does so now in its new form. I think this particular bill is a good bill because it supports what we are seeing these days from the VEU, which is particularly supporting the installation of more efficient heating, cooling and hot-water systems. We know that involves more complex projects, and the reforms that we see here today support those changes.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I do want to give a shout-out to some of our local constituents who are very passionate about this area. The minister and I had the opportunity to talk to Tom and Lisa up in Reservoir East a couple of years ago now, who had removed their gas heating, their hot-water system and their stove with the support of this government. More recently the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action, Sheena Watt, joined us and we chatted to Debbie, who is up on Tyler Street. She had upgraded her solar panels with the support of this government, and she also had a great new heat pump made by Earthworker Energy Manufacturing Cooperative down in Morwell, who I do not know well but sound like a fantastic outfit for anyone who is shopping for a heat pump at the moment. And a shout-out, on that note, to Shane Clayton from the Electrical Trades Union, who I had the opportunity to chat to this morning, who is involved directly in the installation of these more complex pieces of energy efficiency equipment. He was very supportive of the policy that we have here in front of us.

Finally, Frida and Jack in West Preston I had the opportunity to talk to the other day. They have done a fantastic job. I think they have a new iStore 270 heat pumps. They have the full kit and caboodle. I think they have racked up over \$10,000 in rebates thanks to our Solar Homes program, the VEU program and the federal government schemes that are also available. I should say in completeness for Frida and Jack that they also raised the issue of the killing, as we know, of over 15,000 children and many other innocent civilians in Gaza as something they felt passionately about, but I think we were grateful for their hospitality and certainly grateful for their sharing their views on this matter as well. Were they here today, I think they would very strongly support what is being undertaken with this bill and would be opposed to the position of the opposition.

I have dealt with the conspiracy theory put forward by the member for Brighton, so I will not touch on that further except to note the opposition did try to abolish the VEU back in 2014, and it is good for all of us that they failed to do so. I commend the ongoing VEU program, and this bill specifically, to the house.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (16:09): It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to make a contribution in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. This bill is all about extending the Victorian energy upgrades program to be able to continue supporting Victorian families and businesses to switch to electric products. Since the program commenced in 2009, over 2.4 million households and 179,000 businesses have been able to take advantage of being able to install discounted energy-efficient products. The outcome of this program since 2009 is that everybody that has taken advantage of it, whether that be in a business or in a home, has benefited from cheaper power bills.

That has been the benefit of this program, and it has been a significant benefit. Uptake of the VEU, the Victorian energy upgrades, is particularly high in my community of Tarneit. I have spoken to constituents that have been able to take advantage of this program. What we know, and it is not deniable, is that electricity is far cheaper than gas at the moment. That is just a fact. When your gas appliance comes to its end of life – it might be a hot-water service or a heater – you are, through incredibly generous incentives, able to install an electric appliance. That may be a heat pump for your hot-water service, and it drives those bills down. I recently myself changed from a gas hot-water

service to an electric heat pump, and the reduction in your energy costs is significant. That is incredibly important in the time that we are in right now. We understand there are cost-of-living pressures that Victorian families are feeling, and to be able to cover a significant amount of the cost of changing that appliance but also the added benefit that you get from that reduction in power prices is significant for Victorian families.

I think you said it yourself just then, Acting Speaker Lambert: these appliances, through the Victorian energy upgrades program, pay for themselves and drive down your electricity costs. I have listened to some of the contributions throughout the afternoon, some from our side – including your own, Acting Speaker, which was incredibly informative – and some from those opposite as well, and it has become patently clear that either those opposite do not understand the VEU program or, frankly, they are just being disingenuous, as they typically are. The member for Brighton was in here earlier trying to claim that emissions have gone up under this government, which is just absolute nonsense. It is just disingenuous for a little grab on his Instagram or his Twitter or whatever he rolls with. It is frankly embarrassing.

This state, under this government, under this energy minister, has the most ambitious renewable energy targets anywhere in the country and some of the most ambitious anywhere in the world. The notion that emissions have gone up – since 2005 our emissions have dropped faster than any other jurisdiction in the country. We are leading the nation on this. Part of the reason that we are leading the nation on this is programs like the VEU. As I said, this is a great policy to support Victorian families with those cost-of-living pressures, but obviously it is also great for the environment. As our renewable energy production continues to ramp up, the use of these electrical appliances rather than gas appliances is going to be absolutely amazing for the environment as well.

To go to some of the numbers on this, swapping out a gas heater for an efficient reverse-cycle air conditioner could see you get a discount of between \$500 and \$1050. On a hot-water heat pump the discount is between \$420 and \$1500. That is a significant amount of money that can stay in the pockets of Victorian families to make sure that they can put food on the table, to make sure they can pay their mortgage or rent and indeed to make sure that they can pay their energy bills. It is a bit self-fulfilling.

When you when you combine this with \$1000 hot-water rebates through Solar Homes, you can install an energy-efficient heat pump for the exact same price as it would cost you to just change over your gas appliance. Like I said, I have got some experience with that myself, but people in my community of Tarneit that come and speak to me and that have taken advantage of this program are absolutely delighted with the outcome. They drive their power bills down and they get to keep between \$500 and \$1500 in their pocket to spend on themselves and their family.

What we do know is that the last time that the coalition were in government here in Victoria they tried to scrap the VEU. They tried to scrap the VEU in 2014, unsuccessfully, thank God. Imagine Victorian families not having the capacity to get the assistance they need to change over their gas appliances. We know that they tried to scrap it, and we know without a shadow of a doubt that that is what they will do again. We have heard them all afternoon, time after time, trash the VEU and heard them be, frankly, pretty disingenuous around some environmental facts. We know if they are elected in 2026, this program will be gone. Victorians that need that support with cost-of-living pressures when their appliances come to end of life will not be able to access these incredibly generous incentives. It is bad for Victorians, it is bad for working families, it is bad for your hip pocket, but it is absolutely disastrous for the environment.

We would have a situation where we had no VEU and you could not access those incentives. But we would also have a situation where the choice to move from gas appliances to electric appliances would no longer be incentivised, so people would not make the choice. People will not be able to afford to make that choice. They may be incredibly environmentally conscious, but they just will not have the money in the bank to be able to do it. Then we will see a bit of a halt in the reduction of emissions. We will see emissions higher for longer. And then what we will see is that we will need significantly

more gas exploration. Depending on who you speak to and what experts you listen to, we are running out of gas in Victoria in both the Otway Basin and the Gippsland Basin. I have said it in this place before, that is all the incredibly gas-happy mob over there talk about when we talk about energy. If you cannot get any more gas offshore, then where do you have to get it from? You have got to frack it, don't you? If you want to have a local gas industry, because you want every appliance in Victoria to be gas –

Cindy McLeish interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: and you run out of it offshore, member for Eildon, there is only one other place to get it, and that is onshore and that is through fracking. We banned fracking years and years ago because it destroys our local environment; it destroys agricultural land. What we know is that if this mob get elected in 2026, they will hurt Victorians –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, without using the word that is not allowed to be used because it is unparliamentary, beginning with 'I' and ending in 's', I caution you with the facts that this member is coming out with – it is absolute garbage.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): That is not a point of order, member for Eildon. The member has completed his contribution.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (16:19): I rise, after that great contribution, that very factual contribution of the member for Tarneit, to speak in support of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. The Victorian Labor government has done so much to assist in the transition to renewable energy. This legislation and the amendments it makes continue that progress.

Just going through what the original bill itself is all about, it is trying to take measures to incentivise the reduction of any energy consumption in the first place and also to reduce fossil fuel generated energy – gas and electricity – by incentivising households and businesses to switch to renewable sources. In most cases that is solar. This is all about helping us to meet our climate change targets, but it is also about reducing the cost of energy to households.

I talk to residents in the Thomastown electorate about some of the up-front costs. For example, solar panel installation on your roof or even heat pump hot-water services do have some expense up-front, and often people just cannot afford to outlay that money in order to then, over the years to come, reduce their energy bills. These sorts of programs are all about making the switch much more affordable so that all families and households are able to take advantage of the cheaper renewable energy. I know, for example, my mother is a very good case. She has a unit in the City of Darebin, actually, and while she was not entitled to any of these rebates at the time, she just replaced an old gas ducted heating system with electric. Honestly, hundreds of dollars have come off her bills. I think her gas bill now with just hot water is \$80, but the electricity with her solar panels as well means she is paying very, very little in energy bills. Being on a pension as a retired member of our society, of course any savings that she can make in any area really do help her in ensuring that she can still enjoy a good quality of life and have enough to be able to do all the things that she would like to do.

This is an amendment, and basically it is to ensure the program is extended. While a review is being undertaken into the scheme to ensure that it is being used in the best way possible, there is a shorter period provided, two years rather than five years, to make sure that there is certainty for all those involved in and affected by these schemes going into the future.

I would like to give a few examples of what has happened under the program so far. Something like 179,000 businesses have installed discounted energy-efficient products using the program, and that has been done to over 2.4 million households. Since the program went all electric in 2023 it has delivered rebates of 19,000 reverse-cycle air conditioners and 39,000 hot-water systems, which it has been calculated has saved 28 million tonnes of emissions. So this program really is very successful in

reducing emissions as well as making it cheaper for households to make sure that they can still keep their heaters going and have their hot water and not get to a point where they cannot afford it anymore.

In the past I know Liberal–National Party governments have done nothing in order to either reduce energy bills for households or address one of the biggest threats in our time, which is climate change. We know that this takes all sorts of manifestations, whether it is extreme weather events, flooding or bushfires. All of these things of course then cost a lot of money. Not only does it completely disrupt and devastate people’s lives, but it is also a huge cost to clean up. So we really do need to make sure that we are doing all we can as a society in Victoria and across Australia to reduce emissions and therefore do not continue the spiral downward in terms of the threat of climate change.

As I said, the Liberal opposition has never, ever taken any action on this. I know, for example, when they were elected in Victoria in 2010 they pretty well banned wind turbines, without any other incentives or supports for any other programs. This, at the time, devastated the fledgling industry. We have probably lost a lot of opportunities in industry development because of what the Liberal–National opposition did or did not do – their inaction – during that time in government. It is very similar federally, so thank goodness there is an Albanese Labor government. I think we can all feel much more confident in the future when it comes to addressing climate change and in trying to make sure that future generations in our country and across the world are looked after in terms of us taking action on climate change. This is going to happen, and I would absolutely be frightened of a Dutton-led government if we have to look at addressing climate change, because it just will not happen. There are these ridiculous ideas about nuclear – ‘How far away will it be? How much will it cost?’ – when of course we have got such cheap options now when you look at solar and also wind-generated electricity.

This legislation is extremely important. As we know, as time goes by legislation should be in a sense a living thing that has to move and change and evolve in order to address whatever we are facing at the time. Now the big steps are towards electrification in all manner of things because gas as a fossil fuel is both finite but also becoming more and more expensive. While I know the member for Tarneit was talking about where the opposition would go in terms of saying that gas is the answer, not only is there then the threat of fracking and, as he explained, the dangers to farmland and everything else, but it is also the problem that if it is not being fracked, it would have to be, what, imported? The infrastructure and the cost of importing gas would mean that, again, Victorians are destined for huge prices, huge costs, in order to secure the gas that they need to run their heating and essentials of life.

The much better alternative is to incentivise people making that switch so that in some ways they have control over their own destiny. We can actually generate the energy from our solar panels on our own roofs, and hopefully we can also install batteries as the prices of those come down and they get better and better into the future. We always need programs to also give that certainty to industry so they will actually start investing in innovative programs and products that will address or reduce the cost of renewable energy. We also hope to develop good, strong industries here in Victoria. That also needs that certainty that there will be demand for it, and we can do that as a government by continuing to incentivise and encourage residents to move to renewable energy.

This is such an important piece of legislation. It is about making sure that we continue to do the work and build on the work that has been done. Since the state Labor government was elected in 2014 there have been so many different programs, so many different actions taken, to ensure that we do have a better world for those coming after us and to ensure that we have a good, strong and secure energy supply. That is all based on renewable energy that is also clean energy.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (16:29): I am very pleased to rise today to speak on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. From the outset I would like to acknowledge the very hardworking Minister for Energy and Resources and her incredible team for the work that they have done with this bill. I do not think the minister for energy stops. The amount of legislation that we have seen come to this Parliament in the energy space looking at Victoria’s energy future, building the frameworks and infrastructure and support that will help us with the

transition to renewable energy, has been phenomenal. As I say, I do not think the minister for energy ever, ever stops. Her contribution to this Parliament and to Victoria's energy future is immense.

This is an incredibly important bill that supports Victoria's energy future and our transition away from fossil fuels like coal and gas to clean green renewable energy. This bill will amend the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 so that the Victorian energy efficiency target scheme, which is known as the Victorian energy upgrades program, can continue to support energy efficiency in Victorian households and businesses alike. The bill does this by extending the operation of the VEET scheme to the end of 2045, allowing the Victorian energy upgrades program to deliver incentives for mandated upgrades, increasing the flexibility of Victorian energy efficiency certificate surrender deadlines and providing the regulator, the Essential Services Commission, with a range of new and expanded enforcement tools to encourage and enforce compliance with the act and regulations made under the act.

On this side of the house we are so proud of our government's nation-leading agenda when it comes to transitioning our energy grid to a more renewable, more sustainable and cheaper network for businesses, households and communities. On this side of the house we have a plan. We have a plan for renewable energy, and communities are embracing it. They are embracing it because it is supporting households with the cost of living by driving electricity costs down. They support it because it supports our environment by reducing emissions, and these are things that Victorians care deeply about. In contrast to that, those opposite have no plan when it comes to renewable energy or how to drive down electricity costs. Instead all they are thinking about is nuclear, and nuclear power is something that my community absolutely says no to. We do not want it in the Lara electorate. In fact we do not want it anywhere in Victoria. We have heard some really disturbing plans for a proposed nuclear power site down at Anglesea, which is very close to us in the Geelong region, and that is something that residents in my electorate of Lara just do not want to see.

Last year the government kicked off a review of the VEU program, which was aimed at better supporting Victorians in cutting their energy bills by transitioning to electric solutions, and what this bill today will do is provide clarity for households and the industry while that review is in progress. The reforms will enhance and extend the program to ensure it effectively assists even more Victorian homes and businesses in electrifying and boosting their energy efficiency. The VEU is evolving to remain a key component of our climate and energy strategy, and today's bill is an important piece as we work to strengthen the scheme to tackle the current challenges facing households and businesses.

The Lara community recognises the savings that can come from moving away from expensive gas appliances to energy-efficient electric ones, and community members are so grateful that this Labor government is supporting programs that support this transition and make it easier and cheaper to do this. Thanks to the VEU program, for households that are needing to upgrade a hot-water heat pump there is a discount of around \$420 to \$1500. When you combine this with \$1000 hot-water rebates through the Solar Homes program, you can install an energy-efficient heat pump for no more than what it would cost to install a gas one and you can be saving money on your bills from day one. This is an incredibly important program for electrification across the Geelong community. Having spoken with my colleagues the member for Geelong and the member for Bellarine, we know that communities right across the Geelong region are really embracing this. They are embracing the ability to install a more efficient hot-water system at home. They are embracing the ability to install solar panels on their roofs, which we know helps drive down those electricity costs. Our role as a Labor government is to do everything that we can to support residents to ensure that they can do this, to ensure that it is affordable, and that is exactly what the VEU program is delivering.

Everyone in this chamber will know that this government has the most ambitious goals in Australia when it comes to renewable energy, and this bill will go to supporting those goals. The state Labor government has set ambitious renewable energy targets. We are aiming for 65 per cent renewable energy generation by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. Additionally, we have established storage targets

of at least 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035 alongside offshore wind energy goals of 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040.

These initiatives are vital for reaching our climate goals, which include reducing emissions by 45 to 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, 75 to 80 per cent by 2035, and achieving net zero emissions by 2045. When I speak to people in the community about this they are just as excited as all of us are on this side of the house about those emissions reduction goals, and they understand the value of reducing emissions and what it means for people's health and wellbeing and the health and wellbeing of our environment. I am proud to say that we are making significant strides towards these targets, having more than tripled the share of renewable energy since 2014, with our current energy generation in Victoria standing at 39 per cent from renewables – 39 per cent. That is massive. That is something that Labor governments would deliver and something that those opposite would never even consider.

Our government's offshore wind targets are also leading the nation, and our government's plan to bring back government ownership of energy generation by bringing back the SEC, which those opposite cut, will create thousands of jobs building new renewables like wind, solar and batteries. Importantly, any profits from the SEC will go straight back into keeping bills down for Victorians. I think it is safe to say that Victoria is at the forefront of a significant energy transition. In fact retail power prices in Victoria are at the lowest in the country and are projected to keep falling into the future. That is because of this Labor government's robust investment in renewable energy, which is driving down wholesale power prices in Victoria, making them consistently lower than those in other states.

In the electorate of Lara and in the wider Geelong community we are seeing some really exciting projects taking shape. For instance, the 300-megawatt Victorian Big Battery is providing essential energy to the community during peak times. Pavilion Farms in Anakie are also making strides with their biogas project, aiming to turn 30,000 tonnes of chicken litter and organic waste into renewable energy and eco-friendly fertiliser. Just last week we saw a new approval on the Barwon solar farm, which will deliver solar panel energy to Victorian homes. In Geelong we have the Geelong Tech School, funded by a Labor government, which serves as a hub for STEM education essential for fostering a circular economy and educating students about the jobs of the future in renewable energy. Our government has implemented these various programs to help residents transition to more sustainable homes, and many locals have shared with me their positive experiences with solar rebates, hot-water rebates and solar battery loans. Over the past eight years we have more than tripled the share of renewable energy in power generation and provided over 300,000 rebates through our Solar Homes program.

In Geelong we are also supporting Geelong Sustainability, a remarkable organisation who are running impactful community initiatives like their climate safe rooms and electric homes program, and I really do want to thank Geelong Sustainability for the leadership they are taking in this space and for their focus on supporting households who might not have otherwise been able to afford these important energy upgrades. At Cloverdale Community Centre we have invested in solar panels on their roofs to help them keep their bills down, and we have invested in electric car charging stations to support the City of Greater Geelong as they transition to an all-electric fleet.

When you look at all of this investment and the VEU program, it is not hard to see why the community is grateful for our government's investment into these areas. When I am speaking to the community in Lara I hear how these programs are making a real difference to them and making a real difference to their energy bills. Our government is dedicated to helping Victorian families and businesses cut down their energy costs, and the VEU program is a big part of making that happen. Since it started in 2009 we have seen 2.4 million households benefit and 179,000 businesses, and I am so pleased that we are introducing legislation today to support the VEU program into the future.

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (16:39): I am very happy to rise on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. I would say as a note for the most part today we have all stayed pretty much on the bill, which has been a good job for us. I will endeavour

to do the same, as no doubt you would want me to. I think there were some contributions from the other side that took some statistics from a certain point of view. I have no ability to say that some of the things they were saying were absolutely wrong, but I do think they started timing some of their numbers from, ‘Oh, we’ll just go to there because that’s convenient. We won’t go before that.’ I do think there were some little games with numbers at play at times. Well, we are all in here to debate, so all is fair in love and war.

I think as a general standard it is fair to say that over the 11 years of the government, the Andrews–Allan government, our minister has worked tirelessly and very effectively to not only lower our carbon footprint, lower our emissions as a state and encourage the electrification of our state but encourage the sustainability of our state. All of these things are entwined, and the VEU program that we are discussing today is a major part of that. I would argue that Victoria, with a mix of the VEU, the default offer, and our investments into solar, into big batteries and into our sustainability mechanisms is years ahead of the other states. Our energy prices are lower than the other states, and yes, prices do go up across the board – in a cost-of-living crisis we are going to see prices go up.

I noticed an article in the *Age* recently, I think it was a couple of weeks ago, and I do not remember the exact words – allow me to paraphrase – but the headline was something like ‘Power prices going up: very, very bad.’ When you actually read the article, when you got into the weeds of the article and got past the headline, it was, ‘Oh yes, Queensland’s prices are going up by a significant percentage, New South Wales’s are going up by a significant percentage.’ I think Tassie’s were going up by quite a lot too, but Victoria’s were only going up just by a little bit. Hang on a second, they missed that in the headline. The default offer is part of the reason that our prices are lower, and the VEU program incentivising people to electrify their homes and put solar on their roof with a Solar Homes package is part of the reason that our prices are lower than other states. It is very hard to argue against that. I mean, I am not saying it cannot be done, but I do not think it is right.

In my patch there is a wonderful mob – and I know the member for Kew is at the table and I think the member for Kew has been involved with them at some level – a community-led organisation called Electrify Boroondara, which is a fantastic organisation. Yes, she is nodding; we are all on the same page on this – I love a bit of bipartisanship, it is very handy. This is a grassroots, community-led organisation with one purpose, and that is to spread knowledge of the effectiveness of the electrification of people’s homes – to effectively get people off gas usage and off fossil fuel usage as much as possible and into electrified homes. They have had a couple of years where they have their big expo, I think later in the year, and I am sure I will be there with bells on and I reckon the member for Kew will be there as well. I do not want to put words in your mouth, member for Kew, but let us all stick together on this one. The minister was there last year with Saul Griffith, and we were all talking about the same thing. The VEU program is an incentive for people to not only get the benefit of electrification, so we do not need to use fossil fuels as much overall and we have more solar panels on roofs, we have more heat pumps, we have more induction stoves for those who want them – yes, nobody is taking your gas cooker away, that is a bit of fear mongering there from *Herald Sun*; thank you, media. The VEU program enables people who may not have the financial independence to do it themselves to get assistance from the government, because we all benefit.

Just last week the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources joined me in my area and we visited two people who were along that journey. Russell showed us his electrification journey. He is quite a long way through. He was an early adopter of solar when people were getting very high tariffs – I think it was 60 cents, and that was awesome because they were making money. Obviously the feed-in tariffs have gone down because there is so much more energy coming to the grid; that is the way of supply and demand. Recently, as those contracts were coming up, he put more solar on his roof, he changed his hot-water system to a heat pump system and he recently installed a battery. He has still got to do his space heating, which is the next thing on his list, but his energy prices are much cheaper. His carbon footprint as a household is much lower.

For those that can afford to do that, you are going to save money. I know from my own experience in our house – and I have spoken about this before – we had a gas-ducted system in probably the 1970s or 1980s, whenever it was originally installed. It had been on the blink and it was costing us money every year to keep it rolling along. We said, ‘That’s it, we’ve got to replace it,’ and we did the numbers on replacing like for like or going to a heat pump system under the floor. It was expensive, but when we did the numbers, it paid itself off after about a six- to eight-year period. That is not going to work for everyone, I understand that, but for us it works because we are not planning to go anywhere – they can take me out in a box. Over that eight-year period it will pay for itself. Then after that, it is power for nothing, essentially. If I had not changed, I would have been paying more and more and more and more. We also met Jenny last week in my patch. She had out all her bills as she has gone along that electrification journey, showing how much money she has saved.

Without the VEU program what would essentially happen is those people who could afford to spend bigger money in their households would save more money, and those who were not as affluent would not be able to do the upgrade. The incentive is not only good for the household but also for all of us. Even just moving your halogen lights over to LED lights, when we did that a number of years ago I think we saved about a thousand bucks a year just from that. All those little things add up and decrease our electricity usage and decrease our gas usage.

I am running out of time, but I will just quickly respond to something the member for Hawthorn said. I do not want to verbal him, but if I have got it right, he was talking about that the government has a plan to transition away from gas but the government still needs gas and this is somehow conflicting. If he was posing a question in that, I think the answer is that the state will need gas for a long time. Bass Strait is not producing and is unlikely to produce as much as it has. Getting gas from Queensland is not easy. We are talking about import terminals. We will need gas for industry, we will need gas for power, but we do not need to use the gas we have to heat the space in our rooms. It is cheaper to use electricity to do that, and the VEU program not only helps households get to that point but it helps our whole state have a better use of our energy in general, including of gas. This is a good bill and this is a great program. I commend the bill to the house.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (16:49): It is a pleasure to rise in favour of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025, and from the outset I would like to thank the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action and her team for their efforts in bringing this important legislation to the house.

I am particularly pleased to speak on this legislation to highlight the incredible work the Allan Labor government has been doing to secure a sustainable and energy-efficient future for Victoria. We understand that we must secure a just and viable transition away from fossil fuels such that we are reliably powered by clean forms of energy. Boldly legislated renewable energy targets of 25 per cent by 2020, 40 per cent by 2025, 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035 in conjunction with offshore wind generation targets of 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040 have established an ambitious framework for the government to work towards. Alongside our energy generation targets stand our energy storage targets of 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. The cumulative capacity delivered by these targets will provide affordable and clean energy while also delivering some \$9.5 billion and around 59,000 new jobs within a 12-year period.

These aims are directly related to the substance of this bill, which seeks to modernise Victoria’s energy legislative framework. A transition of this scale means there will be new and different challenges that must be faced; therefore, to ensure we effectively address contemporary issues surrounding safety, efficiency and the protection of people and the environment, these reforms are necessary. As we all experience the cost-of-living pressures and the energy bills which contribute to that stress, it is important that we take measures to save energy and costs. It is recommended that lights and electrical appliances are switched off when not in use, globes are switched to LEDs, doors and curtains are closed and roofs are insulated. Transitioning from outdated gas heating and cooling systems to an upgraded and modernised electric system also saves money.

The Victorian government is also aiding in this process through the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program, an initiative which between 2022 and 2025 will save some 28 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. By moving to efficient reverse-cycle air conditioners households can save up to \$2940. Those transitioning to an efficient ducted reverse-cycle air conditioner can save up to \$5460. The discounts are applied with the VEU-approved product is installed through an accredited supplier, ensuring quality and safety.

Additionally, to get the best deal on their bills, Victorians can access the Victorian Energy Compare website, a free and independent energy price comparison tool. Over the years, I have been able to do many a cost comparison for my constituents during the period of the \$250 power saving bonus. The issue is that many people do not realise this tool is there to provide a good comparison. Often they will find that a better deal is available to them, but then they have got the issue of having to contact their provider and spend too much time on the phone. One lady who had some hearing difficulty and could not actually use a phone came into my office. I spent 3 hours and 30 minutes trying to get that constituent a better deal from her energy provider and also manage some other matters around credits that were on her account and things like that. But this tool is there for Victorians to ensure that they are getting the best deal they can from their retailer. Offering comparisons of more than 20 retailers, it helps people find the best and most appropriate deal for them. It is calculated that users can save some \$330 a year on energy costs through this website.

Whether it be in investment in wind, hydrogen or solar, the decisions we make as a government also have sizeable implications for the energy prices that Victorians pay. This January the Australian Energy Market Operator released a report confirming that Victoria continues to have the lowest wholesale electricity prices across Australia. With a national average of \$88 per megawatt hour across Australia, Victoria's minimal \$45 per megawatt hour is an outstanding result for our state. It serves as a clear indication that the record growth in renewable energy generation and storage in Victoria is meeting demand and therefore lowering prices.

I was delighted to join the minister at Wilson Transformer in Glen Waverley last month to tour their facilities. It is a wonderful local manufacturing business in the heart of Glen Waverley; I do not have much manufacturing in Glen Waverley. Wilson Transformer is an excellent company, one that is acting on climate change by delivering super batteries across the state which connect up our wind farms and our solar farms. They are also creating smaller batteries these days. They have plenty of jobs in Glen Waverley and also at their other site on the border, in Albury.

At a time when internationally there are rising costs of living this bill is important for families and businesses alike, as it builds on the success of the Victorian energy upgrades program. To align with our ambitious net zero emissions target, we are extending the VEU's legislated end date by another 15 years, to 2045. We, however, understand that there is an alternative approach. There are some who revel in fantasies, pontificating on delusions of an alternate reality and seeking to distract, disturb and bring us back literally to the dark ages. The CSIRO has confirmed that the Liberal policy of nuclear would cost at least twice as much as renewables. Compared to the cost of \$22 to \$53 per megawatt hour for solar, nuclear would cost somewhere between \$148 and \$238 per megawatt hour. This ridiculous jump in price is not even including the financial burden of building a nuclear plant, which is estimated to cost at least \$8.5 billion. The Climate Council's research states that on average renewables would make up 99 per cent of electricity share by 2050 compared to 15 per cent if six new nuclear reactors were to be built by 2050. It will take us 10 years to get to 96 per cent renewables, whilst it will take 20 years to build one nuclear plant. Renewables already make up 39 per cent of energy generation here in Victoria, whereas nuclear makes up zero per cent. On any environmental, financial, practical or logical measure it is clear that the coalition's nuclear fantasy is unachievable and nonsensical.

Instead of that we will support households and small businesses with sensible and targeted energy bill relief. In partnership with the federal government the state government is providing direct assistance to Victorians. Households will receive quarterly rebates of \$75, amounting to \$300 cumulatively, with

the next instalment to be received automatically on 1 April, and I know this will make a material difference. Furthermore, as a former small business owner, I understand how important it is that we support small businesses in this state. That is why as part of the Energy Bill Relief Fund eligible small business will receive a one-off rebate of \$325 on their electricity bill.

We are also supporting Victorians through the revival of the SEC, a government-owned renewable energy company. This will be owned by the people, operating for the public interest. As forementioned, by 2035 Victoria will need 25 gigawatts of new renewable energy in storage capacity to meet its targets. The SEC will contribute 4.5 gigawatts through its first two projects, at the Melbourne renewable energy hub and the SEC renewable energy park, powering more than a quarter of a million homes. This project alone will create hundreds of jobs, as we know that it will facilitate a viable transition. We need to build a renewable energy workforce.

It was wonderful earlier today to have Trades Hall organise an electrification briefing here at Parliament in conjunction with Environment Victoria and the Victorian Council of Social Service. We also had people from the Electrical Trades Union and representatives of the ASU as well to continue that conversation on ensuring that we transition to renewable energy at a quicker pace. We heard some stories with regard to people that are struggling to pay their bills at this time and that there are financial counsellors helping them. It was wonderful to have them here at Parliament. I commend this bill to the house.

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (16:59): I am so pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. As the member for Glen Waverley did, I also thank the Electrical Trades Union for taking us all on a journey. Our very hardworking electricians make sure that we have what we need to stay safe. We do have a couple of sparkies here: we have got the President, and we have got the Minister for Creative Industries as well.

The SPEAKER: The time set down for me to interrupt the house under sessional orders has now arrived. The house is considering the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Energy Upgrades for the Future) Bill 2025. The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Brighton has moved a reasoned amendment to the motion. He has proposed to omit all of the words after 'That' and replace them with the words which have been circulated. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Brighton should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time and a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Nick Staikos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

And Richard Riordan's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until details of the consultation on the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, along with any proposed reforms, have been released to the industry.'

The SPEAKER: The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Polwarth has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all of the words after ‘That’ with the view of inserting in their place the words that appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Polwarth should vote no.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time, the government amendment be agreed to and the bill be now read a third time.

Assembly divided on question:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (24): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendment as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 96, page 116, line 22, omit “3” and insert “2”.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Reay Road–Hull Road, Mooroolbark

David HODGETT (Croydon) (17:15): (1111) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister and her department to install traffic lights at the intersection of Reay Road and Hull Road, Mooroolbark. Minister, in the time I have been a member of Parliament traffic congestion has been a big issue on Reay Road, Mooroolbark, for residents and the school communities as well as all road users. For a small road, Reay Road has a lot going on. As well as homes, it has two large schools – a primary and a secondary school – plus the Benetas St John’s Rise retirement village, which is now starting development of stage 2, meaning an additional 36 units are to be built. A recent planning application for a childcare centre in the street has increased concern regarding this already congested road and the impact that a rise in traffic will have.

Presently there is a pedestrian crossing on Hull Road, approximately 10 metres from the entrance to Reay Road, which is triggered by pedestrians, along with the traffic on Reay Road; the traffic also triggers those lights. I am informed that residents from the retirement village are experiencing difficulties crossing Reay Road due to heavy traffic when trying to get to the pedestrian crossing. The introduction of traffic lights at this intersection would allow for the safe crossing of pedestrians wishing to cross Reay Road, as well as Hull Road, and allow for schoolchildren to come up from Charles Street, Mooroolbark, to continue to cross Hull Road safely. There is little that can be done to make Reay Road a bigger road or a wider road to handle the increasing traffic. However, traffic lights at this intersection will surely assist with pedestrian safety. Again, I call on the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to take action and for her and her department to install traffic lights at the intersection of Reay Road and Hull Road, Mooroolbark.

Cranbourne electorate veterans

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:16): (1112) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Veterans, and the action I seek is that the minister joins me in visiting with the young veterans in my electorate. At the outset I would like to take the time to acknowledge our veterans and thank them for their service and sacrifice. Importantly I would also like to thank their families and friends, who play such an important role both during their deployment and also after their service. As the minister knows, returning from deployment overseas can be a difficult transition for some in our veteran community, and I would be delighted for the minister to come along and share with these great Victorians all that our government is doing to support them. As we get closer to Anzac Day, I would also like to express how grateful I am to my local RSL for their work in ensuring that the commemoration service is conducted in an inclusive way that strengthens us. Each year there are more and more organisations and particularly more school students in attendance. I would like to take a moment to recognise Stuart Couch for the role that he plays in Cranbourne. We are very fortunate to have people of his calibre, and others, who have served. I eagerly await a response from the minister.

Moyhu police station

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:18): (1113) My adjournment is to the Minister for Police on behalf of Mrs Gaye Newton, and the action that I seek is the replacement of the police officer in the one-man police station at Moyhu. Recently there was a meeting held with representatives from the Wangaratta police station regarding the position being vacant and the policies and procedures that need to be followed before this position can be filled. The King Valley has been recently voted the number one holiday destination in this region, and it brings more and more people to the area. The area is currently serviced by two one-man police stations, one at Whitfield and one at Glenrowan. It is also supposed to be covered by Wangaratta. It is a 25-minute drive from Wangaratta to Moyhu and approximately 45 minutes to Whitfield.

Regardless of Victoria Police procedures, Moyhu needs a serving member stationed in Moyhu. The community rely on having a local member for support and assistance. It has been noticed that since a resident police member has been absent, there have been instances of car hooning late at night and of people riding electric bikes up and down the footpaths. At this stage it might seem minimal, but it really is starting a trend. Victoria Police must recognise this issue and appoint a member to this area. Moyhu is currently in the planning stages for another subdivision and tourism is growing rapidly. Our current, serving one-man stations need this station manned and working. Gaye Newton speaks on behalf of the Moyhu community and requests this vacancy to be filled asap.

Merri-bek Primary School

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:19): (1114) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the investments the Victorian Labor government is making to deliver the Education State across my electorate, including for the families of Merri-bek Primary School. Originally known as Moreland State School and bounded by Moreland Road, De Carle Street and Blair Street, Merri-bek Primary School first opened its doors on 6 June 1887, with the first headmaster being Mr Peter Miller, with his wife Mrs Miller as infant mistress. The first two students listed on the student register were Lily Buxton and Gladys Thomson.

Beginning with a small staff and around 100 pupils, the school's enrolment rapidly grew as more families moved to the area to work in the burgeoning brick kilns, potteries and hardware and textiles manufacturers. As the school continued to grow and evolve, at one point it had the largest enrolled student attendance in the state, with 2400 pupils. In 1970 the De Carle Street building was demolished and a new two-storey building was erected, with the first part opened by then Minister for Education Lindsay Thompson in 1972 and an additional wing opened in 1979. According to the Department of Education, this was the first case of an inner-suburban school being totally demolished and totally rebuilt at the time.

In the spirit of reconciliation, on 19 June 2023 the school unveiled its new name of Merri-bek Primary School and its new logo, and for almost 140 years the school has continued to beautifully educate and support generations of local students in that iconic blue-and-yellow uniform in an increasingly vibrant, inclusive and nurturing learning environment. Guided by its vision to be a community of inclusive, innovative and inspired learners, Merri-bek is today home to 360 students and 40 staff members, led by its fantastic principal Maria Giordano. The school community is also proudly made up of Sean Gan, the school council president; Raoul Woods, the vice-president; Bianca Hudson, assistant principal; school captains Bethany and Marcel; vice-captains Sathya and Olive; and house captains Saxe and Evie of Merri Creek, Sumaya and Zahraa of City Hall, Dayton and Paris of Sydney Road and Roisin and Frankie of Coburg Lake. Sandra Pepi is the longest serving teacher at the school, and she attended Merri-bek Primary School as well as a student. I thank all of the other students and teachers and support staff, families and volunteers.

I was very pleased to visit the school in December to celebrate the grade 6 graduation and be briefed on the school's fantastic concept master plan, which we need to support delivery of. Based on very extensive school community engagement and consultation, the new concept master plan outlines the future infrastructure, facilities and resource needs of the school: the replacement of the current playing surface with an environmentally friendly, resilient and versatile option; the construction of a new covered outdoor learning area and canopy to accommodate all-weather activities and school assemblies; renewed in-between spaces to accommodate more trees, native greenery, flowers and soft landscaping rocks to support wellbeing and inclusivity; developing an upper terrace to support neurodiversity of students and inclusive and supportive environments for all; and a number of other upgrades and learning outcomes. This builds on the previous investments we have made in the school: \$700,000 over recent years to provide an outdoor sensory space; the \$400 school saving bonus, which has saved the school \$88,000 for new uniforms, textbooks and excursions; the free dental program; the free glasses in school program; and the mental health and wellbeing resources in school program.

Industry policy

Jess WILSON (Kew) (17:22): (1115) My adjournment is for the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to release Labor's promised new industry policy. As part of the government's *Economic Growth Statement* it was announced that a new industry policy would be released in early 2025. Well, we are now in April, and still no policy has been released. According to the government's website, this policy is aimed at shifting the dial on productivity, competitiveness and sustainability. This should be a priority for the government, yet we are still waiting. After 10 years of Labor neglect, industry need support. Whether it be Labor's crime crisis, spiking electricity prices or tax hikes, industry simply cannot afford this Labor government. Labor's crime crisis is hurting industry. A combination of Labor's weakening of bail laws, cuts to policing and the cost-of-living crisis has led to retail theft skyrocketing by 37 per cent in the last year, an almost 100 per cent increase since 2022. According to the Australian Retailers Association's Chief Industry Affairs Officer:

A 2-to-3 per cent loss of merchandise can amount to 25 per cent loss in profit ...

Industry simply cannot afford more of the same, yet we are still waiting for Labor's industry policy. Rising electricity costs are hurting industry. Energy bills have risen, with prices predicted to increase by up to \$68 this year, following a 25 per cent rise in 2023–24. Energy is the foundation of our economy, and when power prices go up, industry suffers. Labor promised the SEC would lower power bills, but after 2½ years prices have only risen. The only thing the SEC has delivered is \$380,000 worth of branded tote bags, notebooks, pens and yo-yos, and yet we still wait for Labor's industry policy. Tax increases are killing industry. Since coming to government Labor has implemented at least 60 new or increased taxes, fees and charges, and industry has been hit time and time again. Whether through increased WorkCover premiums or higher payroll taxes, Labor has made it impossible for industry in this state. Because of Labor's eagerness to introduce new taxes, of course we are actually still waiting for Labor's new industry policy.

The slogan of Labor's economic growth statement is 'Victoria: open for business'. But Victorians can see through the spin, and industry knows it is anything but this. In fact industry believes that Victoria is the worst place in the country to do business. Between 1 July 2024 and 16 February 2025 Victoria's insolvencies hit 2500, a 63 per cent increase on the same period a year ago. Labor has abandoned industry for the past decade and yet we still wait for this policy. I call on the minister to deliver this policy.

Country Fire Authority Clyde brigade

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (17:25): (1116) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is that the minister visit the fabulous crew at Clyde CFA and join with us in turning the sod on their new station. This brigade is busy. They have done hundreds of call-outs so far this year. I thank captain Stuart Bluck and the brigade management team members

and their families for their service and dedication to responding, informing, supporting and protecting the communities of Clyde and Clyde North and surrounds. Beyond call-outs they form strike teams at short notice, and we saw this with the fires at both the Grampians and the Gurdies. They train and upskill at every turn too. They are active, visible and connected in to our local schools, kinders, sporting clubs and community groups, as are all our CFAs across Bass.

At the Clyde township community and family centre opening just this weekend gone, the delightful crew of volunteers were there with their tanker. It is always a highlight to catch up with them. A special shout-out to Leticia Presta-Miller, the community safety officer, and all the members that came along. In the spirit of community that shines bright, the annual Santa run, as an example, saw members on three trucks covering 20 estates, a mammoth logistical feat that was seamless and a testament to their extraordinary organisational efforts and the connections they have to this growing community.

I take this opportunity to wish all 20 of my brigades – Bass, Bayles, Clyde, Corinella, Dalyston, Devon Meadows, Glen Alvie, Heath Hill–Yannathan, Inverloch, Kernot–Grantville, Kilcunda, Koo Wee Rup, Lang Lang, Pearcedale, Phillip Island, Pound Creek, San Remo, Tooradin, Warneet–Blind Bight, and Wonthaggi – a very happy 80th birthday, and I thank all the amazing volunteers and members for their service to protecting our community.

Housing

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (17:27): (1117) My adjournment is for the Premier, and the action I seek is that relocation officers cease coercive practices to force public housing residents out of their homes. The Minister for Housing and Building claims that each resident will be assisted to find a new home that matches their needs and preferences, but residents tell a very different story. North Melbourne residents received a letter warning them that if they do not accept one of two offers, they will be moved to the register of interest – housing purgatory for the 125,000 people already on the waitlist. Residents in Richmond say relocation officers threatened that they will be left with only run-down, unsuitable or faraway homes if they do not accept an early offer. A Flemington resident said that he and his mum, who need disability modifications, were told they had to accept an inaccessible home. One of my constituents, an elderly woman living alone, told relocation officers she did not want to move out of the community that she had lived in since arriving in Australia decades ago as a refugee. But over the last year Homes Victoria moved out all of her neighbours. They stopped maintenance and they let piles of broken furniture and rotting rubbish build up in the hallways and in front of the lifts, forcing her to climb flights of steps just to get in and out of her home. With a mostly empty floor, someone tried to break into her apartment at night, and when Homes Victoria moved out the last of her neighbours on the floor, she felt unable to stay.

The conditions that this government created around her home is just one of the deliberate tactics employed in this inhumane process that the government calls relocation. But the biggest coercive tactic of all is the so-called right of return. Residents have continually been told that they have the right of return, as though the new homes that are being built are for them. But residents have not been told that actually there will be no public housing rebuilt at these sites at all and there is no guarantee of a suitable home. The Law Institute of Victoria has just come out saying that the government's communications to residents may contravene the government's own relocations policy and that in reality the policy does not guarantee residents the ability to return to redeveloped sites.

Residents' rights are being trampled to meet an arbitrary deadline for 'decanting' the building – the heartless term that this government uses for forcing people out of their homes. These unethical, rushed and senseless relocations must stop.

Albert Park electorate ministerial visit

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:30): (1118) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Youth Natalie Suleyman. The action I seek is for the minister to visit Albert Park to conduct a listening tour of our local schools and engage with students on issues that matter most to them. In Albert Park we

are fortunate to have a number of outstanding schools, each with engaged and passionate students who are eager to contribute to discussions about education, mental health, employment opportunities, climate action and other key matters affecting their lives. A listening tour would provide students with a chance to express their views and experiences while allowing the minister to hear firsthand about the challenges and opportunities they face. Such engagement fosters great civic participation and ensures that youth policies are informed by the very people they are designed to support. I look forward to the minister's response and hope to welcome her to Albert Park soon for this important initiative.

St Kilda Primary School

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (17:31): (1119) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to commit to funding a new school hall for St Kilda Primary School. St Kilda Primary School is a wonderful local school in my electorate with an enrolment of around 500 children. It is situated near the corner of Chapel Street and St Kilda Road. Its old school hall was demolished in 2020 to make way for a new building. The initial plans included a new school hall. However, at the very last moment the hall was removed from the final plans without any consultation with the school community. It simply was not built.

Since that time the school has been forced to hold their assemblies outdoors. On hot days the schoolchildren sit on the hot concrete to receive their pen licences or awards. Worse still, their assemblies are cancelled if it is raining. On rainy days there is nowhere to go at lunchtime, and there is no gym space available for PE lessons, drama classes and other school activities that require a large indoor area. The lack of a school hall creates difficulties for students and teachers. Children's learning, sport and drama activities should not be weather dependent. Importantly, after school hours the hall would offer a valuable community resource to be used for sporting and recreational activities.

Once a new school hall is built it will also be possible to finally demolish an old asbestos-riddled building on the school site. This building is currently being used for an after-hours program for students, but our local community deserves better than having to make do with this makeshift facility in an outdated and potentially hazardous building. This desperately needed community and school assembly hall is critically important to the St Kilda community, because the majority of students at the school live in flats and apartments with very limited access to open space. The Balaclava–St Kilda East area, a large part of the school's catchment area, has one of the lowest percentages of open space in the region – 5 per cent of open land area compared to 17 per cent across the City of Port Phillip. These children need space to play and learn and to not be restricted to weather-dependent facilities.

On Monday I was pleased to be part of a very large and noisy crowd at a rally held at the school to show strong support for the local community and for the new school hall. The rally was expertly MCed by Dave Hughes, a former parent at the school, but the real stars of the show were the students with their loud and enthusiastic chanting. The hundreds of students, parents and local community members who attended the rally emphasised the need to build this hall as an urgent priority. So much was the newsworthiness of this hall that it was covered by mainstream media.

Minister, the students, staff, parents and the entire school community at St Kilda Primary School need and deserve an appropriate learning environment, including a fit-for-purpose school hall. I urge you not to ignore their fair and reasonable request and call on you to commit the funds needed to build this school hall in the forthcoming state budget and to then get on with building the new hall.

Concept Caravans

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (17:34): (1120) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to Concept Caravans in Campbellfield. Concept Caravans manufacture the wonderful Viscount, Newlands, Concept and Franklin caravans. Franklin caravans have a special place in my heart. My happiest two weeks every year are spent in a Franklin caravan with family. You should see

the latest ones with all the bells and whistles, really clever design solutions and of course such quality engineering and production – done right in Campbellfield.

Concept Caravans are a proud partner to the Brotherhood of St Laurence through the Broadmeadows Thrive Hub project. Empowering young jobseekers, the Thrive Hub is an innovative one-stop employment service that helps individuals in Melbourne's north secure meaningful and sustainable jobs and helps local businesses to access a highly motivated and supported workforce – a win-win for the community.

With our focus on delivering more homes and our fabulous planning reforms that take away the need for planning permits for granny flats I look forward to discussing opportunities for expanding our prefabricated and modular housing industry in Broadmeadows. We have a proud manufacturing history and a strong manufacturing base in the north, and I am so proud of the Victorian Labor government's investment in manufacturing and am very pleased with the federal Labor government's focus on a future made in Australia. I particularly thank Basem Abdo, the Labor candidate for Caldwell and a strong advocate for manufacturing, and the hardworking Peter Khalil for their ongoing advocacy for manufacturing in the north. I thank them for their work in securing priority funding for a new local jobs hub through the federal government's \$10 million National Priority Fund to help more people get jobs near where they live and give local businesses a pipeline of skilled workers into the future.

Responses

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (17:35): The member for Croydon raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action he seeks is that the minister work to have traffic lights installed at the corner of Reay and Hull roads in Mooroolbark. The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Veterans, and the action she seeks is that the minister join her to meet with young veterans in her community. I am sure she will look forward to doing that with you, member for Cranbourne. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action he seeks is that a police officer once again be stationed at Moyhu. Of course the member for Ovens Valley would know that the deployment of police is a matter for police command and not the minister. The member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action he seeks is an update on the investments made into schools in his electorate, most particularly Merri-bek Primary School. We thank you for the history lesson on Merri-bek Primary School.

The member for Kew raised a matter for the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, and the action that she seeks is that the minister release the Allan Labor government's industry policy. The member for Bass raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that the member seeks is that the minister join her at Clyde CFA to turn the sod on the beginning of their new station. I am sure the minister very much looks forward to joining the member for Bass in doing that. The member for Richmond raised a matter for the attention of the Premier. The action that the member seeks is that the Premier cease relocating residents from public housing or that the Premier stop the relocation officers from doing their work, which of course is to relocate public housing tenants while our government gets on and builds them fit-for-purpose contemporary energy-efficient new homes.

The member for Albert Park raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Youth, and the action that the member seeks is that the minister join her in Albert Park for a listening tour of schools in her electorate, listening to the voices of young people, bringing those voices directly to government. I am sure the minister will look forward to that. The member for Prahran raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action that the member seeks is that the minister fund a new school hall at St Kilda Primary School. The member for Broadmeadows has a matter for the attention of the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing, noting that the member represents one of

ADJOURNMENT

Victoria's manufacturing hubs, and I am sure that the minister looks forward to joining the member at Concept Caravans, a very important local employer and manufacturer.

The SPEAKER: I thank the clerks and attendants, catering and indeed all parliamentary staff, as always, for helping us to do our jobs. The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5:39 pm.

Proof