

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 2 April 2025

CONTENTS

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	1
PETITIONS	
Maroondah Hospital	1
Princes Freeway intersections	1
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	2
BILLS	
Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025	2
Council's agreement.....	2
Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024.....	2
Council's amendments.....	2
MOTIONS	
Motions by leave	2
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Crime	3
Parkhill Primary School.....	3
Suburban Rail Loop	3
Ashwood School.....	3
ParagonCare	4
Kew electorate schools.....	4
Footscray West Writers Fest	4
Footscray Roubaix.....	4
McCrae landslide.....	4
Transport infrastructure.....	5
Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria	5
Eildon electorate school sports.....	5
Kubilay Genç	6
Commonwealth Games.....	6
Clunes Booktown Festival.....	7
Country Fire Authority Beaufort brigade.....	7
St Augustine's Primary School	7
Woody Yaloak Primary School	7
Ararat Early Learning Centre	7
Peter Lanigan	7
Helen Paul Kindergarten.....	7
Rotary Club of Brighton	7
Preston Cricket Club	8
Filipino community celebrations	8
World Autism Awareness Day	8
Treaty	8
Calder Freeway.....	8
Gladstone Park Secondary College	9
Sunbury Senior Citizens Centre.....	9
Bushfire recovery	9
Glen Waverley electorate sports	9
Wyndham ring-road	10
Child sexual abuse.....	10
Narre Warren North women's health and wellbeing expo.....	10
Dandenong Valley Special Developmental School	11
Narre Warren train station	11
Bentleigh Football Netball Club	11
Federal election.....	11
STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS	
Legal and Social Issues Committee.....	12
Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria	12
Legal and Social Issues Committee.....	13
Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria	13
Legal and Social Issues Committee.....	14
Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria	14

CONTENTS

Environment and Planning Committee	15
Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply	15
Legal and Social Issues Committee	16
Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria	16
Legal and Social Issues Committee	18
Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors	18
BILLS	
Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025	19
Statement of compatibility	19
Second reading	20
Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025	23
Statement of compatibility	23
Second reading	26
Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025	28
Statement of compatibility	28
Second reading	28
Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024	30
Council's amendments	30
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Questions without notice and ministers statements	55
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Victoria Police	55
Ministers statements: health services	56
Commonwealth Games	57
Ministers statements: energy policy	58
Commonwealth Games	59
Ministers statements: transport infrastructure	60
Homelessness	61
Ministers statements: veterans support	62
Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund	62
Ministers statements: government achievements	64
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Polwarth electorate	65
Koroit electorate	65
Euroa electorate	66
Tarnit electorate	66
Rowville electorate	66
Thomastown electorate	66
Ringwood electorate	67
Eureka electorate	67
Hawthorn electorate	67
Wendouree electorate	67
BILLS	
Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025	68
Second reading	68
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE	
Cost of living	80
BILLS	
Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025	105
Second reading	105
ADJOURNMENT	
Caulfield South Primary School	116
Werribee electorate small business	117
Gippsland East electorate public transport	118
Creswick crime	118
Country Fire Authority Montrose brigade	118
Country Fire Authority Corio brigade	119
Shepparton electorate roads	119
Narre Warren North police station	120
Victorian Fisheries Authority	120

CONTENTS

Wyndham City Council	121
Responses	122

Proof

Wednesday 2 April 2025

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

The SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge in the gallery a delegation from Hanoi City today.

Business of the house**Notices of motion**

The SPEAKER (09:33): General business, notices of motion 20 and 48 to 63, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions**Maroondah Hospital**

David HODGETT (Croydon) presented a petition bearing 62 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly community support for the Victorian Government to **rebuild Maroondah Hospital** to address its dated infrastructure and inadequate facilities. Maroondah Hospital is a very busy hospital, that is under extreme pressure to cater to patients from all over the Eastern Suburbs. They lack the up-to-date facilities, which have been promised over the past two election periods by the Victorian Government and deserve to be supported completely.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Victorian Government to **fulfill their election promises of 2018 and 2022**, and finally deliver on the **\$1.05 billion promise given to our community, by rebuilding Maroondah Hospital from the ground up**. Funding needs to be allocated in the 2025/2026 State Budget so that the rebuild can start soon – not in ten years' time.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Princes Freeway intersections

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) presented a petition bearing 3285 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly That intersections along the Princes Freeway between Nar Nar Goon and Bunyip are in desperate need of upgrade and a putting the lives of road users at risk. With the State Government rapidly increasing population growth Cardinia, Baw Baw and Latrobe Shires, local and regional traffic has increased greatly resulting in a higher potential for accidents. In 2021 the State Government instituted a trial of 80km/h speed zones select sections of the Princes Highway in this area, however it is not a permanent solution or effective solution. Townships such as Nar Nar Goon, Nar Nar Goon North, Tynong, Tynong North, Maryknoll, Garfield, Garfield North, Bunyip, Tonimbuk need permanent solution such as slip lanes, intersection upgrades and flyovers. There are regularly major incidents along this section of the Princes Highway, with many unreported.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to immediately undertake a masterplan to prioritise upgrades to this intersections along the Princes Freeway between Nar Nar Goon and Bunyip before another life is lost or major accident occurs.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

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

Auditor-General – State Trustees' Financial Administration Services – Ordered to be published

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice under s 32(4)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rules 22/2017, 155/2018, 69/2022, 115/2022 (*Gazette S151, 1 April 2025*)

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

*Bills***Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025 without amendment.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024*Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (09:35): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

*Motions***Motions by leave**

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier, the Treasurer and the member for Bass for callously increasing taxes on farmers, including a 189 per cent increase in their fire services levy.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That his house condemns the Premier, the Treasurer and the member for Bass for callously worsening Victoria's cost-of-living crisis by voting to increase taxes on home owners by 33 per cent, including a 99 per cent increase on every dollar of property value.

Leave refused.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bass, noting Labor cannot manage money and Victorians are paying the price with a 104 per cent increase in gas prices, a 61 per cent increase in medical costs and a 41 per cent increase in the cost of education during a cost-of-living crisis.

Leave refused.

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

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Werribee, noting Labor cannot manage money and Victorians are paying the price with a 104 per cent increase in gas prices, a 61 per cent increase in medical costs and a 41 per cent increase in the cost of education during a cost-of-living crisis.

Leave refused.

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

That this house condemns the Premier, the Treasurer and the member for Werribee for callously worsening Victoria's cost-of-living crisis by voting to increase taxes on homeowners by 33 per cent, including a 99 per cent increase on every dollar of property value.

Leave refused.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier, the Treasurer and the member for Werribee for callously increasing taxes on farmers by at least 109 per cent, including a 99 per cent increase on every dollar of property value and the disgraceful emergency services levy taxing farmers.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Crime

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (09:39): Crime in Victoria is out of control and we are seeing it all the way across this state, whether you are in Werribee, where we have seen crime increase with aggravated burglaries, or out in the south-east through Clyde and Clyde North, where people are so fearful now that they are sending out their own fathers, driving around in cars, to create security on the streets. Crime in this state has been rewarded under this government for far too long, and the person that weakened the bail laws has now been promoted to Treasurer of the state. That is the problem with this government. We have had a government that for far too long has let the innocent victims become the story when it should be around those offenders we should have been locking up. For the government to come out in the last Parliament and turn around and say that they are introducing the toughest bail laws here in Victoria was a cruel hoax on the entire state.

To come out and say that they were going to bring in laws to ensure that young people who commit violent crimes will be locked up was nothing short of a joke. Now what we are seeing is they have to go through a second tranche, and they are out negotiating again to see how they can toughen up those laws to keep people locked up here in Victoria. And it is across the whole state. We have seen it for simply too long. The only way to fix the crime crisis here in Victoria is to vote for a Liberal–Nationals government so we can deliver on what we promise, and that will be the toughest bail laws in Australia to keep the worst offenders locked up.

Parkhill Primary School

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:40): Last week was a busy and exciting week in the Ashwood district. I started at Parkhill Primary School, where I joined the students for a special garden incursion as part of the Victorian schools garden program. This fantastic initiative supports student learning, health and wellbeing by encouraging schools to make the most of their outdoor spaces, connecting students to nature. A big thanks to principal Jo Jolley and the fantastic teachers at Parkhill for creating such a meaningful experience and to James McLennan from the VSGP for sharing his expertise and teaching students how to plan, plant and protect their environment in a sustainable way.

Suburban Rail Loop

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:41): It was also my privilege to welcome Minister Shing, John Berger and Sonja Terpstra from the other place to my patch. We had a look at the very large hole in Burwood that is going to have the tunnel-boring machines and the Suburban Rail Loop going into the ground next year.

Ashwood School

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:41): On Wednesday I took my shopping bags to the Ashwood specialist school for the opening of Ashwood School's little mini Woolies. It was fantastic to shop

with a student, Sienna, and be served by Jack while being supported and guided by some Woolies Ashwood staff. Good on the young people there for providing students with a way to learn about the shopping experience.

ParagonCare

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (09:41): I was also pleased to welcome Minister Pearson to Mount Waverley, where we toured ParagonCare's new state-of-the-art manufacturing facility, a great example of cutting-edge healthcare technology and innovation thriving in our community. It is a service that supports everyone in this country.

Kew electorate schools

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:42): I want to give a shout-out to the hundreds of kids across Kew who participated in my annual Easter colouring-in competition this year. I think it gets tougher every year to judge because there are just so many entries. Congratulations to the winners: Mallea from Andale School, Maryan from Belmore School, Elise from Boroondara Park Primary, Estelle from Camberwell Girls Grammar, Emily from Chatham Primary, Malayah from Giant Steps, Elisha from Greythorn Primary, Nadia from Kew East Primary, Amelie from Kew Primary, Chloe from Our Holy Redeemer, Claudia from Our Lady of Good Counsel, Elina from Ruyton, Claudia from Sacred Heart, Harvey from St Anne's, Kareena from St Bede's, Rowan from Trinity and Leo from Xavier. Colleagues are very welcome to pop past my electorate office any time to view the winners and runners-up, stellar entries that I am proudly hanging in my office.

A big shout-out to the runners-up as well: James from Andale, Oliver and Michael from Belmore, Zach from Boroondara Park, Tiffany from Camberwell Girls, Lewis and Cleo from Chatham, Kenneth from Giant Steps, Isabel and Gavin from Greythorn, Alexander from Kew East, Lucy from Kew Primary, Sia and Isaac from Our Holy Redeemer, Ava from Ruyton, Bonnie and Xavier from Sacred Heart, Harrison from St Anne's, Ethan from St Bede's, Winston from Trinity and Matthew from Xavier. I wish all students across Kew a very safe and enjoyable school holidays and Easter period. I hope the Easter bunny visits all of them.

Footscray West Writers Fest

Katie HALL (Footscray) (09:43): I am delighted to thank the organisers of the inaugural Footscray West Writers Fest, who this past weekend put on a brilliant event in our community celebrating the stories of our history and our sense of place in the inner west. What a thrill it was to be among hundreds of inner westies listening to two authors I admire greatly, Helen Garner and Bob Murphy, talk about footy and the fabric of our community at the hallowed grounds of Whitten Oval. Congratulations to Reem from the Chestnut Tree Bookshop on Barkly Street, to West Footscray Arts, Jess Lilley, all of the writers, the publishers and all of the storytellers who so eloquently shared their experiences of writing and of Melbourne's inner west.

Footscray Roubaix

Katie HALL (Footscray) (09:44): Congratulations also to Elwyn Davies of Footscray, who organised the first ever Footscray Roubaix. I was not familiar with this sport, but it takes cyclists down cobblestone streets. The laneways of Melbourne's inner west were full of cyclists from across Melbourne stopping off and enjoying their coffees, and it was wonderful to see.

McCrae landslide

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:45): I want to rise today to express concern but also my unwavering support for the residents of McCrae who have endured unimaginable hardship due to the local landslides, the most recent of those on 14 January 2025. A recent *A Current Affair* investigation shed light on some of the distressing experiences, especially those of Paul and Denise Willigenburg, pensioners who were originally displaced from their dream home in November 2022 by the landslide that happened back in that year. They relocated to a rental property but were again forced to evacuate

following the devastating landslide in January this year. Despite the establishment of an exclusion zone, reports have emerged of looting targeting the abandoned homes, further victimising the affected residents.

The response from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council has been nothing short of inadequate. Residents have voiced frustrations over the lack of clear communication, transparency and timely action, and the council's failure to provide immediate financial assistance has left many covering their own accommodation costs, exacerbating their distress. The state government has established a board of inquiry, and I thank the Minister for Local Government for that. It has been a little bit delayed. It will be led by Renée Enbom KC, and while this is a step towards understanding the causes, it does little to address the immediate needs of those displaced residents. So I call on the minister, the Allan Labor government and the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council to prioritise the welfare of McCrae residents. Immediate financial assistance, clear timelines for remediation and robust security measures are imperative immediately.

Transport infrastructure

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:46): The federal election has only just been called and already the choice could not be any clearer between the Albanese Labor government, who will build Australia's future for our communities in Melbourne's west, and Peter Dutton's Liberals, who will cut from this future. I was appalled yesterday to hear that if elected, a Dutton government will scrap the additional \$2 billion that the feds have committed to delivering the Sunshine station upgrade as part of Melbourne Airport rail. I would say that I am surprised, but this is what the Liberal party has always done to folks in Melbourne's west. Of course they did not have the courage to front up in Sunshine to announce this; they did it at a paddock as far away from the city as you could get whilst being able to see the airport.

Let us be absolutely clear here: the \$4 billion that will go to this junction alone is absolutely critical to unlocking the complex mix between metro, regional and freight trains that run through Sunshine station. You do not have the airport rail service that Victorians rightly expect without having Sunshine station, and we cannot deliver every other rail improvement to the west – that means electrified services to Melton as well as Wyndham Vale – without this work at Sunshine station being done. Time and time again we see the Liberal party pretending to care about Melbourne's west, but at their very core this is who they truly are and what they have always done. If you want to see Sunshine station become a major transport interchange, vote 1 for the Albanese Labor government.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:48): I recently attended the Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria district 14 rural championships in Plenty. I was impressed with the junior teams competing. Doreen CFA had 10 juniors tackling the pumps and hoses, competing in the 11-to-13 and 11-to-15 age groups. It was great to see former juniors, now 18 to 25, move into the role of junior leaders. Sue Mann, who was just a mum and is now an enthusiastic volunteer, said it has been great to see the growth in juniors through their participation. The young adults Victoria, Rebecca, Emily, Declan and Ryan have become independent and more confident and have increased self-esteem. I chatted to Amelia from the Hurstbridge brigade and was impressed by her maturity and confidence as she talked about her time as a junior and participation now as a young adult.

Eildon electorate school sports

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:48): Macey Norman, Penny Freeman and Sienna Hamilton from Healesville Primary School deserve a pat on the back for raising over \$4000 between them for the school Colour Run fundraiser, part of an overall \$16,000 to be put to two interactive play spaces and a resurface of the gymnasium hall.

Congratulations to Archie Armstrong in the under-13s at the Yea Tigers Cricket Club, who scored 466 runs this season and has been invited to try out for the Victorian schoolboys under-12s cricket team.

Well done to Zoe Aldrick from Yea Primary on taking home silver in backstroke at the regional swimming carnival, going on to swim at Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre, and also to Taj Parker from St Mary's in Alexandra, who won the 50 metres in both breaststroke and butterfly at the regionals in Shepparton and is through to the state championships.

Kubilay Genç

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (09:49): Today I rise to bid farewell and pay my respects to an extraordinary man, Uncle Kubilay Genç JP, who many lovingly referred to as Forti. Kubilay sadly passed away on 15 March during the holy month of Ramadan, which is fitting for a man who blessed the community every day with his dedicated service.

A true believer, I first met Kubilay and his beautiful wife Feriha over 25 years ago at his home in Glenroy. I have been welcomed back many times since and have always enjoyed their wonderful hospitality and interesting stories. Most recently I visited on their 50th wedding anniversary and got to see Feriha's gorgeous wedding dress. Their dedication and love for each other was beautiful and most evident in their love for their five children and many grandchildren.

The Genç home was like an open house, and so many in the community came to him for advice and his JP services. Day or night, he was there – always welcoming, always warm and always with a smile. Kubilay was a true pillar of our community: honourable, deeply respected and always ready to lend a helping hand. As a justice of the peace and a marriage celebrant he touched countless lives with his wisdom, compassion and unwavering dedication. Like so many Turkish immigrants, Kubilay worked at Ford, but his voluntary service to the community was profound. He established a seniors club and built a special room for community assistance and services.

We thank Kubilay for his dedication to serving the community and pass our sincerest condolences to Feriha and the family. He was loved by so many in both the Cypriot and wider community. (*Time expired*)

Commonwealth Games

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:51): Like all Victorians, I have been forced to put aside the Labor government's lies about the \$2.6 billion Commonwealth Games –

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members about parliamentary language.

Peter WALSH: and the millions it is going to spend building much-needed regional sporting infrastructure. But I cannot put aside the almost \$600 million those mistruths have cost us in helping Glasgow stage the Commonwealth Games in 2026, money straight off our bottom line and money adding to our already crippling debt – money which in my electorate alone would have paid for the new Swan Hill bridge and been more than enough to finish the Swan Hill hospital rebuild, and the would almost certainly have put a ring levee around Rochester hospital to defend it from the next flood. It would also have replaced the community's pool, which has disappeared as a result of the last flood.

It is hard to look my constituents in the face day in, day out, and try to explain to them why the Labor government cannot repair our appalling roads, provide them with a roof over their head or have more medical services available and better schools. As Elton John sang, sorry is the hardest word to say. Perhaps the Premier should put that song on her playlist.

Clunes Booktown Festival

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (09:52): It has been a big fortnight in Ripon. Two weekends ago we saw over 10,000 people flock to the Clunes community for the annual Clunes Booktown Festival. Nick Bassett, Jacqui Horwood and the Creative Clunes board outdid themselves with 135 booksellers, 34 marquees, 36 roving performers, dozens of volunteers and over \$25,000 reinvested back into the local economy. It was a joy to help open the festival and celebrate the sponsors, volunteers, booksellers and writers who have made this event so special for 19 years now.

Country Fire Authority Beaufort brigade

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (09:52): We also celebrated the official opening of the brand new Beaufort CFA station and handover of their heavy tanker. Congratulations to Captain Tony Neville and members on this huge milestone. You now have the fire station, vehicles and equipment that you deserve.

St Augustine's Primary School

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (09:53): Thank you to the grade 3 and 4 students at St Augustine's Primary School in Creswick who invited me along to talk to them about my role as their local MP. Their teachers Michael Heenan and Celly Csorba are doing a tremendous job teaching them all about civics. Thank you for all the great questions.

Woody Yaloak Primary School

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (09:53): A big thankyou also to Jamie Dwyer and student leaders at the Woody Yaloak Primary School's Snake Valley campus for showing me the huge upgrades that they have recently completed as part of their school's \$11 million transformation.

Ararat Early Learning Centre

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (09:53): And thank you to the team at the Ararat Early Learning Centre for hosting the Minister for Children and me, including to the amazing centre director Kerri Turner. Four-year-olds at the centre have kicked off their first term of pre-prep, thanks to our Labor government, and they are loving their 30 hours of free learning each week.

Peter Lanigan

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:53): Peter Lanigan has made a profound impact on the service community and was recently awarded life membership of the Returned Services League. He is a cornerstone of the Hampton sub-branch, and the award befits a man who has contributed for so long. Peter served between 1968 and 1970 in the Royal Australian Engineers. Locally he joined the Hampton sub-branch in 2007 and the committee in 2008, when he became aware of the dire financial position of the club. He remained on the committee in an official position until 2021, including as president between 2011 and 2020. As president he repaid outstanding club debts and avoided closure. He then ceased gaming at the club, renovated the premises and oversaw the creation of the Gallipoli Memorial Garden. Thank you for your service, Peter, and congratulations on life membership.

Helen Paul Kindergarten

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:54): In the baby boom following the Second World War Helen Paul Kindergarten was established, in 1952, with support from the department's supervisor, who took an interest in its establishment. The new Hampton kindergarten took her name. As a nature-based kindergarten with bush kinder, Helen Paul is a key quality early childhood educator in Bayside. Congratulations to the team on their successful open day recently.

Rotary Club of Brighton

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:55): One of the newer major events in Bayside, led by the Rotary Club of Brighton, is the Brighton Classic Car Show. Returning for its fourth year, the recent

show was incredibly successful. It saw over 120 cars turn out and thousands of interested enthusiasts. The Brighton club has had a profound impact in my community, having raised at least \$7 million since it was formed.

Preston Cricket Club

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:55): I would like to begin by congratulating Preston Cricket Club on their victory in the Victorian sub-district first XI final on the weekend. I should acknowledge that Noble Park's Sahan Perera had set an all-time record of over 1000 runs for a season, but as it happens he was dismissed for 13 on a tricky wicket, and Preston proceeded fairly comfortably to victory, with the winning runs coming off a cover drive from Swapnil Salvi.

I have previously mentioned in this place the extraordinary contribution of Richard Norris to that club, who has been on their general committee now for 59 years, which is surely a record for contributing to any Victorian community organisation. I know Richard thoroughly enjoyed the win, as did Lee Cooper and everyone else at the club.

Filipino community celebrations

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:56): I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Damayan society on a fantastic Filipino–Australian Multicultural Festival on the weekend. Well done to president Tennie Ramirez, secretary Dorothy Sofra, MCs Ana and Elizabeth and the whole team for putting on a great afternoon of singing, dancing, fashion shows and Filipino cuisine. We in this place all know the huge contribution the Filipino community make to Victoria, our sixth largest migrant group now, and it was fantastic to have the opportunity to share in their culture.

World Autism Awareness Day

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (09:56): Finally, today is World Autism Awareness Day, and I want to acknowledge the work of Pamela Mathieson and all the team at the Northern School for Autism in our electorate and the work they do and also advocates like Nicole Rogerson at Autism Awareness Australia who provide important information and support to autism families. They are going to do a lot of work today, but we appreciate – *(Time expired)*

Treaty

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:57): The member for Richmond and I recently held a forum in North Fitzroy to hear about Victoria's treaty negotiations, so it was heartening to see over 100 Brunswick and Richmond constituents show up with open minds and enthusiasm to learn about treaty from the co-chairs of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria Ngarra Murray and Rueben Berg. Ngarra and Rueben were upbeat about the assembly's negotiations with the Victorian government, and the audience left hopeful that we will hear the results of these negotiations later this year.

Unlike the blankets, tomahawks and flour presented as part of Batman's 1935 so-called treaty, which was really anything but, this will be Australia's first genuine treaty, and this time we hope the Victorian government is negotiating with goodwill and due recognition of Aboriginal law and sovereignty. Our first genuine treaty must stand the test of time, and it needs to be announced before the next state election. Thank you to Ngarra and Rueben, to Uncle Andrew Gardiner for his welcome to country, to Haus of Dizzy for the vibrant jewellery stall, First Nations artist Teagan Malcolm for the treaty forum artwork and to everyone else who joined us. We cannot change the past, but by confronting the truth about colonisation we can build a better future together.

Calder Freeway

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:58): It was absolutely sensational to join the Deputy Prime Minister, the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the state Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, the member for Hawke, the member for McEwen, the member for Sydenham and the Labor candidate for Gorton on Monday to announce \$300 million for vital upgrades to the Calder

Freeway. Whilst the federal Leader of the Opposition skulks into Victoria to announce a \$2.7 billion cut to rail, this government and federal Labor are partnering to deliver projects that we need to get growing communities home safer and sooner. This project will be very warmly welcomed within my community and many communities right across the north.

Gladstone Park Secondary College

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:59): On another matter, it was terrific to join year 10 students from Gladstone Park Secondary College in Parliament last week for a chat about legal studies, the Parliament and democracy. I want to wish them all the very best for their studies throughout the rest of the year.

Sunbury Senior Citizens Centre

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:59): It was also wonderful to visit the site of the upgrades to the Sunbury Senior Citizens Centre, which is a strong partnership with Hume City Council and will make a local facility even better as we get on and deliver that and many other projects.

Bushfire recovery

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:59): My question is to the Premier. When will the \$5000 business bushfire recovery fund open? This was announced back on 11 March. It is nearly a month later and businesses in the Grampians region still cannot apply for that fund. This is after the Victorian government did not go in to bat for Victorian businesses with the federal government. The disaster recovery fund has been established for this exact purpose. We saw in Queensland and New South Wales, those states impacted by Tropical Cyclone Alfred, \$50,000 available to businesses within days, whereas in Victoria Jacinta Allan is nowhere to be seen. She has not set foot on the fireground, and she has not fought for Victorians in their time of need. I note today the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences report saying that farmland in Victoria has decreased and yet we are seeing the government providing more and more land taxes, pushing our farmers out of business and pushing up the cost of food grown in Victoria.

Last week I was speaking to farmers in the Willaura region, and they are actively looking at property and land in South Australia because it has become too difficult to make money in Victoria. If we look at grocery prices in Victoria, they have gone up by 30 per cent over the past six years. If we look at food prices overall, they have gone up by more than 17 per cent over the past few years. Labor cannot manage money, and it is Victorians that are paying the price.

Glen Waverley electorate sports

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:01): The Glen Waverley district has a vibrant culture of community sport, and over the last couple of weekends I got to attend some great events. It was a pleasure to visit the Waverley Little Athletics Centre last weekend to celebrate the success of the 2024–25 season at the end-of-season awards presentation. I believe you were there as well, Deputy Speaker. I want to congratulate the centre on another very successful season and thank all the committee members, including president Peter De La Haye, vice-president Matthew Greensmith and secretary Daryl Beasley, the volunteers and the sponsors for making this a growing and successful club that will feed into the next generation of track and field stars for Victoria and Australia.

On the previous weekend, it was great to spend time at the 2025 Bharathi Academy athletics sports meet. It was a perfect day of weather for the occasion, where students from seven Tamil language school campuses met at the Bill Sewart Athletics Track in Burwood East to compete in a day of athletic competition. This wonderful language school is now 31 years old. A big thankyou to principal Mavai Nithianandan and chair Saththiyen Satchithanatham. The day was celebration of the Tamil heritage, culture, language and sports. I want to congratulate the school of their successful endeavours.

I also popped in to visit the Nunawading Cricket Club junior presentation to congratulate the juniors on another great season. A big congratulations to the under-12 purple team, who went all the way this

season and are the premiers. A big thankyou to president Rob Ferdinands all the committee volunteers and sponsors who continue to make this club thrive.

Wyndham ring-road

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (10:02): The Allan Labor government, in conjunction with the Albanese Labor government, will build the Wyndham ring-road. This transformative project promises substantial improvements for families in my electorate of Tarneit and indeed the electorate of Werribee as well. Key aspects of this project include the expansion of the Ison Road overpass and the Main Road interchange, crucial upgrades to intersections that link Tarneit, Wyndham Vale and Manor Lakes, and perhaps most importantly, the construction of a new bridge over the Werribee River. The Wyndham ring-road will connect Hobbs Road in Wyndham Vale directly to Sayers Road in Tarneit, facilitating smoother travel and accessibility for residents in my electorate. This is a fantastic development for our community, representing a leap forward in our ongoing efforts to improve local infrastructure and quality of life for every resident of Tarneit.

The Wyndham ring-road is going to be an absolute game changer in my area as it will not only create a better-connected community but also help bust congestion on our local roads. Having an alternate connection to the freeway means we reduce demand on Ballan Road, Heaths Road and through central Wyndham. These projects are part of the Albanese Labor government's \$1 billion road blitz, matching the existing near-billion-dollar road blitz campaign by the Allan Labor government, who have since added an additional \$200 million. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that is listening to our local communities and building better-connected and safer roads.

Child sexual abuse

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:04): I want to put on record my appreciation of Dr Judy Corton, Chrissie Foster and the Victorian Attorney-General, who met with me in my office last week regarding the recent High Court decision in the case of Bishop Paul Bird versus DP. This recent High Court ruling, which declined to recognise that vicarious liability extends beyond a strict employment relationship, is a profound blow to the ability of victims of child sex crimes by clergy and others to recover compensation. The consequence of the court's ruling is not only a profound injustice to victims but also stands in stark contrast to the well-developed principles of law and vicarious liability applied in almost all other common-law countries in the world, including the UK, Canada and New Zealand. This ruling means many Australian survivors will not achieve the justice they deserve. The consequences of this decision are dire, and victims all around the country are seriously impacted by this arcane and highly injurious decision. Many of them struggle as a result of their abuse just to stay alive.

Claims that were well advanced in the litigation process are now having to be delayed and put on hold, leaving these already traumatised and vulnerable people further traumatised. This ruling signals to survivors that their suffering can be disregarded and creates a legal shield for institutions to avoid responsibility, which is becoming something they seem to excel at. I urge everyone in this Parliament to prioritise this absolutely critical issue and take decisive action to correct this profoundly harmful injustice any way we can and represent the survivors in your communities.

Narre Warren North women's health and wellbeing expo

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:05): On Saturday I had my very first women's health and wellbeing expo. It was a really great morning. From 10 to 12 my team did an incredible job. We had a great array of stallholders, including Fernwood Fitness, Headspace, Wellsprings for Women, the Narre Warren Bowls Club, Victoria Police, the Endeavour Hills Judo Club, Monash Health, the Australian Trauma Education Centre, L'ada Soaps, Soul Centered Healing, South-East Monash Legal, Isabella Lay Psychology, Women's Empowerment Coaching and Hallam Family Practice podiatry. It was such a great event. My team – Mathilda, Nicole, Krissel, Zoe and Zahra – did an amazing job

organising it. We had great constituents from all over the electorate talking about health and wellbeing. It is an event we are going to do again next year, and we look forward to everyone attending.

Dandenong Valley Special Developmental School

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:06): I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate and absolutely thank Rhonda and the team at Dandenong Valley Special Developmental School. I had the pleasure of taking the Premier there last week and showing her around the absolutely magnificent \$14.7 million new build that we have done there. It is an amazing space, purposely built for their great students, and all the work they have done I am so, so proud of.

Narre Warren train station

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:07): I also want to take this time to say a very happy birthday to Narre Warren station, which has just turned one. You can see a great video on my socials, but happy birthday, Narre Warren station.

Bentleigh Football Netball Club

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (10:07): Happy 60th birthday, Bentleigh Football Netball Club. It started in 1965 as Bentleigh Methodists and competed in the Eastern Suburbs Protestant Churches Football Association. In 1978 the club changed its name to Bentleigh Uniting and 10 years later moved to its present home at Arthur Street. In 1993 Bentleigh became part of the newly created Southern Football League before crossing to the Victorian Amateur Football Association from 2000 to 2010. It had a landmark year in 2009 when both the seniors and reserves sides won premierships. Returning to the Southern league in 2011, Bentleigh took a great step when it fielded a women's netball team and then in 2017 added a women's football side. I have had a proud association with this club in the years that I have been the local member. It has been a pleasure to secure funding for important infrastructure, including lights and an electronic scoreboard, and soon work will commence on a full-size netball court so that netball and football can both be played at Arthur Street.

With over 150 male and female playing members, Bentleigh footy netball club is a thriving and diverse club, largely thanks to Demons stalwarts such as Garry Matlock and Paul Dimattina, who have served as players and presidents and continue to serve on the committee to this day. I want to acknowledge another club stalwart Russell Holmesby, and I particularly thank him for assisting me with the historical information in this statement. Happy 60th birthday, Bentleigh Football Netball Club.

Federal election

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:08): The Liberal Party of Australia are unfit to govern this country, and they are unfit for Melbourne's west. The reason I know is because when I googled the candidate for Gellibrand for the Liberal Party, this is what I got:

Sorry –

sorry! –

... there are no members that match your selection. Please try again.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. I would counsel the member for Point Cook not to use props in any form.

*Statements on parliamentary committee reports***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria*

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:09): I rise to make a contribution on the Legal and Social Issues Committee's report, which was tabled yesterday, on the inquiry into capturing data on people who use family violence. We titled it *Building the Evidence Base*, and I want to thank very much at the outset the committee, and not just my parliamentary colleagues, who did a pretty good job on a pretty heavy topic, but particularly the secretariat. Jessica Strout, as the committee manager did a really exceptional job, always keeping a level head.

With different views in the room often, she was able to work with us and guide us to come up with outcomes that were certainly satisfactory. Danielle Broadhurst was with us for the time as the administrative and research assistant, and there was nothing Danielle did not do to help members along the way. Her attention to detail was remarkable, and I thank her greatly. With Danielle and Jessica, really the work that they did over and above what was presented through submissions and hearings to get a really full understanding of the topic was terrific. They were wholly invested and believed in this report as well, which was terrific. Katherine Murtagh was with us for most of the time as a research officer and then moved on, and we had additional support at the end as things got pretty tight and we needed to get this moving.

This is a really serious issue, what we were looking at, and it is very pressing. Family violence is a particularly pressing topic in Victoria at the moment. We know too many women and children in particular lose their lives or are seriously injured as a result of family violence, and there are a number of deficits.

I thought the terms of reference that we were given were particularly vague, and that was a challenge for us at the start. The terms of reference that we were asked to consider were:

... the mechanisms for capturing data on the profile and volume of perpetrators of family violence in Victoria and barriers to achieving a full understanding of this cohort ...

We received many submissions which were not quite related to our topic, because I think from speaking to some of the submitters they equally found it a little bit vague. If their submissions did not fit our topic perfectly, we certainly took the time and effort to consider them. They were very invested in this area and continue to be invested in this area, so we had to work out how we could include them in our report. Because the terms of reference were a bit vague, we had to come up with our own interpretation of what we would narrow this topic into being. We focused on how the Victorian government can achieve a more holistic understanding of people using family violence. This included considering improvements in the current data collection, linkage and sharing of data and what else is needed to build knowledge about the perpetration of family violence. I want to say that we used the term 'person using violence' rather than 'perpetrator', as per some of the information that we heard.

This comes on the back of the royal commission that was completed in 2015 with some 227 recommendations. In January 2023 the implementation monitor said the final recommendation had been implemented, but there is still a lot more to know and a lot more to do. It is time now, given it is 10 years since that royal commission, that we have another look at a number of areas here. We looked specifically at how to move to a more purposeful approach and how to improve current data processes. The data processes are very, very complex, and as a result a number of the recommendations where we put timelines in were pushed out to 2027, in recognition that the data is really different. So many organisations have different means and ways of capturing data using different systems and processes.

We also looked at what we need to know more about and how to improve our understanding. For me, it was exceptionally important that we included timeframes on this. Because this is such a pressing

issue, we do not want these recommendations to be pushed out into the never-never. We need some continued action in this space. One thing I would really like to see in the field around the perpetration of violence is people being very curious – curious to ask more questions to understand a little bit more deeply what is really happening in the space and in the head of a perpetrator. I really encourage those working in that field to be curious.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:14): It is a pleasure to follow the member for Eildon this morning in also making a contribution on the Legal and Social Issue Committee's report *Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria*. Family violence is one of the most pressing issues facing Victoria, and it is an issue that we must not shy away from. It is pervasive, and it is perpetrated by people from all walks of life.

It impacts many families. In recognising this I am really proud that our committee has delivered this report and I am very pleased to be speaking on it today. During the inquiry it was made abundantly clear to the committee that collecting family violence data, including about those who are using family violence, is complex. Data on people using family violence is held in multiple places by multiple organisations and is often not comprehensive enough to provide a complete picture. Improving how governments, agencies, relevant sectors and systems capture data on people who use family violence will increase our understanding of why people use family violence. Better information about the drivers, behaviours and patterns of people who use family violence can then be used to improve the effectiveness of intervention and prevention strategies, which I know is an incredibly important thing for everyone in this place.

The committee heard that collecting data on people who use family violence is not straightforward, and caution must be taken to ensure accuracy and protect victim-survivors. One of the key things we heard about was misidentification of the predominant aggressor. This is an issue that continues to distort the data that is collected, harming victim-survivors and keeping people who use family violence out of view of systems. To address this the committee has recommended the establishment of a clear system-wide process to correct misidentification, ensuring that data collection processes do not reinforce harmful stereotypes or enable systems abuse.

Considering the distinct development needs of children and young people who use family violence can improve both service response and data collection, which in turn builds our understanding. Our recommendations have a focus on refining data systems to provide a more nuanced understanding of how children and young people experience and engage with family violence and how services can better support them. Another area of our report that I am really proud of is the work we did on elder abuse. It is an often hidden form of family violence and it also demands greater attention. There is a need for improved data collection to identify risk factors, intervention points and long-term impacts of elder abuse, and our recommendations target improvements in those areas.

Family violence often remains hidden, and without a more complete evidence base our ability to develop targeted prevention efforts is constrained. By incorporating qualitative, longitudinal and multimethod research we can build a clearer picture of perpetration pathways, protective factors, behaviour change over time and the long-term effectiveness of interventions. This will provide critical insights into how to prevent violence, support change and reduce the risk of continued harm. Our recommendations include to support new research on people who use family violence that centre practice-based knowledge and qualitative, longitudinal and multimethod research approaches, with a priority for projects about those who are not engaged with services. This will play a crucial role in preventing and addressing family violence. Minimising, addressing and preventing family violence is a collective responsibility, and this report highlights the need for a holistic and systemic approach that

coordinates and links existing datasets, enhances cross-sector collaboration and ensures consistency in data standards.

With the time I have left I would like to thank the stakeholders who participated in our inquiry. The learnings and experiences that they shared about barriers to collecting, linking, sharing and using family violence data greatly enriched this report and its recommendations. I also acknowledge the victim-survivors of family violence who bravely shared their experiences. I commend them for their strength and determination to improve the family violence system in Victoria. I am deeply grateful for their contributions, and I thank them.

I wish to thank my fellow committee members: deputy chair the member for Euroa, the member for Eildon, the member for Mornington, the member for Geelong, the member for Bayswater and the member for Clarinda. I thank them for their immense contribution to our inquiry and their curiosity in exploring ways to improve Victoria's response to family violence. On behalf of the committee I also thank our incredible secretariat team: Jessica Strout, Katherine Murtagh, Danielle Broadhurst, Fred Toll and Caitlin Connally. Thank you to our secretariat for your incredible contributions to this important report.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:19): I also rise today to speak on the Legal and Social Issues Committee report on our inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria. As deputy chair of the committee I had the opportunity to contribute and continue to learn about the ongoing challenges that our state is facing when it comes to reducing instances of family violence. I would like to start by saying the deepest thankyou to Jessica Strout, Danielle Broadhurst, Fred Toll and Caitlin Connally. Your intelligence, compassion, memory and patience are incredible. Your catering is also incredible and your cuddles of Sigrid throughout were very valuable. I am so grateful to all of you for everything you have done. Your professionalism is so impressive. We did have robust debate and deliberations throughout, because all of us came to this inquiry with such passion to change the trajectory in Victoria.

In this inquiry we focused on how the Victorian government and relevant agencies can achieve a more holistic understanding of people using family violence, primarily when it comes to the collection and usage of data. It included considering improvements to current data collection, linkage, identifying barriers and sharing and exploring what else was needed to build more knowledge about the perpetration of family violence. Many government departments, agencies and services engage with people experiencing or using family violence, such as the justice system, police and first responders, child protection and family and community services, GPs, hospitals, schools and education providers. A significant amount of data collected on people who use family violence supports risk assessment and management as well as policy development, service planning, research and evaluation activities.

While the scope of this inquiry was limited and did not present a fix-all solution to the problem of family violence, I feel it provided a path for improving how this crisis is addressed and handled at a state government level. The inquiry and the findings in this report aim to build on the 2015 Royal Commission into Family Violence initiative that led to a significant improvement in family violence response. This included greater support for victims, initiatives in prevention and mechanisms to keep people using family violence monitored. But we still have a long way to go.

Even with these improvements the government has not been able to gain the insights needed to achieve a full understanding of people using family violence, and sadly the cohort continues to increase across our state. Family violence incidents reported to Victoria Police increased 400 per cent in the last 20 years, and many unreported incidents continue, with the numbers relating to family violence continuing to increase. This is just the tip of the iceberg. The most recent data from the Crime Statistics

Agency has shown family violence has increased 8 per cent in the last year and 25 per cent on average across regional Victoria.

The report looks extensively at data and statistics, but it must be remembered that family violence has a severe impact on the lives of real people, particularly women and children. In the past week we have seen another family violence murder make the news, this time in Werribee. A 42-year-old mother of four was killed by her partner. These are not isolated incidents. Hearing these stories makes it important for us to ensure we are getting it right when it comes to family violence. This inquiry had a limited scope and did not necessarily chase the bold claim to fix the issue of family violence, but the terms of reference for the report were quite specific to capturing data. It is a clear area of need for improvement, and I do hope these recommendations will lead to real, tangible change. But it must be accompanied by a willingness to do more to make a real-life difference and address the broader issues of family violence in our state. This report is a step, but it is just one step. It must be matched by government policy that is in the best interests of our most vulnerable people. We are still seeing issues with crucial services being closed, including the Orange Door in Benalla just at Christmas and other services within our regional communities.

This report involved extensive discussion and effort to ensure accountability with the aim of driving changes. Some of the major recommendations that I am really proud of include ensuring that sufficient resources are allocated to service providers and stakeholders, ensuring that the government works closely with the same service providers, reviewing existing frameworks for data collection, prioritising training and upskilling of staff and improving the government's reporting capabilities to improve accountability.

I just want to close by thanking everyone who made a submission. Their experience and lived experience were essential to the success of the inquiry and the strength of the recommendations within this report.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:24): Sadly for you, Deputy Speaker, this may well be my last contribution on the report of the inquiry into securing the Victorian food supply that was handed down in November 2024 by the Environment and Planning Committee. It is a sensational report and really important for the community that I represent. I know how keen you are on hearing more about this report, so I am sorry to disappoint you that this may be the last contribution I make on it.

I would like to thank the committee members: the chair, the member for Wendouree – my chamber neighbour; the deputy chair, the member for Morwell; and the members for Bass, Monbulk, Ripon, Croydon and Warrandyte, all of whom contributed to this report and delivered what I think is a very good report that is already being taken seriously by government, and I will come to that in a few moments.

I hear the thanks for the secretariats of committees, and I acknowledge the secretariat of this committee, in particular Igor Dosen. But I would like to just give a shout-out to Caroline Williams, the executive officer of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. PAEC is about to lose Caroline Williams to the Northern Territory, where she will be heading off to assist the Northern Territory Parliament, and their gain is certainly our loss. Caroline, I hope you have a wonderful time up in the NT. I hope you come back to Victoria at some point. I know you will be warmly welcomed.

In terms of this report itself, it goes to the fundamentals of supporting the green wedges and protecting green wedges particularly related to agriculture. That is where it intersects most poignantly with the community that I represent. I was recently at a forum that was thinking about the community of Wyndham and how they may progress their industry and agriculture and what the community really needs. I met some people there who have land in Werribee South which is green wedged, an important

agricultural area producing 10 per cent of Victoria's crops – as the Deputy Speaker knows, our wonderful cauliflower, broccoli, lettuce, all those wonderful vegetables that he eats every day at his lunch, and it is very important that he does so – and a couple of people approached me about seeking to develop land in the area of Werribee South. I told them what I tell everybody who talks to me about planning issues – that I really hope that they have engaged with the planning department well in advance of purchasing the land, because it is a very sad situation for many people who seek to develop land, whether for great community services and assets such as religious facilities or sporting facilities, or for development for houses or business, that they do not always see the planning department first and often their dreams are dashed, but also their dough is dashed because they have spent their dough on what they would like to see happen outside of the planning rules. I encourage all those people who are about to purchase land and who are thinking of developing it to engage with planning departments early.

Unfortunately for these people, my advice to them was to become farmers – and become very good farmers – because the area of Werribee South is for farming. There are some other uses that go on there, but it is primarily a farming area, so I hope that they do become very good farmers. I hope they get engaged in the agricultural industry. It does not mean they have to get into the mud. There are lots of ways that they can get involved in horticulture, in the development of plants and in the development of seedlings across that area, and there are some very thriving businesses who are doing a wonderful job, and I have spoken about some of those before.

I will go to recommendation 9 of this report, which discourages discretionary uses – this is talking about green wedges – that have no nexus with agriculture or the environmental values of green wedge zones and directs local governments to consider the total impact of all discretionary development across green wedges. These are very important recommendations that go to preserving and protecting the agricultural needs of Victoria and Melbourne. Werribee South is within 30 kilometres of Melbourne, and it is amazing to have that in our area for food security primarily but also for employment and a diversity of employment across our community.

I will end on recommendation 11, that the Victorian government make a strong and unequivocal commitment to maintaining Melbourne's urban growth boundary in the new *Plan for Victoria*. That was done. That is part of the *Plan for Victoria*, and I am so glad to see that it is part of the *Plan for Victoria* because we need to increase density but at the same time protect our wonderful environment and our wonderful farming communities.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Building the Evidence Base: Inquiry into Capturing Data on People Who Use Family Violence in Victoria

Chris CREWTHER (Morrington) (10:29): I rise to speak on the Legal and Social Issues Committee's final report on the inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria. Firstly, I will note it has been wonderful to be part of this committee. I will soon be leaving this committee, unfortunately, to participate more in the Electoral Matters Committee, but it has been great to be part of this committee on the organ and tissue donations inquiry and more.

On this inquiry into data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria, I want to express gratitude to everyone involved, from the work of the chair, the deputy chair and the secretariat to colleagues and others. In particular, the secretariat were amazing. Jessica, Danielle, Fred, Caitlin and everyone else who was involved have been amazing. Family violence is one of the most urgent social challenges facing our state, so their work was extremely important. But I also want to acknowledge the work of the chair, the member for Lara. I know we had many robust debates throughout this inquiry, but we managed to come to compromises and solutions when it came to the recommendations in the end. So I want to congratulate the chair on all her work, and it does show that Liberal and Labor can actually work across the chamber sometimes and actually get joint results. I want to also acknowledge my other colleagues, the member for Eildon and the member for Euroa on the coalition side, along with

the members for Geelong, Bayswater and Clarinda. In particular I want to acknowledge the member for Eildon. Her attention to detail is amazing, and it has been terrific to work with her. She does not miss an ‘i’ or a ‘t’; she dots her i’s and crosses her t’s on everything, and it has been absolutely tremendous to work with her. She has really increased the value of this final report.

If we look at key statistics, in 2023–24 Victoria recorded over 100,000 family violence incidents. This has risen from approximately 88,000 in the 2019–20 period. For too long, understanding of perpetrators has been fragmented, incomplete and at times dangerously distorted. Without accurate, inclusive and coordinated data, we will continue to struggle to develop effective interventions, hold perpetrators to account and keep victim-survivors safe.

I want to quote a student called Charli Runge, a student at Balcombe Grammar School, who spoke on this issue earlier this week through a Committee for Frankston & Mornington Peninsula event. She said:

On the 25th of October 2023, Lillie James, aged 21, was murdered at the hands of her previous partner, Paul Thijssen. After ending their relationship just days prior, Lillie James was brutally killed in the bathrooms of a school gymnasium with a hammer by Thijssen.

She went on to say:

On the 16th of November 2020, Celeste Manno, aged 23, was murdered at the hands of her ex-partner and work colleague, Luay Sako. After a year-long campaign of harassment and stalking, Sako stabbed Celeste Manno 23 times in just 2 and a half minutes.

She went on to say:

The impact of this crisis extends beyond just the women affected and these impacts are felt across our nation. Domestic and family violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women in Australia. This places additional strain on support agencies such as The Salvation Army and leads to an increase in the need for crisis housing, which in turn has negative effects on our economy.

She went on to say:

It’s time for the government to take a stand and enact meaningful change. We need stricter penalties for breaching restraining orders and harsher sentences for those convicted of killing women.

Thank you, Charli Runge, for your comments and your passion in this area.

Going into this inquiry we looked at many different things. We looked at the fact that data is often siloed across systems, collected inconsistently, stored in disconnected formats and rarely shared in ways to build a full picture. We need a statewide data-mapping project to identify where this information lies, where the gaps are and how these gaps prevent meaningful insights. Current data reflects only those who come into contact with police or the justice system, and many perpetrators outside the justice system are not counted at all. We looked at the highlighted risk of over-reliance on demographic profiles, which leads to stereotypes and allows some perpetrators to escape scrutiny altogether.

We also looked to the future. We have 61 practical and well-reasoned recommendations in this final report, which I hope will be fully implemented. We looked at better training and tools to embed the multi-agency risk assessment and management framework in trials of minimum-standard datasets to create clear system-wide processes to correct the misidentification of victim-survivors as aggressors. We call for investment in research, including proactive information sharing; support for service providers, hospitals, schools and community legal centres; better attention to elder abuse; and collaboration. This is not just a justice issue; this is a community issue.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

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

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (10:34): I rise to speak on the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors report that was tabled in March 2024. The health and wellbeing of our community of course is paramount, and regardless of age, background or circumstance everyone in our community deserves access to good quality health care in a good quality hospital being looked after by the hands of our highly trained and skilled health professionals. However, in some cases the best of quality health care, sadly, is not enough. Whether it be because of hereditary reasons, genetics, family history, lifestyle, an accident or unforeseen trauma, sometimes the healthcare system can only help to a point, and it is the generosity of another human being through their organs, tissue or blood that can save another's life. As set out on page 1 of this report:

People who become organ and tissue donors perform a selfless and generous act that saves and improves lives.

In the words of Alfred Health, organ and tissue donation:

... is perhaps the most valuable, even sacred, gift it is possible to give. At a time of profound grief, the family of [a] donor have found the grace to recognise that they can help others.

As highlighted by this amazing inquiry, an individual's registration on the Australian Organ Donor Register is important because it significantly increases the likelihood that a donation will proceed, honouring the donors wishes. The way a person can donate is as a deceased organ donor, a deceased tissue donor or even as a living donor. A deceased organ donation can include kidneys, heart, lungs, liver, stomach, intestines and pancreas and involves transplanting a viable organ from someone who has died, with family consent, to someone on the transplant waiting list. Deceased tissue donation is a separate process that includes heart valves and tissues, pancreas islets, bone and tendons, skin and eyes. This involves retrieving tissue from someone who dies, with family consent, that is then stored as a viable product and available when someone needs it. Deceased tissue donation can usually occur up to 24 hours after death, meaning the person does not need to die in hospital. Living donors can also volunteer to donate – usually a blood relative or close friend of a patient – kidneys or part of the liver, tissues, breast milk, faecal microbiota, blood, plasma, stem cells, bone marrow, eggs, sperm and embryos.

Currently Australia is an opt-in registration model, where a person over the age of 16 can register their decision to donate their organs and tissues when they die on the Australian Organ Donor Register via an online form, Medicare account, MyGov, post or phone. However, regardless of a person's registrations status, consent from the family is currently and has always been sought when a person dies and their organs or tissues have been identified as suitable donors. The inquiry did show, however, that where a person is registered to be an organ and tissue donor there is a nine in 10 chance that their family will consent come the time of donation. That is compared to a four in 10 chance of a family consenting if a person is not registered.

Donation and transplantation of course provide tremendous benefits for the recipient's survival chances. It is even cheaper for the health system and helps the patient recover quicker and lead a better life. Of course the donor's family leaves a legacy behind. But as highlighted in this report, there still are a number of opportunities, challenges and barriers to increasing the rate of donation. In this respect the report highlights that Victoria's organ donation rate remains consistently above the national average. Most people support donation; 81 per cent support it. However, only 23 per cent of Victorians are registered be donors. That is compared to the national average of 36 per cent.

South Australia's donation registration rate is at 72 per cent, namely because South Australia is the only state where it is still possible to record a donation decision on a driver's licence. While Victorians were previously able to record interest in becoming a donor on a driver's licence for a short period,

that has not been possible since the early 2000s. With 99.9 per cent Victoria's eligible donation population holding a driver's licence, our state's drivers licence system really does provide that major opportunity to drastically increase Victoria's registration rates on a massive scale. Among young people, however, the statistics are even lower. Just 10 per cent of people aged 16 to 25 years have registered a donation decision, and rates among our culturally and ethnically diverse communities do remain particularly low as well.

However, in Australia about 1400 people died in hospital out of approximately 80,000 deaths where organ donation was possible. This measures to around 2 per cent of people who die in hospital each year who have the chance to become organ donors. The deceased organ donation rate has continued to fall during and since the COVID pandemic to a low of 16.5 per cent for Victoria and 16.4 per cent for Australia and is yet to fully rebound. At the same time, concerning overall Australian's organ waitlist continues to increase, including by 17 per cent in recent years, outstripping population growth by 11 per cent.

That is why the work of this inquiry and its report, recommendations and findings are so important – 74 findings and 41 recommendations that I draw this house's attention to.

Bills

Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:41): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Wage Theft Amendment Bill 2025:

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

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

Overview of the Bill

The Bill will amend the *Wage Theft Act 2020* (**Principal Act**) in order to:

- rename the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and amend the name of the Principal Act to the *Workforce Inspectorate Victoria Act*;
- repeal Victoria's wage theft offences, and the functions and powers connected to the investigation and enforcement of those offences by the former Wage Inspectorate Victoria;
- retain the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria as an independent statutory body with responsibility for administering the *Child Employment Act 2003* (CE Act), *Long Service Leave Act 2018* and *Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005* and as a sector regulator under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*;
- provide a facilitative function for the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to give advice and information in relation to workplace entitlements and protections that are prescribed; and
- confer a function on the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to receive and refer complaints and information relating Victorian public construction projects.

Human rights issues

The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- right to privacy (s 13).

Right to privacy

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

New function to receive and refer complaints, and information sharing

Clause 36 of the Bill inserts new sections 20(1)(ia)–(id) into the Principal Act, and will provide that Workforce Inspectorate Victoria have new functions to receive complaints or matters, and related information, regarding public construction and then refer these on to other government agencies and bodies, including those of the Commonwealth or another State or Territory. Workforce Inspectorate Victoria may then also receive notifications and information from other government agencies and bodies relating to the complaints or matters it has referred on, and may provide advice and report to the Minister on any complaints, matters, notifications or information it receives or refers.

Clause 37 of the Bill then inserts a new Division 2A into Part 5 of the Principal Act, which provides that Workforce Inspectorate Victoria may request notification or information from a government agency or body regarding any investigation or action the agency or body has taken in respect of a complaint or matter that Workforce Inspectorate Victoria has referred to them. The agency or body must then provide the relevant notification or information within a reasonable time. Clause 38 then inserts new section 77(2)(ab) into the Principal Act to enable the disclosure of information when performing a function or exercising a power under the Act in accordance with the Workforce Inspectorate’s functions under s 20(1)(ib) or (id), that is in relation to the referral of a complaint or matter regarding public construction to another government agency or body, or in relation to providing advice and reporting to the Minister on any complaints, matters, notifications or information that Workforce Inspectorate Victoria receives or refers.

The receipt and referral of complaints, matters and information, as well as information sharing between bodies and agencies, engages the right to privacy, given this may involve the sharing of personal information of individuals engaged to work on Victorian public construction sites.

I am of the view, however, that clauses 36 to 38 of the Bill do not limit the privacy right, as any disclosure of a person’s information would be lawful, in that it would be pursuant to a properly circumscribed law, and is not arbitrary, as any disclosure may only occur in limited and clearly defined circumstances that enable Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to carry out its functions in respect of the receipt and referral of complaints regarding potentially unlawful conduct on Victorian public construction sites.

I note that the purposes of disclosure are consistent with those recognised by the Information Privacy Principles as being consistent with protection of privacy, being where disclosure is a necessary part of investigating unlawful activity or reporting concerns to a relevant authority.

A person acting on behalf of Workforce Inspectorate Victoria is also still subject to strict confidentiality requirements under s77 of the Principal Act, and any disclosure of information that is outside that the current exceptions in s77(2), and new s77(2)(ab) may amount to an offence.

I therefore consider that the Bill is compatible with the right to privacy under s13 of the Charter.

The Hon Danny Pearson
Minister for Finance

Second reading

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (10:41): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that the minister’s second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

Criminal and unlawful behaviour has no place in Victoria’s construction industry.

The Formal Review into Victorian Government Bodies’ Engagement with Construction Companies and Construction Unions, led by Mr Greg Wilson (Wilson Review), has exposed a rotten culture in the construction sector and the Victorian Government is taking strong action to stamp it out.

That is why I am introducing a Bill to implement the Victorian Government’s response to recommendation 1 of the Wilson Review, to establish a complaints referral function within the independent statutory body, Workforce Inspectorate Victoria, to receive and refer complaints relating to public construction.

The Bill will also give effect to the Victorian Government’s decision to repeal Victoria’s wage theft offences, following commencement of the Commonwealth’s offences in the *Fair Work Act 2009* (FW Act) on 1 January 2025. The Commonwealth’s offences were drafted to cover the field of criminalising the underpayment of wages and other entitlements.

Background

In July 2024, the Victorian Government commissioned the Wilson Review as part of a range of actions responding to allegations of criminal and other unlawful conduct by the construction division of the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees' Union (CFMEU), to examine how Victorian Government bodies interact with construction companies and unions.

The Final Report was delivered to the Victorian Government on 29 November 2024. The review made eight recommendations about how the powers of Victorian Government bodies can be strengthened to better respond to allegations of criminal and other unlawful behaviour. The recommendations emphasise collective action among employers, agencies and law enforcement to encourage complaints, share information and act on misconduct as well as highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach involving cultural, regulatory, legal, policy and contractual changes.

The Government released its response to the final report on 18 December 2024, accepting all recommendations either in-full or in-principle.

The Review found that most relevant interventions sit with the Commonwealth in industrial relations and the CFMEU administration, but that there are a number of actions Victorian Government agencies can take to enhance oversight and management to deter criminal and unlawful activity.

The measures the Victorian Government is adopting aim to complement Commonwealth reforms and CFMEU changes, as well as actions already taken by the Government, which includes passing anti-bikie laws in 2024 that make it easier to prevent certain individuals from associating with each other.

The Bill will amend the *Wage Theft Act 2020* (Act) to repeal Victoria's wage theft offences and associated compliance and enforcement functions and powers as well as re-name the Wage Inspectorate to the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria to better reflect its role and functions going forward.

The Commonwealth Government introduced amendments to the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) in the *Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Closing Loopholes No.2) Act 2024* (Cth), which makes it a criminal offence in Australia to intentionally underpay wages. The Commonwealth wage theft laws commenced on 1 January 2025, and as a result, the Victorian wage theft laws are largely inoperable and can be repealed.

The Bill in detail

People coming forward with critical information about unlawful or intimidatory conduct on worksites deserve to have complaint processes that meet their expectations and the expectations of the Victorian people.

There are multiple state and federal entities with powers to respond to various issues that may arise on any Victorian worksite including Victorian Government construction sites. For example, WorkSafe Victoria has regulatory responsibility for workplace health and safety, the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) is responsible for compliance with Australia's workplace laws around pay and conditions, Victoria Police are responsible for the investigation of criminal allegations, while the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission investigates complaints about corruption in the public sector.

The number of different complaint handling entities with various regulatory responsibilities can make it challenging for people to find the right place to direct their complaint. Some complaints are also multifaceted and fall under the remit of more than one agency. The Wilson Report identified instances of complaints being passed between agencies without resolution. A central agency with relevant referral functions can provide 'one doorway' to receive and assess complaints and ensure they are referred to the appropriate regulatory body who can assist.

A centralised complaints referral agency will assist to collect and track complaints data, that could detect emerging trends and inform future changes in laws and policies as well as facilitate appropriate referral pathways.

That is why the Victorian Government supported recommendation 1 of the Wilson Report to establish a central agency to receive and refer complaints relating to Victorian Government construction sites to the bodies who can assist.

The Wilson Review recommended establishing the complaints referral function as part of a new standalone entity or administrative office. However, consistent with the Government's commitment in the Economic Growth Statement to halve the number of business regulators, it is proposed that the complaints referral function be set up in the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria. Housing the referral function within an established regulator, with existing operational capability and experience in dealing with allegations of unlawful conduct in workplaces, is a more efficient delivery model that can be rapidly set up.

It is preferred that the complaints referral body be established within the Workforce Inspectorate, given its current legislative remit and existing operational capability to receive information from members of the public, refer matters as needed and experience dealing with allegations of criminal conduct.

The amendments in this Bill will confer on the Workforce Inspectorate the necessary legislative functions for it to undertake the complaints referral function, including receiving information relating to suspected criminal or other unlawful conduct from principal contractors on Victorian Government-funded construction projects, as well as providing appropriate information sharing arrangements with the bodies to which it will be referring complaints.

The Bill also enables the Workforce Inspectorate to follow up on complaints and matters it has referred to other agencies, by facilitating a two-way flow of information. The Bill specifically allows the Workforce Inspectorate to request and receive notifications and information about matters it has referred (subject to any confidentiality or privacy provisions within the referral agency). The Workforce Inspectorate will be able to set up systems to enable it to provide information back to complainants to keep them informed of any responses or updates it receives.

The complaints referral function does not require the Workforce Inspectorate to investigate or resolve complaints directly, but rather, act as a clearing house, ensuring that complaints are received and referred to the appropriate agency. The Workforce Inspectorate will be a central point of communication. It will not have powers to require referred matters to be followed up (as this would interfere with the powers of other independent law enforcement agencies), nor is it given powers to take action itself in relation to a referred matter. As recognised by Mr Greg Wilson in his review report, the responsibility for action belongs to the law enforcement or regulatory agency that has the relevant powers. The Workforce Inspectorate will have operational capacity to monitor status and resolution of complaints over time.

These amendments implement recommendation 1 of the Wilson Review.

Recommendation 7 of the Wilson Report, which the Victorian Government supported in full, recommends that contracts for state projects include new requirements for principal contractors to report and manage criminal or unlawful conduct on Victorian Government-funded work sites. The recommendation also requires principal contractors to report any suspected criminal or other unlawful conduct to the new complaints referral body. Failure of contractors to meet their reporting obligations could constitute a breach of contract, providing clearer grounds for enforcement if issues arise in the future.

In setting up the complaints referral function, the Bill also supports the implementation of Recommendation 7, by empowering the Workforce Inspectorate to receive reports from any person, which includes principal contractors. Where these matters are of a criminal nature, they will need to be handled in accordance with criminal procedure laws.

The Bill includes a definition of ‘public construction’ to support the new function. The Wilson Report and recommendations only refer to Victorian Government construction projects, not construction more generally.

The Wilson Report estimates that the demand in Victoria could be in the vicinity of 200 complaints per quarter. The Report noted that demand for Victoria’s referral function could be less or more, depending on whether or not individuals chose instead to directly make a report to the Fair Work Commission (or other responsible bodies) and levels of awareness of reporting options.

The Wilson Report data was sourced and estimated based on the Fair Work Commission online portal, which opened on 31 July 2024 and received 793 complaints and pieces of intelligence as at 31 October 2024. It assumes that complaints in relation to Victoria represents around 25 per cent, which equates to approximately 200 complaints.

We have announced that the Inspectorate will conduct its new functions in receiving concerns or complaints with a special focus on women’s safety.

This Government has a continuing, existing commitment to drive long-term structural and cultural change across the male-dominated construction sector, to increase women’s workforce participation through the implementation of the eight year Building Equitable Futures Strategy, together with implementation of the Building Equality Policy. The policy works towards equal representation by taking steps to attract, recruit and retain women in the industry, break down the barriers to women’s workforce participation and challenge existing attitudes and norms.

The Victorian Government is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of the action taken to acquit the Wilson Report’s recommendations and their impact on managing issues of criminal and unlawful conduct within Victorian Government construction sites two years after the laws commence. The evaluation will also assess whether further reforms may be needed, to make sure our construction industry meets the expectations of the Victorian people.

The Bill will additionally confer a general function on the Workforce Inspectorate to provide information, education and advice in relation to workplace entitlements if prescribed in regulations. This function will allow the Workforce Inspectorate (subject to approval and regulatory prescription) to provide advice and information on workplace matters more broadly, noting its regulatory functions will otherwise be limited to

child employment, long service leave, owner drivers/forestry contractors and the new complaints referral function following the repeal of the wage theft offences. The proposed amendment is a facilitative function intended to provide flexibility for the Workforce Inspectorate in the future to provide a broader advice function if deemed appropriate, without acting beyond its statutory remit.

The Bill allows the Workforce Inspectorate to be re-named to better reflect its revised legislative mandate, as well as re-naming the principal Act. The Wage Inspectorate Victoria will be known as the Workforce Inspectorate Victoria and the *Wage Theft Act 2020* will be re-named the *Workforce Inspectorate Act 2025*.

The change of the name of the Act and the Inspectorate will not alter its formal status in any way. The Workforce Inspectorate will continue to be an independent statutory authority led by the Commissioner.

The Bill also makes consequential amendments to the *Child Employment Act 2003*, *Long Service Leave Act 2018* and *Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005* to reflect the new Act name and references to the Workforce Inspectorate. The legislative reforms also interact with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* to support the referral of complaints and ensure appropriate privacy protections are in place for the referring entity. They also interact with the recently amended *Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012* and regulations, which prohibit members of prescribed organisations from entering certain areas of Victorian Government worksites.

Commencement date

The provisions that repeal the wage theft laws can commence quickly upon proclamation as they are no longer required in light of the Commonwealth's offences.

The new complaints referral function will commence on a date to be proclaimed to allow time for the function to be fully embedded in the Workforce Inspectorate, including the recruitment and training of staff to appropriately navigate, assess and direct complex complaints within the Commonwealth and Victorian regulatory and integrity landscape as well as set up the necessary ICT systems.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:41): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 16 April.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:42): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025:

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

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

Overview

The Bill seeks to improve the operation of the Victorian legal and justice systems by implementing the following reforms:

- narrowing the trustee secret commission offence in section 180 of the *Crimes Act 1958* to capture only dishonest or otherwise corrupt conduct
- extending the commencement date of summary appeal reforms in the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019* by 3 years
- supporting the expansion of the Magistrates' Court of Victoria's electronic Case Management System to its criminal jurisdiction
- correcting section referencing errors in the *Worker Screening Act 2020*

- amending the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* (SSRA) to correct an error by repealing section 330G(2)(a), a provision relating to the regulation of out of home care workers and carers, during a transitional period, and
- repealing an outdated regulation-making power in the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989*.

Human Rights Issues

Many of the Bill's reforms are technical in nature, and do not give rise to human rights issues. The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- equality (section 8)
- privacy and reputation (section 13)
- protection of families and children (section 17)
- property rights (section 20)
- right to a fair hearing (section 24)
- rights in criminal proceedings (section 25), and
- retrospective criminal laws (section 27).

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, to the extent that any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and justified.

Amending the *Crimes Act 1958* to narrow the trustee secret commission offence

The Bill amends section 180 of the Crimes Act to narrow the trustee secret commission offence so that it only captures dishonest or otherwise corrupt conduct.

Property rights (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. The amendments to the trustee secret commission offence in the Crimes Act may promote this right by ensuring that routine, good faith transactions engaged in during a trustee's replacement can occur without risk of criminal liability. The reforms will also remove the onerous requirement to obtain the consent of all trust beneficiaries or the Supreme Court of Victoria (SCV) for the proposed conduct, which will help to prevent unnecessary and costly dissipation of trust assets.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24)

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to a fair and public hearing. The reforms to section 180 of the Crimes Act will apply retrospectively to ensure that trustees and other persons are not charged with a serious indictable offence for prior conduct that was not dishonest or otherwise corrupt. The reforms clarify the mental element that the prosecution must prove in different circumstances and break down the conduct covered by current section 180 into separate offences. If a charge is brought under revised section 180, this improved clarity may promote an efficient and expeditious hearing and support the accused's right to a fair hearing.

Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to a presumption of innocence until proven guilty. As with the right to a fair hearing, these reforms will promote just outcomes in criminal proceedings. Without the section 180 reforms, a person may be criminally liable, for example, for a good faith offering or giving of valuable consideration to an outgoing trustee. The amendments will make clear that for a successful prosecution, it must be proved that the conduct was done for a dishonest or otherwise corrupt purpose, and with the requisite intention or knowledge.

As noted above, the reforms will break down the conduct captured by section 180 as currently in force into separate offences. This will not expand the ambit of section 180, but will instead clarify the elements of each offence in line with modern drafting techniques, with the additional threshold of requiring a 'dishonest or otherwise corrupt purpose'.

Retrospective criminal laws (section 27)

These amendments engage, but do not limit, retrospective criminal law rights under section 27 of the Charter. Section 27(1) provides that a person must not be found guilty of a criminal offence based on conduct that was not an offence at the time the conduct was engaged in.

The Bill includes a transitional provision for the amendments to section 180, which provides that the revised trustee secret commission offences:

- will apply retrospectively to conduct engaged in prior to commencement, instead of section 180 as currently in force, including for the purposes of any ancillary offence relating to section 180 (thereby only capturing past conduct engaged in dishonestly or otherwise corruptly), and
- uphold the legality of any prior convictions and decisions by beneficiaries of a trust or the SCV to consent to conduct under section 180 as in force prior to commencement of these reforms.

Amendments to the *Criminal Procedure Act 2009* and *Sentencing Act 1991* to support Magistrates' Court case management

The Bill amends the Criminal Procedure Act and Sentencing Act to support the rollout of the Case Management System (CMS) in the Magistrates' Court Criminal Division, allowing the Magistrates' Court of Victoria to achieve efficiencies following investment in the CMS.

Right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)

Section 8 of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination.

The Bill will promote the right to equality before the law by increasing access to justice for Victorians. Currently, court users may be required to travel significant distances to physically file documents with the registry. These amendments will reduce the need for travel by enabling certain applications to be filed online. As such, it will ensure that court users, including those with disabilities and who live in rural or regional areas, can access registry services more easily.

Correcting an unintended deemed exclusion in the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021*

The Bill rectifies an unintentional deemed exclusion for out of home carers by repealing section 330G(2)(a) of the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* (SSRA). This provides that all findings of misconduct in accordance with section 105(5) of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* are deemed exclusion decisions for the purposes of the new worker and carer exclusion scheme under the SSRA.

On repeal of section 330G(2)(a), a person would not be deemed to be excluded from being an out of home carer following a finding of misconduct made in accordance with section 105(5) of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* on its own. Instead, deemed exclusions under section 330G of the SSRA will only apply to findings that a person should be disqualified from registration, on the basis of a finding under section 106(3) that the person poses an unacceptable risk to children and a finding that a person should continue to be disqualified under 112 of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

Right to privacy and reputation (section 13)

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides for the right of a person not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought. The right protects a person's interest in the freedom of their personal and social sphere, which includes the right to establish and develop meaningful social relations and may also incorporate a right to work in some circumstances (to the extent that work is necessary to establish and develop social relations, and in cases relating to caring for a child).

The amendment to the SSRA engages this right and promotes it, in that it will mean that findings of misconduct will not result in an automatic exclusion but rather, will ensure that an exclusion is only deemed under the SSRA where an out of home carer also presents an unacceptable risk of harm to children.

Right to protection of families and children (section 17)

Section 17 of the Charter provides that families are entitled to be protected by society and the State, and every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child's best interests and is needed by the child by reason of being a child.

This amendment engages section 17 as it removes an automatic exclusion of out of home carers where a finding of misconduct has been made against them.

The amendment to the SSRA promotes the section 17 right as it is expected to result in fewer out of home carers being deemed as excluded. This is intended to ensure the availability of out of home carers will not be unnecessarily impacted, minimising disruption for children in care where a carer may be excluded, who has not been found to pose an unacceptable risk of harm.

The amendment also limits the section 17 right, because it will mean that a carer who has engaged in misconduct may still be able to work with children in out of home care. This limitation is reasonable and justified, however, on the basis that the Suitability Panel must still perform a risk assessment of the carer and must determine, on the balance of probabilities, that the carer does not pose an unacceptable risk to children.

The amendment is consistent with the arrangements for excluding out of home care workers and carers for the worker and carer exclusion scheme under the SSRA.

The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Planning

Second reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:42): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 amends a number of Acts to support the courts and improve the operation of the Victorian justice and legal systems. It:

- narrows the *Crimes Act 1958* trustee secret commission offence to only capture dishonest or otherwise corrupt conduct
- defers commencement of summary appeal reforms in the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019*
- improves the operation of the Case Management System in the Magistrates' Court
- corrects technical errors in the *Worker Screening Act 2020*
- rectifies an unintentional deemed exclusion for out of home care workers in the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021*, and
- removes an obsolete regulation-making power from the *Magistrates' Court Act 1989*.

Narrowing the trustee secret commission offence to only capture dishonest or otherwise corrupt conduct

Section 180 of the *Crimes Act 1958*, as currently in force, makes it an indictable offence for a person to offer or give to a trustee, or for a trustee to receive or solicit for themselves or any other person, valuable consideration for the appointment of a new trustee in the trustee's place, without the consent of all trust beneficiaries or the Supreme Court of Victoria. The Bill will narrow the trustee secret commission offence by requiring the relevant conduct to have been done with a dishonest or otherwise corrupt purpose.

This offence was introduced in 1905 after the Royal Commission on the Butter Industry found widespread bribery and corruption involving agents, including the receipt and payment of secret commissions. It was later consolidated in the Crimes Act. Recent Supreme Court of Victoria decisions on the application of section 180 have held that a corrupt purpose is not an element of the offence. This has left trustees and other persons engaged in routine, good faith transactions relating to the replacement of an outgoing trustee at risk of serious criminal liability. It follows that the offence is no longer fit for purpose.

The reforms will ensure that only conduct done for a dishonest or otherwise corrupt purpose and with the requisite intent or knowledge will be captured by section 180. The phrase 'a dishonest or otherwise corrupt purpose' is intended to mean dishonest conduct or conduct done with a wrongful or improper purpose. It should not capture good faith transactions.

The reforms will also remove the onerous and costly requirement for trust beneficiaries or the Supreme Court to consent to a person offering or giving, or a trustee soliciting or receiving, valuable consideration associated with a trustee's replacement, such as reimbursement of reasonable costs. This will save those involved, and the Court, time and resources. The consent requirement will no longer be necessary once the reforms commence, as neither beneficiaries nor the Court would knowingly consent to dishonest or otherwise corrupt conduct.

The Bill will break section 180 down into five offences. This does not expand the ambit of section 180, but rather will clarify, through the use of modern drafting techniques, the elements the prosecution must prove in each scenario currently prohibited by section 180, with the additional threshold of requiring a 'dishonest or otherwise corrupt purpose' and either intent or knowledge.

The revised section 180 offences will be retrospective in operation, except in specific instances. This will mean that trustees and other persons who have in the past engaged in good faith, routine trust transactions that may have inadvertently breached section 180 as currently in force, can be assured that they will not be held criminally liable. Retrospectivity also extends to circumstances in which a person may be criminally liable

under certain ancillary offences in the Crimes Act that relate to the primary section 180 offence as currently in force.

These reforms are important to keep our criminal laws fit for purpose, to promote just outcomes, and provide confidence in the legality of good faith, routine dealings that are central to the effective operation of trusts.

Delaying the commencement of summary appeal reforms

The Bill extends the forced commencement date of summary appeal reforms in the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Appeals) Act 2019* for 3 years, to 1 July 2028. This allows additional time for implementation planning and for affected justice agencies to prepare for commencement of these significant changes to criminal procedure.

In 2019, Parliament passed laws to modernise Victoria’s summary criminal appeal system. These laws, currently set to commence on 5 July 2025, will abolish summary appeals of criminal cases to the County Court and replace them with new processes that seek to enhance efficiency and reduce trauma for witnesses and victims who will no longer have to re-attend court and give evidence a second time on appeal.

These are important objectives, but they can only be achieved if courts and justice agencies have sufficient time to prepare for this change in practice. The commencement date for these reforms was postponed on previous occasions to allow affected agencies to prepare, while also recovering from the impacts of the pandemic on courts. Since the Criminal Appeals Act passed, Parliament has passed several other pieces of legislation which have made, or will make, significant changes to other aspects of criminal procedure. These include enabling judge alone trials to address the impacts of the pandemic on jury trials which, though temporary, required significant effort for courts to implement, the *Youth Justice Act 2024*, and, more recently, the *Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Act 2025*.

This changed environment has required Government to turn its focus to supporting implementation of these critical reforms to the justice system. In light of the significant time and resources required to implement the summary appeal reforms on top of these other reforms, it is necessary to further delay their commencement. This will ensure that implementation activities can be undertaken in a careful, staged manner, minimising significant disruptions to the court system.

Improving the operation of the Case Management System in the Magistrates’ Court

The Bill makes technical amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act and Sentencing Act to allow the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria to extend the use of its Case Management System in its criminal jurisdiction. These reforms will modernise registry services and improve the efficiency of court operations by enabling certain documents to be filed electronically.

Correcting technical errors in the *Worker Screening Act 2020*

The Bill will make technical amendments to the Worker Screening Act to correct errors in references to sections in the Act relating to National Disability Insurance Scheme checks and Working with Children checks.

Rectifying an unintentional deemed exclusion for out of home care workers in the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021*

The Bill will amend the SSRA to ensure that, during the 3-year transitional period for the Suitability Panel, a person can only be excluded from working in the out of home care sector when the Panel finds both that the person:

- a. engaged in conduct, and
- b. poses an unacceptable risk to children.

This amendment will ensure workers are not unintentionally excluded from working in the out of home care sector, where a Panel has not found they pose an unacceptable risk to children in out of home care.

This ensures consistency with the approach to exclusion decisions made by the Suitability Panel before the new Act was introduced, and is the approach taken by the new Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme for out of home care workers and carers.

Removing an obsolete regulation-making power from the *Magistrates’ Court Act 1989*

The Bill repeals an outdated power in the Magistrates’ Court Act to prescribe municipal areas where police officers are not required to serve civil process. This provision is no longer required as police officers do not serve civil process.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (10:43): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 16 April.

Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:44): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025:

Opening paragraphs

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

In my opinion, the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Human Rights Issues

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria.

Clause 71 of the Bill amends the requirements that apply in relation to voluntary exclusion orders at the casino. An exclusion order prohibits the person from entering or remaining on casino premises. Under the amendments, it is an offence if a casino operator does not issue an exclusion order to a person upon voluntary application by the person. This is a change from the current provision, which affords the casino operator discretion in deciding whether to issue an exclusion order upon request.

Clause 71 also reduces the regulatory burden on a person seeking a voluntary exclusion order by providing that an application no longer needs to be witnessed.

The purpose of clause 71 is to strengthen the regulatory framework for voluntary exclusion orders. While the government is not aware of any situation in which the casino operator has or would refuse to issue an exclusion order upon request, this change will close a potential loophole. Self-exclusion is an important mechanism to address gambling harm.

Clause 71 contains minor amendments to the existing exclusion framework and does not limit the right to move freely within Victoria. If it does limit the right to move freely within Victoria, any limitation is reasonable in accordance with section 7 of the Charter, because it only applies in circumstances where a person has voluntarily requested to be issued with an exclusion order.

The Hon Anthony Carbines MP
Minister for Police
Minister for Community Safety
Minister for Victims
Minister for Racing

Second reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (10:44): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Bill I am introducing amends the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* and the *Casino Control Act 1991* to improve the regulatory framework for gambling in Victoria.

The Bill makes important changes to the legislative framework for the gaming machine monitoring licence and public lottery licences to provide flexibility for the government in future licensing processes to yield the best outcomes for the state.

The Bill also makes provision for the removal of cheques from the Australian financial system and will reduce the barriers to voluntary exclusion at the Melbourne casino.

The Bill will also make some minor and technical amendments to ensure Victoria's gambling legislation is clear and consistent.

I now turn to the provisions of the Bill before the House.

The Bill makes changes to the monitoring licensing framework to provide options that will maximise the state's ability to extract value for Victorians from monitoring services after the expiry of the current licence in 2027.

The Bill amends the requirements for the term of the monitoring licence to replace the current fixed term of 15 years with provisions that enable the licence term to be specified in the licence. This will enable the government to determine the most appropriate licence term at a point in time, having regard to best available evidence and an understanding of the value to the State.

The Bill also gives the government the power to require a premium payment as consideration for the monitoring licence.

The Bill will also enable the monitoring licensee to be directed to provide other regulatory compliance systems and mechanisms, such as anti-money laundering alert systems to assist venue operators to comply with their regulatory obligations.

In addition, the Bill makes other administrative and technical amendments to improve the process for directing a monitoring licensee to provide pre-commitment and other systems and to clarify the operation of the ownership restrictions to reduce uncertainty ahead of the licensing process.

The Bill also makes changes to the public lottery licensing framework ahead of the expiry of the current public lottery licence in 2028.

The Bill will give the state the power to issue a long-term extension of a public lottery licence and will modernise the licensing process to make it consistent with the licensing processes for the other major gambling licences.

These changes will maximise the state's ability to extract value for Victorians from public lotteries after the expiry of the licence in 2028.

To complement the proposed changes to the monitoring licence and public lottery licence framework, the Bill includes amendments to clarify the functions of the independent Review Panel that reviews and reports on the licensing processes undertaken by government. The changes will align the Panel's process with the modernised gambling licensing processes and simplify the process for the Minister to refer matters to the Panel for review.

The Bill includes amendments to enable the continued operation of pre-commitment at the Melbourne casino in periods of downtime where the casino systems are unable to communicate with the statewide pre-commitment system. The amendments will enable the casino operator to securely keep a temporary database of pre-commitment information, including players' last known limits, to ensure the effective operation of the pre-commitment functions unless communication with the statewide system is re-established.

The Bill also includes amendments to address the proposed phasing out of the use of cheques from the Australian financial system. The Bill amends payment of winnings provisions for gaming venue operators, casino operators and bingo centre operators to ensure payment by electronic funds transfer is always a permitted alternative to payment by cheque.

The Bill will reduce barriers to voluntary exclusion at the Melbourne casino by ensuring the Melbourne casino operator is required to issue an exclusion order on request by a person and removing unnecessary administrative requirements for an application to be signed by a person who is authorised to witness a statutory declaration.

In addition to the substantive amendments to improve the operation of the gambling legislative framework, the Bill will amend the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* and the *Casino Control Act 1991* to remove gender references.

I commend the Bill to the house.

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

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 16 April.

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

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Insert the following New Clause before clause 1 –

“1AA Statement for this Act

The Parliament recognises the right of all Victorians to be free from vilification and to participate equally in a democratic society.

The diversity of the people of Victoria enhances our community and Victorians embrace the benefits provided by this diversity and are proud that people live together harmoniously. However, vilification is still occurring in Victoria.

Vilification harms social cohesion through its inherent divisiveness and perpetuates the unequal distribution of power. Vilifying conduct is contrary to democratic values because of its effect on the people who are subjected to it. It diminishes their dignity, sense of self-worth and belonging to their community and can cause profound physical and psychological harm. It also reduces their ability to contribute to, or fully participate in, all social, political, economic and cultural aspects of society as equals, thus reducing the benefit that diversity brings to the community.

It is the intention of Parliament to enact law for the people of Victoria that respects the inherent dignity of all of us and promotes our equal participation in public life.”

2. Clause 1, after line 5 insert –

“(ab) to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and others experiencing systemic injustice and structural oppression; and

(ac) to promote full and equal participation in an open and inclusive democratic society, without impeding robust discussion that does not vilify or marginalise others based on a protected attribute; and”.

3. Clause 2, lines 24 and 25, omit “18 September 2027” and insert “30 June 2026”.

4. Clause 4, page 7, line 27, before “A” insert “(1)”.

5. Clause 4, page 7, line 28, omit “1950(1)–” and insert “1950(1)”.

6. Clause 4, page 7, line 29, omit “(a)”.

7. Clause 4, page 7, line 29, after “by” insert “or with the consent of”.

8. Clause 4, page 7, line 30, omit “Prosecutions or a” and insert “Prosecutions.”.

9. Clause 4, page 7, line 31, omit all words and expressions on this line.

10. Clause 4, page 8, lines 1 to 5, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

11. Clause 4, page 8, after line 5 insert –

“(2) In determining whether an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) is to be prosecuted, the Director of Public Prosecutions must take into account all the circumstances (including the social, cultural and historical circumstances) surrounding the conduct that is alleged to constitute the offence.”.

12. Clause 9, page 16, line 4, after “proselytising” insert “that is in conformity with the doctrines, beliefs or principles of that religion”.

13. Clause 44, line 18, omit “18 September 2028” and insert “30 June 2027”.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (10:45): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

Can I just say, first of all, this is absolutely landmark legislation. It is the culmination of so much work, so much consultation, so much engagement, so much collaboration with so many Victorians over so many years. The message today is very clear: whatever you believe in, wherever you are from, whoever you love, you deserve to be safe in our state, free of hate. These new anti-vilification and social cohesion laws are all about keeping Victorians safe and keeping Victoria united. Our new anti-vilification and social cohesion laws are all about improving our system, making sure that it works for all Victorians and keeps all Victorians safe.

The bill has come back to this place with some amendments, and I will speak briefly to those amendments. I should say at the outset that for the most part, the amendments are ultimately minor, perhaps even cosmetic in part, but do not impact on either the purpose or operation of the new laws.

We have an amendment today that brings to the commencement of this act the act's statement, and I want to read that statement. I think it is profound and important for all of this to go on the record.

It reads:

The Parliament recognises the right of all Victorians to be free from vilification and to participate equally in a democratic society.

The diversity of the people of Victoria enhances our community and Victorians embrace the benefits provided by this diversity and are proud that people live together harmoniously. However, vilification is still occurring in Victoria.

Vilification harms social cohesion through its inherent divisiveness and perpetuates the unequal distribution of power. Vilifying conduct is contrary to democratic values because of its effect on the people who are subjected to it. It diminishes their dignity, sense of self-worth and belonging to their community and can cause profound physical and psychological harm. It also reduces their ability to contribute to, or fully participate in, all social, political, economic and cultural aspects of society as equals, thus reducing the benefit that diversity brings to the community.

It is the intention of Parliament to enact law for the people of Victoria that respects the inherent dignity of all of us and promotes our equal participation in public life.

That is exactly what our laws will do. They will protect all Victorians from vilification, the very worst kind of hate speech or conduct, that profoundly harms people and undermines social cohesion in this state.

The new law will do this by strengthening civil protections against vilification and providing more options for people to seek remedy and resolution if they have been harmed. The new law will also create two criminal offences to respond to serious vilification. It will be an offence to incite hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule against another person or group based on their protected attribute. It will be an offence to threaten physical harm or property damage against a person or a group based on their protected attribute, and these offences will be placed in the Crimes Act 1958, where they absolutely belong. They will apply when incitement or threats occur in Victoria in any context – private, public or online.

A further amendment before us today further highlights that in determining whether an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) is to be prosecuted:

... the Director of Public Prosecutions must take into account all the circumstances (including the social, cultural and historical circumstances) surrounding the conduct that is alleged to constitute the offence.

It is important, indeed as it is in existing practice, to consider all of those surrounding circumstances – because as we know, everything has context, and that is exactly what these laws are about.

I should say it is not right for the rest of us to judge what is harmful to someone with a protected attribute. That in fact has been the very problem. That is why our laws do not properly protect all Victorians. I might like to think I can understand what is harmful to a member of the Jewish community or the Islamic community or the LGBTIQ+ community or the disability community or the Aboriginal community. This is why the amendments put forward by the opposition are just so

plainly wrong. It is not up to us, without those protected attributes, to judge what is or may not be harmful. I am not a member of those communities, and whilst I can empathise, whilst I can sympathise, whilst I can acknowledge that harm, I am not, and I can never fully, truly understand nor feel the impact like someone who is part of that community, which is why it is so important that when we are considering conduct, particularly in relation to the civil harm based test, the test must be an objective one, but namely one where conduct that would in all the circumstances be reasonably likely to be considered by a reasonable person with the protected attribute to be hateful or seriously contemptuous of or reviling or severely ridiculing the other person or group of persons.

I would also like to acknowledge and note an amendment moved by Rachel Payne in the other place to Clause 44, and this is to bring forward the commencement date for the changes to the civil protections to 30 June 2026. This is important, especially because those opposite were proposing to remove the civil protections in their entirety. I would like to thank Ms Payne for her support of this bill, which has been instrumental in achieving what we have achieved today.

I do want to add that during the course of the passage of this bill we have seen attempts by others to water down this bill. What we saw earlier this morning was those opposite voting against this bill. Thankfully they did not succeed, and they did not succeed because those opposite are out of step with Victorians, especially those for whom these laws are just so very, very important. They did not succeed because those opposite are not acting in the interests of Victorians. They did not succeed because those opposite have failed yet again to focus on the interests of the community, on the interests of Victorians and in particular on the interests and in support of the safety of marginalised Victorians. What kind of leadership is that?

I really think now it is up to Brad Battin, it is up to those members of the opposition, to look in the eyes of those community members, the Jewish community and the Muslim community, the LGBTIQ+ community, the Aboriginal community, the disability community – look them in the eyes and say to them that the opposition were prepared to act against the interests of those communities. Those opposite were acting against the interests of those people living their fullest lives and fully participating in society here in Victoria. They need to explain to those communities, to those Victorians, why the Leader of the Opposition thought that the far right of his party was more important than the interests of these Victorians. This is a proud day for Victorians. Those opposite –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Bulleen and members at the table on both sides, let us keep it civil.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members at the table, I am on my feet. Let us keep it civil.

Sonya KILKENNY: I must say those opposite are revealing their true colours right now. What we have seen through this debate and what we have seen through discussion with political community groups is the moving of goalposts by those opposite. We have seen disingenuous attempts at working through these laws, which are fundamentally about protecting the safety of Victorians. They have failed to engage in good-faith negotiations. I think it is fair to say they have been disloyal to these very community groups who have turned to us as leaders in this place and as leaders in our community and asked for our support to enact laws for their safety, something that has been worked on with these communities for years and years and years. These laws are for people for whom our current laws were not working to keep them safe and to keep them free from harm. How completely unedifying from those opposite, the attempts that they have made to water down this bill and to block this bill from protecting Victorians. But I have to say, how completely predictable by those opposite. It is simply a case of: we know better than people with those protected attributes to say what is harmful to people within their groups who share those attributes.

We stand here proudly today in support of all Victorians. This is landmark legislation. Yes, it is coming back with amendments – those are minor amendments. Those are minor amendments in this bill, and those opposite know it. Those opposite are saying this, and do you know why they are saying this? Because they are on the wrong side of history. Those opposite have let down so many members of the Victorian community who have simply asked us for our help in making sure that the laws are there to protect them equally, the same as all other Victorians. We are passing these rules to unite Victorians – to unite them, not to divide them. That is what those opposite do, and we are doing this today at a time in history when it is probably no more important to show leadership and to join with all communities to say ‘We hear you, we are acting, we are bringing in these laws to protect you as equal Victorians in this state – to protect you.’

A member: Wrong.

Sonya KILKENNY: It is not wrong. I take up that interjection.

A member: It is wrong.

Sonya KILKENNY: It is entirely not wrong to introduce and bring in laws to protect all Victorians from the kind of hate speech and hate crime that we are seeing throughout our community.

These laws will pass, and those opposite will have missed an historic opportunity to join together as a Parliament united against the kind of hate speech and hate crime that members of our community are experiencing every day – every day. What a missed opportunity for them. We stand united on this side of the house, in kindness and in compassion, and join with all Victorians in protecting them from hate speech and hate crime. This is a proud day for Victorians, and I commend the motion, I commend the amendments and I commend this bill to this house.

Michael O’BRIEN (Malvern) (10:59): What sanctimonious humbug from the Attorney-General, who brings amendments to this house which undermine the bill itself. A grubby, grubby deal with the Greens has sold out faith communities in this state, has weakened protections for faith communities in this state and has made sure that this bill is going to have a chilling effect on freedom of speech, freedom of belief, freedom of worship and freedom of thought. That is the effect of the amendments.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I should not have to stand up. Members will come to order. The incessant niggling across the chamber would be better off stopped. Members are warned.

Michael O’BRIEN: To hear the sanctimony dripping from the Attorney-General –

Juliana Addison interjected.

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

Member for Wendouree withdrew from chamber.

Michael O’BRIEN: This Attorney-General and this Premier had an opportunity to act in a bipartisan way, and they chose not to do so. Instead they went home to the Greens. They went home to their ideological mates in the Greens, who are far more interested in encouraging hate speech. Who has been out there with the people saying Zionists are terrorists? It has not been members of the Liberal Party or the Nationals, no. Members of the Greens have been out there, and that is whom the Labor government have thrown their lot in with on this bill. That is exactly who the Labor government have partnered with, they have done a dance with, and it is appalling. It is disgraceful.

Let me go through what these amendments mean and why they fundamentally undermine all the protections that the government claims are in this bill. First of all, let us turn to the criminal changes. It was a recommendation of the Legal and Social Issues Committee of this chamber that the DPP not have a veto on the ability to bring charges – very important. The Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 has seen very, very few criminal charges brought over its more than 20-year history. It was

a very clear recommendation, a bipartisan recommendation, of the Legal and Social Issues Committee of this chamber that that veto of the DPP be removed. Indeed the initial format of this bill when it passed through this place said that the DPP or police should be able to bring charges in relation to an adult. The DPP retained sole discretion to bring charges in relation to a minor. We did not object to that. But it is very important, if we are giving these criminal protections some teeth, if we want to see criminal charges brought against people who act to incite hatred in a way that is violent and threatening, people who threaten somebody's person, threaten somebody's property on the basis of a protected attribute, that is a criminal offence. Why should the police be cut out from the ability to lay a charge? For how many other charges do we say to Victoria Police: 'We don't trust you to bring a charge'? Very, very few.

But the Greens do not like police. In fact I will go further: the Greens hate Victoria Police. The Greens hate them. They do not trust them. They want to defund them. They import all their ideology from antifa in the USA and they hate Victoria Police, and what has this government done? The Labor government has gone and bowed before the Greens and agreed to this deal that says 'Victoria Police, we don't trust you to bring a charge in relation to anti-vilification.' That is selling out groups who are looking to this government for protection. It is selling them down the river. They wanted strong criminal protections in this bill, and they are now not going to get them because Victoria Police have been cut out. Victoria Police cannot bring charges any further because of this grubby deal that has been done between the Labor government and the Greens political party. This government has undermined its own bill. This government has undermined criminal protections that vulnerable people in our community deserve to have. They deserve to have those criminal protections be strong, and this government would rather do a grubby deal with the Greens and weaken those criminal protections for vulnerable groups in our community.

That is why the sanctimony of the Attorney-General got me going. It is absolutely appalling. This deal to cut out Victoria Police from the ability to bring charges cuts out the strength of the criminal protections. Why would the government support that? Does the government also have no faith in Victoria Police, like the Greens? Why else would the government agree to this amendment? It may be that other members in this place want to seek to restore the ability of Victoria Police to bring charges for criminal sanctions. If any member put forward an amendment like that, we would be very minded to support it, because we do support Victoria Police. We do not want to see them cut out. We do not believe that only the DPP has the ability to bring charges in relation to criminal incitement and criminal threats on the basis of protected attributes.

But the weakening of the criminal sections gets worse. Before we go to that let me just quote here from a briefing provided by the then Attorney-General's office to me. When this bill was first going through I did ask a question: do we know if there are any cases where Victoria Police have sought to lay charges but the DPP has not consented?

Here is what the answer from the Attorney-General's office was: yes, we believe there are cases where Victoria Police has laid charges and the DPP has not consented to a prosecution being commenced. So this is not a hypothetical; this is history. We know the DPP has blocked charges being brought for criminal incitement, criminal threats, on the basis of protected attribute. We know the DPP has acted as a blocker to the proper enforcement of these laws, and that is what the Labor government, with its grubby deal with the Greens, is allowing to continue, and that is absolutely disgraceful.

A member interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: Don't talk to me about playing politics, Member. It is the government that is playing politics.

Members interjecting.

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

Michael O'BRIEN: It is the government that is playing politics, and it is at the expense of vulnerable communities in this state.

Let us go to sociology 101. The government is now agreeing to amendments to the criminal sections of this bill where it is actually directing the Director of Public Prosecutions on how to apply the law. It is not enough for this government to say, 'We don't trust police to bring charges,' the government is also saying, through this grubby deal with the Greens, 'We are now going to direct' – the supposedly independent – 'DPP as to how to apply this new law.' Here is the clause that has now been inserted under this grubby backroom Labor–Greens deal:

In determining whether an offence against section 195N(1) or 195O(1) is to be prosecuted, the Director of Public Prosecutions must –

not 'may' but 'must' –

take into account all the circumstances (including the social, cultural and historical circumstances) surrounding the conduct that is alleged to constitute the offence ...

Social, cultural and historical circumstances – well, somebody has been to a sociology lecture. That sort of nonsense should not be in our criminal law. If somebody goes and attacks a person with a protected attribute – attacks them because they are a woman, attacks them because they are gay, attacks them because they are trans, attacks them because they are a person of faith – frankly, the historical circumstances of the attacker do not matter and should not matter in law. There is no excuse for attacking people with a protected attribute in this state, but this grubby Labor–Greens deal has undermined the protections available to vulnerable people.

This government is changing the criminal law not only to direct the supposedly independent Director of Public Prosecutions but also to require the Director of Public Prosecutions to take into account sociological factors in deciding whether a prosecution is worthy or not. We on this side say that if you attack somebody with a protected attribute because they are a protected attribute person, then you are guilty of the offence. There is no excuse, whereas we know the Greens and Labor want to provide excuses for people – because certain people are not equal before the law; certain people get away with things because of their backgrounds. We all know what this is all code for. This is code for saying, 'We don't want the DPP to charge people who we like. If they're our allies, they're our mates, then they can get away with anything, because society is to blame. Sociological factors are required to be taken into account.' This is outrageous. Not only is the government directing the Director of Public Prosecutions as to how to apply the law, but it is also requiring the law to take into account these sociological factors in relation to a crime.

This side of the house does not believe there is any excuse for attacking somebody with a protected attribute. The government wants to defend somebody for attacking somebody because they are gay or lesbian, for attacking somebody because they are trans or a woman or for attacking somebody because they are a person of faith. If the government wants to excuse that and defend that, let them do it. But that is not what this amendment does. This amendment says that in some circumstances there is an excuse, there is a reason and there is a justification for attacking people of faith. We do not believe that. As to there being some excuse or reason for attacking somebody who is gay or lesbian or trans, we do not believe that. We believe that people should be equal before the law, and if you attack somebody with a protected attribute, then your conduct should be condemned and there is no excuse for it. But this amendment completely undermines it.

This government stands up here and says it is about supporting vulnerable groups. The fact is that their own amendments and their own grubby deal with the Greens undermine those protections 100 per cent.

We have had groups who have been sold down the river by this government. I pay tribute to the former Attorney-General – at least she did consult. We may not have always agreed with her, but the former

Attorney-General certainly would not have agreed to last-minute deals with the Greens that completely cut out groups that had been discussing the issues in good faith with the government prior to that.

Let me talk to some of the civil changes that are in this bill. I note that the Attorney-General read out new clause 1AA, 'Statement for this Act'. What is really interesting about that statement is that it is not so much what is in it but what is not in it that is important. Clause 1AA in the bill replicates almost exactly clause 102A, which is the 'Statement for this Part' in the 'Prohibition of vilification' part of the bill. There is one really important paragraph that is not in the statement that the Attorney-General read out. I will put it on the record now:

The right to freedom of expression is an essential component of our society and this right should be limited only to the extent that can be justified in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. The Parliament acknowledges the importance of maintaining the ability to engage in robust discussion reasonably and in good faith on any matter for a genuine academic, artistic, public interest, religious or scientific purpose.

Why is that paragraph not part of the statement for the act? The fact is this Labor government, in their deal with the Greens, is downgrading the importance of freedom of speech in Victoria. This is an attack on freedom of speech. Reasonable freedom of speech and freedom of speech in good faith – that is what the paragraph I read out refers to. It refers to reasonable freedom of speech, freedom of speech in good faith and for an important purpose. This government is downgrading that. They have deliberately excluded that vital paragraph from clause 1AA, 'Statement for the Act'. That tells you what you need to know about this government's attitude towards freedom of speech: they do not believe in it. They do not believe in it, and that is why they have done this grubby deal with the Greens to cut it out.

James Newbury interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: It was a Greens' amendment, member for Brighton. The Greens wagged the tail and the Labor dog barked. That is what they did. They just accepted the Greens' amendment.

What is the government doing with the civil changes to this bill? First of all, the reasonable person is dead. There is no reference to a reasonable person anymore in anti-discrimination law in Victoria.

James Newbury interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: It was in 1594 – thank you, member for Brighton – that the concept of the reasonable person came about in law. From 1594 to 2025 in Victoria: RIP, reasonable person. Most people would think that is a pretty fair standard. If you were to judge somebody's actions, somebody's words or somebody's conduct, the test of the reasonable person is what should be applied, because it is reasonable. But this government does not believe in the reasonable person. They say they support the test being the reasonable person but with the protected attribute. What that means is not just broad groups of people with protected attributes but subgroups of subgroups of subgroups of people with protected attributes. The law now has to look at everything from the perspective of very narrow groups. What happens when we have clashes of rights? What happens when women who support sex-based rights have views and people who support gender-based rights have views? Are we supposed to then work out what every single subgroup in the state thinks and tailor views, words and conduct to what that particular group thinks might be severely ridiculing or not? That is now going to be the law in this state. If a particular group is more easily finding severe ridicule, then that is the new standard in law. Every Victorian is now going to be required to understand what every subgroup of every group with a protected attribute may or may not find to be severely ridiculing. That is now the law.

So forget the reasonable person test. It is now going to be a question of subgroup upon subgroup. It is identity politics now written into law. We all agree that there are standards of common decency that we should all abide by, and they are reflected in the law in the test of the reasonable person. But this government has now killed the reasonable person test. We now have a subjective test, not an objective test. We have a subjective test that can change, depending on which particular subgroup of a subgroup

of a group with a protected attribute the law has to examine. What it means is that even a small group of people who may have views that are unreasonable to the rest of society – if they have a protected attribute, that now sets the standard for how everybody else must conduct themselves. This is why I say that this bill with these Greens amendments will have a chilling effect on freedom of speech, on freedom of thought, on freedom of belief and on freedom of worship.

The government has also brought forward through this deal the default commencement date of the civil provisions to 30 June 2026. We all know that VCAT is already in a mess. It has got huge backlogs. VCAT deals with vulnerable people like renters and like those in guardianship disputes. VCAT is struggling at the moment. The government has cut \$19.1 million out of Court Services Victoria, which funds VCAT, this year. The government has baked in a \$58 million cut to CSV in 2027–28. How does the government expect VCAT to deal with a \$58 million budget cut in 2027–28, 12 months after this legislation comes into effect? We have seen in jurisdictions around the world that as soon as you open the floodgates with these sorts of civil provisions which encourage groups to sue each other, massive backlogs come up very quickly. We are going to see a lot of vulnerable people in Victoria denied timely access to VCAT because VCAT is going to be so busy dealing with the lawfare that this government is unleashing on Victoria through these provisions. If this government had any sense or sensibility at all, it would immediately stand up and reverse the budget cuts to Court Services Victoria. It would reverse the \$19.1 million cut this year. It would reverse the \$58 million cut that is in the budget for 2027–28. This government cannot say it cares about vulnerable people. It cannot say it cares about access to justice when it is massively cutting the courts budget and the tribunals budget to be able to deal with it.

The government is also not encouraging Victorians through this bill to act in a tolerant way towards each other or in a way which shows understanding of each other. The government's view is that people should be suing each other, because what this government wants is to have activist groups lining up to sue each other. That is what we have seen in the past, and that is what this is going to lead to. There is a reason why the government originally had a commencement date of the end of 2027 for the civil provisions of this bill, because the government knows what is going to happen once these civil provisions are enacted. The government knows that we are going to see a flood of litigation and of people being sued potentially on very flimsy pretext and that we are going to see activist groups lining up at the door of VCAT to sue people, and the government was desperate to see it not occur before the next election. Well, the government has now agreed to this grubby deal with the Greens. We are going to see it bring forward these civil provisions to a default commencement date of 30 June 2026.

The saddest thing is that the government could have decided to work with the opposition on this. There could have been a number of changes made, relatively minor in the scheme of things but important. Let it be made really clear: the government made a decision that they would rather throw their lot in with the socialists of the Greens than act in a bipartisan way to secure broad support for this bill. That is on the government's head.

Let me be very clear that while we support the expansion of protected attributes –

A member: Do you?

Michael O'BRIEN: We do, and we support many of the criminal changes. We support stronger criminal changes because we do not believe the police should be cut out from bringing charges. We support a strengthening of the criminal provisions, not a weakening of them as this Labor government has done. Let me be very clear that a future Liberal–Nationals government will amend the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 to restore the standard of the reasonable person in anti-discrimination law and better protect freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of belief and freedom of worship in Victoria.

This is a bill which had promise. The government decided to do a grubby backroom deal with the Greens political party, a deal which undermines criminal protections for vulnerable people in Victoria,

a deal which has undermined the independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions by directing him how to apply the law, a deal which is going to put more pressure on our tribunal system at the same time as they are cutting funding from VCAT and a deal which will effectively not protect the rights of Victorians but will simply encourage lawfare and encourage activists to sue other Victorians. This is not about promoting social cohesion. This is a government that has lost its way and would rather do a deal with the Greens than sit down and sensibly protect Victorians. For that reason the opposition will not be supporting the amendments and will not be supporting the bill.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (11:21): I rise today with a great sense of pride to make a contribution in this place on the amended Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 that has returned to this place from the Legislative Council. I say ‘with a great sense of pride’ because I believe, and my government believes, something very simple but very powerful: whoever you are, whatever faith you follow, wherever you are from and whoever you love, you all deserve to be safe in this great state, free of hate. This mantra will be law when this place passes this anti-vilification and social cohesion bill. What this means is that if you are a woman, if you are multicultural or religious, if you have a disability or you may be a proud member of our LGBTIQ+ community or if you are simply related to anyone with these attributes, you will be protected from vilification, from humiliation and from harm.

I want to take a very clear moment to say thank you to the community leaders who have worked tirelessly to shape this bill. They have worked with our government. I know they have worked with some of those on the opposition benches. I know there were some on the opposition benches who were part of the committee work that was done as part of the genesis of this bill. This bill has been years in the making, and we have brought it to this point because we are making another tough-on-crime law. This time it is a crackdown on hate to keep people safe in public and make it easier for police to charge those who whip up hatred and fear. Also, let us be clear, it goes further to protect Victorians than any other similar laws across the country.

I want to thank those community leaders who, as I said and I do want to acknowledge, have worked with our government. I know there are a number of people on the opposition benches that they have worked with as well. The religious groups, the Jewish groups, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, disability advocates, women’s advocates and LGBTIQ+ groups – in the end they were all on a unity ticket. They told this Parliament to get this bill passed, to make these law changes and to get on and get it done. That is why, as the Attorney-General has presented to this house today, the bill we are being asked to consider – acknowledging there were some amendments made last night in the Legislative Council – continues to hold that strong support from a number of groups in our community, whether it is Equality Australia or the Jewish community.

Can I remind the house of comments that the Jewish community leadership made back in February when the bill came before this place, at a time when those opposite were starting their long march away from this bill:

The Victorian Jewish community unites to support the hate laws that are being proposed by the Victorian Government.

However, they go on to report their disappointment that the opposition are walking away from this bill. They say:

That is because we are facing a crisis of hate speech. There has been an explosion of hatred in our communities in recent years. Hatred is fuelled by hate speech – that is why the most extreme forms of incitement must be outlawed.

But our hate speech laws are broken, as is said in this statement, which is why this bill is so vitally important. They go on to say:

Now, with this amended bill, Victorians will have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to fix our hate speech laws ...

an extraordinary statement. I will come back to our Jewish community in a moment.

Earlier I said I rose with great pride, because I have been humbled as Premier to have had a number of discussions with Victorians who have told me why they need this bill, why they need us as community leaders not just to stand with them but to lead, to stand for them, in delivering this bill. I had the opportunity with the member for Thomastown to meet the young Muslim woman who was attacked in Epping plaza simply because she was wearing a hijab. I have spoken to Jewish parents and their kids who have been abused on their way to school on their fears and concerns for their children. On Saturday in Bendigo I spoke to a young gay woman who had moved to Bendigo from another country town because she was being vilified simply for being a young gay woman in a country town. These are the Victorians that we should remember.

It does sadden me that ultimately this Parliament is not on a unity ticket. Even though Victorians are, there are some in this Parliament who cannot bring themselves to support this bill. I am just so disappointed. It is just so disappointing that when the moment was there to be seized by the Liberal Party they walked away from that chance to work in a bipartisan way to fight one of the biggest challenges our society today is facing. We are being challenged in ways we have not seen before in our generation, and this bill is part of knitting that fabric back together by making it very clear that hate is a crime. I certainly will not forget, and this place will not forget, how those opposite, the Liberal Party, negotiated in bad faith. They made every attempt to shift the goalposts, wanting us to water down this bill. Then as we have seen, ultimately they have refused to support the passage of this bill. Again, let us remember what the Liberal Party in this place is voting for by voting against this bill today. They are voting for hate to be allowed to continue in our state without being made a crime. They are voting against that Muslim woman for being attacked. They are voting against those Jewish families. They are voting against that young gay woman that I spoke to on Saturday in Bendigo.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I think my comments were directed entirely to the amendments. The Premier is straying well beyond the amendments before the house. I ask you to bring her back to the amendments.

The SPEAKER: Premier, I ask you to speak to the amendments, please.

Jacinta ALLAN: These amendments to the anti-vilification and social cohesion bill are about saying to these groups that we want them to be free from hate, which is what the Liberal Party is voting for by voting against this bill that is before this house today. The member for Malvern – I note the Leader of the Opposition is not here to hear this contribution – talked about reasonable freedom of speech. Reasonable freedom of speech led that young woman moving town to be free from hate. That is not reasonable freedom of speech. What we are seeing is not just a sad moment in the Victorian Liberal Party; it is a moment in history that will come back to haunt the Liberal Party.

It will haunt the Liberal Party. As the member for Malvern has said to this place, 'We will in government reverse this bill.' Well, let that be on their record. Let that be on their record that they want to reverse the protections in this bill. They want to reverse the protections against hate and vilification in this bill.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, I am being misquoted. I clearly said that we would reinstate the reasonable person test, not that the bill would be reversed.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: We also will not forget why, and we will make sure we remind Victorians why – because the Liberal Party cares more about peace inside their party room than peace on our streets, safety in our universities and safety in our workplaces. Community groups will not forget it. Victorians will not forget it. Today Victorians see very clearly where my government stands. We stand for Victorians. Whoever you are, whoever you love and whatever you believe in, we will always fight for

the respect and dignity you deserve, and that is why I commend this bill in the strongest terms to this house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:31): I rise to speak on the amendments to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. What Victorians know is that over the time of this Premier social cohesion in this state has broken, and more than anything else Victorians should know that the Premier's words will not fix it. That is what has happened during the time of this Premier's premiership – the 553 days that have been her premiership. Today the Premier spoke in her attack on the opposition but failed to talk about the breakdown in social cohesion in this state.

What the government has agreed to today is a dirty deal with the Greens to bastardise the law. These amendments bastardise the law of this state, and every Victorian should see that for what it is. It perverts, it brutalises and it degrades the law of this state. As the Shadow Attorney-General eloquently put it, in one way it rips out a 400-year standing test in many democratic systems of law – that the reasonable person is the person you look to at law to test whether an offence has occurred. What this government has said is 'no more' because it wants to embed left-wing ideology into Victorian law. Led by the Greens, they are embedding that left-wing ideology into law. You can see it in the way that the new statement in the act is given precedence over the previous statement in the bill. As the Shadow Attorney said, the right to freedom of speech has now been pushed down by this government in its importance in the law, and that should not surprise any of us. I think we can all expect that the Greens wrote the statement that now takes precedence and that now embeds that left-wing ideology into law over freedom of speech and freedom of expression, which should not have been pushed down. I do not think any Victorian would want them to have been pushed down.

The other point that was eloquently made was about how these amendments effectively cut out the police's ability to prosecute.

We know why, because we know that the ultra left do not like the police. They do not trust the police, they do not like the police, so these amendments cut out the concept of the police taking leadership in charging people in relation to this bill. How have we got to a circumstance where this government can accept an amendment that sets aside the police? Does it surprise any of us that they have? They have knocked over two police commissioners. They have defunded the police. Does it surprise us that this government is going to vote down the capacity of police to prosecute? The Premier spoke about the committee that did the work that started the process of anti-vilification reform, and what the committee did hear – because I was on it – was that public prosecutions leading in charges has led to a delay in the very small number of prosecutions that have been achieved. That is what the committee heard. When the Premier talks about what the committee heard, the outcome of these amendments runs in direct contrast to what the committee not only heard, but what it found.

My view is – and I think any reasonable person would say this – that by removing the police what the government is doing is slowing down the process in the ability to charge and find an outcome, but also sending a very, very, very clear signal that this government does not support the police. How could a government allow a system of law which says, 'We do not want the police to have the capacity to take action.' How could you in good conscience vote for that amendment? But of course the government has, because they have done a deal and it was a required part of the deal with the Greens to get this bill through. The government do not mind if some of the amendments that are put through diminish the law. Of course they don't. They do not mind if they downgrade the police. Why would they? Because it gets their bill through and that says everything, frankly, about this government and this Premier.

The other amendment which is important to note is to clause 12. What the government has also sneakily put through in these amendments, without any consultation, is the downgrading of the religious exemption. In short, the bill as it previously stood said that if you proselytised – if you, as a religious person, give a speech or made comments – you would have an exemption from elements of the bill. What the Greens have said is, 'We don't want that. We don't want that to stand.' And the

government last night and the Greens admitted in the upper house that the amendments that are being put through today narrow the religious exemption. The Greens admitted it. I mean, why would they care? They are proud of it. They are proud that they have narrowed the religious exemption. They admitted it. They boasted about it in the upper house. ‘Ha ha ha, we’ve narrowed the religious exemption.’ It is nothing to be proud of. This change inserts a real narrowing of that exemption. Now effectively, as I read it, when a religious speech or communication is given and a claim is made against the person doing so, they will have to prove, if there is a question, that their words were linked to a doctrine, a belief or a principle of that religion.

They will have to potentially prove it, because what was an exemption previously gave a broad exemption, and now this narrowness requires the person to draw a link to a doctrine, belief or principle of that religion – and to do that without a single moment of consultation, well, shame on this government.

I go back to the point that I first made, and that is: the Premier on this and every other issue says things, makes big claims and makes bold claims, but at the end of the day, over the 553 days that this Premier has held the premiership, social cohesion in this state has broken down. This bill will not fix it and in fact it embeds division, and I think encourages it because it allows a system by bastardising the law. We as a coalition cannot stand for that, and we will not.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (11:41): I rise to speak about the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 and the amendments that were passed last night in the Council. At the outset I want to acknowledge the work of the Attorney-General, and of the former Attorney-General in the Council last night. It was a Herculean effort to get the amendments passed and get the bill through at a very late hour. It will not come as any surprise that I do support the amendments that are presented today. I actually think that putting a preamble and statement at the beginning of the act is a really powerful statement to Victoria about where we stand.

There are a lot of issues that have been raised by members of the opposition which I really must disagree with. Freedom of speech in any democracy and particularly in Victoria and Australia is very important, but it has never been an absolute right. I think that we see, particularly in the context of this bill and the purpose of the legislation that we have been trying to bring, is that we need to make it clear and make a clear statement that those most heinous examples of vilification are not acceptable. I really fail to see any justification to allow vilification to occur.

The Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council last night made a number of statements just reflecting on the bill generally in the committee stage in answer to some other questions. As she mentioned, this is not about restricting genuine debate on any matter. It is not even about restricting someone’s right to be offensive. It is about vilification and that high standard of vilification in inciting hatred in others. I have failed to be convinced by any argument, whether it has been put by the opposition or been put by community members, that we should have a free-for-all on vilification.

When I initially spoke on this bill I did speak fairly early, and it was before the initial house amendments that were put forward by the Attorney-General. I do thank the Attorney-General for listening to the concerns that I had about some of the initial draft and particularly in relation to how it applied to I think the reference to a genuine political purpose defence. I was very glad to see that removed, because I felt that that would have been an unworkable defence in the context of how this law would be able to apply.

Then I come to one of the other amendments. Both the lead speakers, the member for Malvern and the member for Brighton, have spoken quite a lot about the reasonable person test. They have also spoken about how they are very unhappy with the amendments and about how they are another reason to vote against this piece of legislation. At the time, they said there were four words separating their acceptance of the bill. Now we have got a situation where the government has negotiated with a range

of parties to get legislation through that fulfils the objectives of making it a criminal offence to vilify others and making it easier to bring a civil claim.

Now, I just want to focus a little bit on this reasonable person test that seems to be so problematic within the Liberal Party. The bill says ‘a reasonable person with the protected attribute’. I want to use a couple of examples. The member for Malvern was quoted I think in his original contribution talking about how this would apply to a member of the Muslim community if a picture of the Prophet Muhammad was shown that was only offensive to an extreme element of the Muslim community. In any reading of the bill, that would not represent to me ‘a reasonable person with the protected attribute’. The protected attribute is not about an extremist member of a particular community, it is about a member of the community in general, as in the Muslim community.

I want to take that thread in terms of my own community. The way that I express my Zionism and identify with my Zionism is different from how the Liberal Party probably look at Zionism – as we have seen. The Liberal Party reference Zionism repeatedly during their contributions. I am sure the member for Richmond has a completely different view of what Zionism entails, and that is not the view of the Zionism that I share or the view of Zionism that the vast bulk of the Jewish community share. The issue here is that if we are going to look at whether vilification has occurred – and we have seen this on the street, and the Liberal Party members themselves have talked about how Zionism and the word ‘Zionism’ have been weaponised against the Jewish community, particularly since 7 October but also for many years before that – then surely we need to respect and look at how the broad Jewish community sees Zionism defined, not the average person in the Box Hill electorate or the average person in Australia, who would not have that deep cultural and social understanding of what Zionism is.

I would make the same argument for our Indigenous community. I do not stand up here to try and pretend that I understand everything about the Indigenous community, and I respect that there are many different views also in the Indigenous community about all sorts of issues, as there are in any other community. But if an individual was to vilify a member of the Indigenous community based on their Indigeneity, it is only Indigenous people who are able to really tell how offensive and how hateful that vilification is based on the long experience and the long history of oppression and racism that they have faced.

It is not for me, as someone who is a child of a migrant to this country and who has no Indigeneity in Australia, to be telling them how they should be feeling or how they should be responding to an offence that could be caused. For the Liberal Party now to come up and say, ‘Well, we don’t agree with any of the amendments’ – they had this opportunity to remove their objection to these four words in what I thought was actually a very appropriate application of a reasonable person test in this particular case, and we would have had bipartisan support for this bill.

I want also in the very last little bit that I have to just reflect on a couple of other contributions that were made in the in the Council overnight, and specifically on this test, Mrs McArthur in the other place started to talk about people who believed that the moon was made of blue cheese and also: would it have protections for paedophiles? I think this goes to the heart of why the Liberals do not support the bill and they are never going to support the bill. Even if we had removed those four words they would not have supported the bill, but I support the bill.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (11:51): I am pleased to follow my friend the member for Box Hill, who has shown outstanding leadership within the Jewish community right throughout the course of the debate on this, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. I accept absolutely it is not necessarily easy being a person of faith in this place. It is not easy right now being a Jew in Melbourne who has seen some of the most appalling graffiti, the most appalling vilification and the most appalling hate speech, even in the part of Melbourne that both the member for Box Hill and I represent. It has been an extraordinary, chastening period for those of us in public life who would seek always to defend the magnificent Jewish community, their contribution to

our city and our state and our nation, against the horrendous antisemitism that sadly has been a feature of public discourse in recent times. I thank the member for Box Hill for his contribution.

I agree with the member for Box Hill that it is a shame that we could not get to a bipartisan position on this bill. I am not going to infer too much in terms of the motivations, but it is a shame that the government has gone down this particular path in reaching a form of words that is going to pass both chambers of this Parliament. I think it would have been better to have found another way through. I am flagging that I will be moving an amendment to these amendments, as one of the rare opportunities for those of us who are not members of the government get to move substantive amendments to legislation in this place. I will be taking up that opportunity and I will be reading that into the record towards the end of my speech.

Before I do that I want to talk to the substantive issue. My amendment will essentially be to reinstate Labor policy in relation to the ability of police to charge offences of incitement and threats. These are very serious offences that this bill is introducing into Victorian law. They are very serious offences, and I do not think it is appropriate for the DPP to have a running veto over offences of this nature. We have a pretty distinct separation between the prosecutorial function and the policing function in this state. It is a bit different to, say, other jurisdictions like the United States, where the prosecutorial function is conducted under more political circumstances. For that reason a DPP veto is less dangerous than it might be in other parts of the world, but nonetheless I do not think it is appropriate for DPP to be overriding police decisions as to charging. That is a power that is best left in the hands of police, and the government on this matter have caved to pressure from the Greens political party in the other place and made an amendment that I think ultimately weakens the bill.

It weakens the bill, and as a result of that it has caused significant concern in the Jewish community, the leaders of which I have spoken with in the last couple of hours, because it undermines perhaps the most important part of this bill, which is the ability for police to charge, under criminal statute, threats and incitement. They are very, very important powers and they are powers that ought not be exercised in my view, and indeed in the government's view, by the DPP. It is the government's view that these are powers that ought to be exercised by Victoria Police. I think that ought to be reinstated, and that is why in a moment's time I will be moving that that in fact happen.

I should say not all the Greens amendments were without merit. I think narrowing the proselytising clause is a good change, and it is a matter on which the opposition and I disagree. Narrowing the proselytising clause is a very good thing. I do not think we should be handing carte blanche to those people in positions of faith leadership to simply say whatever they want because they are in a position of faith leadership. I think it is entirely appropriate to narrow those matters to make sure that their proselytising is, and I quote the amendment here, 'in conformity with the doctrines, beliefs or principles of that religion'. That is an entirely appropriate narrowing and that is a very good result for this legislation, and I do thank the Greens for their constructive engagement on that matter.

But as I say, I disagree with the Greens on the ability of police to charge. These are very serious matters. We need to protect these community groups properly. I heard the Premier say that Victorians are on a unity ticket in relation to this. I think Victorians would prefer and indeed expect that police could charge for incitement or threats. I think it risks sending the message that police are yet again being undermined by the government. That is really unfortunate because these are very, very important crimes and they ought to be dealt with in the ordinary way that crimes are, with police having charging responsibilities. Charging and prosecution are different. It is an important distinction. The DPP prosecutes charges, police lay charges, and to start blurring the lines between the two sends us down a very difficult road and not a road that, frankly, the government has fully contemplated the consequences of.

In relation to the bill more broadly I am very pleased that my amendment about the genuine political purpose defence was taken up by the government when the bill came first to this place. I am very pleased that the bill will protect in particular members of the Jewish community and protect them

properly. But there is this great deficiency where you are now asking the DPP to act as the charging authority rather than the police, and that is the matter which I will be seeking to amend. I move:

1. Amendment 8, omit ‘omit “Prosecutions or a” and insert “Prosecutions.”’ and insert ‘after “Prosecutions or” insert “by”’.
2. Amendment 9, omit “omit all words and expression on this line” and insert ‘omit “officer; and” and insert “officer.”’.
3. Amendment 11, after “Director of Public Prosecutions” insert “or police officer”.

That in isolation is not going to make much sense to anyone. These amendments have been lodged with the Clerk and will be circulated to members. But let me talk about what these amendments achieve, because amendments to amendments are prima facie confusing and what we really want to understand is what this does to the bill. What my amendments to the amendments do to the bill is make sure that police officers can also charge and that the amendments about determining whether an offence is to be prosecuted – giving account to all the circumstances, including the social, cultural and historical circumstances – that were passed in the other place apply both to the DPP and to police. Whoever is making the charge has to make it under the same set of circumstances. Whether it is police doing the charging or DPP, they have to charge with those factors under consideration.

The reinstatement of police being able to charge is Labor policy, adding that when they do charge, they have to take into account the circumstances that were agreed to yesterday in the other place – or perhaps early this morning in the other place. That is the position that was agreed to between the government and the Greens, so I see no reason for the government not to support my amendment. This amendment reinstates Labor policy that says police should be doing the charging for these crimes, not the DPP.

There are those members from the Greens political party who harbour a very high level of distrust of Victoria Police, which I do not share, which most Victorians do not share and which the government does not share, and that is the reason why they sought to make this amendment. As I say, I am grateful for some of the amendments that the Greens have made to this bill in the other place. I think a bunch of those amendments have improved the bill, particularly the narrowing of the scope around proselytising. But I respectfully disagree with the Greens on the police being able to charge these offences, because I think that is the ordinary course of business, particularly when it comes to serious offences like these. I think that is a very important element to reintroduce. For that reason I move the amendments, and I urge members of this chamber to support those amendments to reinstate government policy and, frankly, reinstate the opposition’s view on this as well.

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (12:01): I rise to speak on the amendments to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. What a historic day this is – this bill before this house. Let me say as a multicultural woman of Muslim faith I am very proud to see this in our community. Whether you are a Muslim, Sikh or no matter what your faith, no matter what your surname or how you look, you will be protected in this state.

Today we are seeing the best of multiculturalism, and we see it shine through our communities, whether it is our hardworking Vietnamese community coming together to support us during the pandemic, providing healthcare workers with masks; or whether it is the Sikh community, who we saw come together for the natural disasters affecting our regions, providing food relief and providing support to those local communities. Our multicultural community is one of our biggest assets in this state, and we are proud of every single member, as I said. No matter their surname, religion, background or ethnicity, we in Victoria have opportunity. Unfortunately we have seen very divisive arguments and attacks on our communities. There has been a rise in discrimination; there is no doubt about that. We have heard that from both sides of the house during these debates – the rise of discrimination and the rise of hate crimes in our communities.

I want to in particular acknowledge the powerful contribution of my friend the member for Box Hill. His contribution today really does stand out and really does state for all of us to stand in solidarity, to stand by a powerful message that we cannot accept this any further. That is why this house acted when it came to banning the Nazi salute and the evil display of Nazi symbols across the state. We came together and we immediately put a stop to this, because it is just not good enough. That is why this bill is going further and responding to the real life stories and experience of Victorians who have unfortunately experienced vilification – vilification if you wear a hijab, vilification of Jewish kids going to school.

The stories continue on and on and on, and Victorians again deserve to feel safe and deserve to be protected from hatred, from division and of course from vilification-based harm. It has no place in our community, and that is why on this side of the house we will always support our diverse multicultural Victorian communities and will stand against division.

A number of years ago, when I was the chair of the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee, we laid the foundations for this bill, and I am very proud that we laid those foundations together as a committee. It was a bipartisan report that we produced with the support of the member for Caulfield and the member for Brighton as well. It was supported by both sides, and together we endorsed those reforms after hearing the experiences and the everyday stories that came before the committee in relation to vilification. We heard the real-life stories of attacks on faith and on people's backgrounds and on how they look. They were real stories. That unity is the heart of this debate. We need to be able to get on, and this legislation means recognising the experiences of so many in our community. The recent attack in Epping on a woman just going around in her own way in the shopping centre – attacked for wearing a hijab. This is Victoria, and it is not good enough. Today, with this bill, we come together to endorse powerful reforms and powerful changes, recognising and sending a message, a very strong message, to everybody in our community: we hear you, your experiences are valid and, more importantly, you deserve to be protected regardless of your faith, regardless of how you look and regardless of your surname in this state. That is what we will do today.

I know through family, through friends and through my community who share those stories and who feel that they cannot really be a part of the community because they feel isolated, again, because of the faith that they may practice or the way they look. I have heard this in my own communities, being someone of Muslim faith, when I visit my local place of worship and my mosque in particular in Sunshine. The Sunshine Mosque does wonderful, supportive work for the community and for young people, and it is a place of great faith for all of us. I hear the stories from young kids who talk to me about how they feel and about some of the attacks and how they stop the confidence of young people at the beginning. Being attacked for the way you look, your faith or your surname has long-lasting effects on your development. This is why it is so important that there is this legislation that gives confidence back to our community and sends a strong message, a message that we will not accept this and there are ramifications for attacks and actions against our community that undermine our state and that undermine the fabric of our democracy. To live peacefully, to live productively and to be and choose whatever they want in the way they live, our communities deserve this.

I can continue, and there will be a number of other contributions, but it is about standing up, and I urge all members of this house to stand up. Multiculturalism is not just attending multicultural events, having a photo and enjoying the hospitality of our multicultural community, it is more than that.

It is about this bill that is before the house and, more importantly, reforms and real stories, and it is about making sure that they are protected. They deserve these protections. Our community will be watching very clearly today, because as I said at the beginning of my speech, today is a historic day. It is a historic day because this legislation is a rare opportunity for members in this house to come together and stand against vilification. This is what it is about today: standing up and standing against vilification and showing that these measures are above politics. It is about our communities, it is about our diverse Victorians, and they deserve your support today.

I again urge the house to stand together by supporting this legislation and opposing divisive amendments that will weaken its purpose. Remember the real stories. Remember what we are seeing playing out in our communities. You have an opportunity to stop it; you have an opportunity to protect. As I said, this is a bill that will protect our community. Quite frankly, enough is enough. We need action, and today we will provide that action. We will stop this form and send a very loud message to those who want to attack. Whether it is for their faith, whether it is for their name or whether it is for the way they look – you have no right to attack and make people feel that they do not belong in this community.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:12): I am going to just say a few words on these amendments to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. This is a piece of legislation that the minister at the table, the Minister for Veterans, suggests should have bipartisan support, and the principles perhaps do. I reflect on the first clause that we are debating, new clause 1AA, which finishes with the line:

It is the intention of Parliament to enact law for the people of Victoria that respects the inherent dignity of all of us and promotes our equal participation in public life ...

As a principle, no-one would disagree with that, but it is about getting the balance right. That has been the consistent position of the Liberals and Nationals all the way through this debate: getting the balance right between ensuring that people cannot be unduly vilified, harmed, threatened with violence or actually experiencing violence or intimidation based on their protected attributes – race, religion, sexuality et cetera – but we have always been concerned that the government has not got the balance right on this legislation.

I will go to a question of process for a moment. This process has been literally going for about eight years – from an inquiry in the other place, where it began. We have had this bill for a long time, for more than six months, and yet we are now dealing with amendments that were agreed with the Greens in the other place overnight, in the wee hours of the morning, in a matter of hours. And they are not just little changes to a comma or a full stop; these are significant changes that we think make this bad bill even worse. My predecessors in the debate, particularly the member for Malvern, highlighted one of those.

I take up the comment of the minister that she is not supporting divisive amendments. Well, amendment 11 brings into being that:

... the Director of Public Prosecutions must take into account all the circumstances (including the social, cultural and historical circumstances) surrounding the conduct that is alleged to constitute the offence...

That is something that is inherently divisive. That basically says, potentially, 'Oh well, yes, the person did incite or threaten the victim, but we need to take into account that they're Serbian and the other person was Croatian, and we know that a thousand years ago there was an issue between those countries.' There are multiple examples that could be given of particular social, cultural and historical circumstances to be taken into account that just do not justify the means.

As the member for Malvern said, that is effectively in some respects giving an excuse to someone to do it – 'Oh, well, yes, I said that. But you've got to understand my cultural, historical perspective on it.' We do not think that is fair. That is contrary to the intent of this legislation and indeed it is divisive. I think it is setting this up to fail and it is in fact creating more tension in our community. That is one example, and I think there are many through this. But as I said, the concern that the Nationals and Liberals have is the balance not being right in this. No-one deserves to be vilified, but equally, Victorians have a right to free speech. That is not an absolute right; it needs to be balanced by the need to avoid unduly harming people. There are some protections in this law, but we think that the legislation as it was initially proposed, and even more so now that it has been amended in the other place, gets that balance entirely wrong. That is why we will not be supporting the amendments that have been proposed today.

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (12:16): I rise to make a contribution on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, and I would like to begin by just acknowledging the contribution made by the Minister for Veterans. I too share her enthusiasm for attending events throughout our state that celebrate our diversity. Those opposite attend the same events. But we do need to match that same fervour, that same zeal, that same passion for our diversity with our actions in here. It was back in 2001 in this chamber where we saw an example of that, because the Bracks government introduced what was then our world-leading Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001. They were our first anti-vilification laws, and they were the first step in legislation to protect individuals from hate and misconduct based on race or religion. It made it unlawful to incite hatred in this state and it made it unlawful to incite serious contempt for or ridicule of individuals or groups due to their racial or religious backgrounds. The law also provided avenues for individuals to seek remedies if they experienced vilification.

This was one of the early efforts by a Labor government in Victoria to promote social cohesion and ensure a more inclusive society. But as we know, the world has moved on since then. These laws were world leading at the time, but what we have seen in the last two decades, even in the last two years, is that we need to beef up our laws and we need to ensure that those who are missing out on protection are encompassed by this legislation. We need to ensure that these protections are extended, for example, to people from Victoria's LGBTQIA+ community. The 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry which examined the operations and effectiveness of the original act heard that many Victorians, including First Nations Victorians, Muslim Victorians, Jewish Victorians, women, LGBTQIA+ communities and people with disability often experience vilification. The inquiry also found that despite the protections of the original act, hatred and prejudice is still far too common in Victoria.

We are a government that will not tolerate the targeting of minorities in Victoria. We have demonstrated that through our anti-racism strategy designed to challenge racist attitudes, strengthen community cohesion and address systemic racism in institutions. I was privileged, while I was Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, to serve on the Anti-Racism Taskforce, which has now turned its efforts to ensuring that we are passionately and enthusiastically implementing that strategy. We have demonstrated our commitment through our groundbreaking Yoorrook truth and reconciliation commission, Australia's first truth-telling inquiry into the historical and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in our state, and by banning the use of the Nazi swastika in 2022 – the first Australian jurisdiction to do so – and the subsequent ban on the Nazi salute and other symbols and gestures used by the Nazi party. We have foreshadowed new laws to ban protests outside places of worship.

This is part of our broader effort to combat antisemitism and protect an individual's right to worship without fear or harassment.

I represent an electorate with a very large Jewish community, and I know very well that the fears of our Jewish community have been heightened. Why have they been heightened? Well, they have been heightened because in 2024 there was a 320 per cent rise in antisemitic assaults, and there were six incidents of serious property damage to synagogues and Jewish facilities in Victoria. When I travel around my electorate and when I visit the synagogues in my electorate it is very noticeable that the community's anxieties are heightened at the moment and that they have stepped up security. They have done that with the support of our government, by the way, with significant funding that has gone into securing Jewish communal facilities. I am proud that we as a government have done this because this is about protecting our multiculturalism, protecting our diversity and defending our diversity, which has been significantly challenged over the recent period. We cannot tolerate any further terrorist attacks such as that dastardly attack on the Adass Israel Synagogue. The intent of these laws is to strengthen what is on our statute books by ensuring that we have what we need to deal with some of the awful, awful incidents that we have seen in recent times.

I have something hot off the press from Philip Zajac, president of JCCV, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria:

For years, the Jewish community has been advocating for stronger hate crime laws in Victoria.

This took on a new urgency in 2023–24 with the explosion of antisemitism on our streets, and we called for action, not just words, in response.

The passage of these laws hopefully signals a new era in Victoria where those who are undermining our social cohesion face consequences for their destructive actions.

The JCCV will work with our Jewish community and with police to ensure the laws help Jews and other minorities to live in safety and peace in Victoria.

Those opposite are about to vote no to these laws, and they are doing so supposedly in the name of freedom of speech. We all have freedom of speech, but we also have responsibilities as citizens of a democratic society. It is simply not okay to be a bigot. People do not have the right to be bigots. I will say this: since at least the Second World War it has been social democratic parties like the Australian Labor Party that have defended minority groups. We are one of the oldest social democratic parties in the world. That is why I cannot say that I am particularly surprised by the divide in this house today. I cannot say I am surprised by it at all. I am proud to be a member of the Australian Labor Party and of this Labor government because of legislation like this, and I commend it to the house.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:23): There is no place for hate, and unfortunately this could have been the opportune time for the Parliament to come together on a unity ticket to ensure that that would happen in this state. But actions speak louder than words, and we have seen today at the eleventh hour that this government would do a dirty deal with the Greens – a dirty, disgusting deal with the Greens.

As we have heard from the member for St Albans and the member for Bentleigh today, this has been a number of years in the making. I have been proud working with the member for Brighton and the member for St Albans and others to ensure we outlaw hate in this state, and I am going to focus my attention on the Jewish community because there has been no community that has been more targeted than they are by what we have seen since 7 October 2023 – no other community.

The member for Bentleigh quite rightly said there has been an over 300 per cent increase in antisemitic attacks. A synagogue was firebombed in a terrorist attack, and we have a government today that wants to walk back police powers that ensure that they can do their job. I can tell you that every single member of the community that I speak to says that this government have not been able to keep them safe because they do not allow police to do their job. Police have not responded in the way that many in the Jewish community would have expected them to do because they have said they have not had the powers. Here is an opportunity to do something, and what does this government do? Wind back the powers to do a grubby deal with the Greens at the expense of the Jewish community.

We know recommendation 21 in the report clearly says the DPP barrier to be able to prosecute these cases is something that takes time and causes issues with people actually taking up something and charging people for vilification. That is why we have seen hardly any vilification success here in this state. That is why unfortunately for years the community and other communities have not felt safe because there has not been a prosecution. The police have said, including Luke Cornelius, who came to the committee and gave his report, that actually that test needed to be removed so police could do their work and so police could actually charge. And what did this government do? The government turned around and said, 'Do you know what? That makes sense. We will support it.' And what did we say? We said, 'We'll work with you.' We want to focus on the criminal element, because we said to the government, 'The problem right now is the criminality on our streets, day in, day out, with 72 weeks of protests and 18,000 shifts of police work to babysit these pro-Hamas protesters.' So what has the government done now? They have not tried to work with us but have done a dodgy deal with the Greens that allows them to continue to have police turn around and say, 'Well, I'm sorry, in order for me to do my job, I am going to have to go and get permission from the DPP before I charge you.'

That could take weeks for them to come back and say, ‘Well, we’ll have to look at it, and on this particular evidence you probably don’t have a case.’ So how many people are actually going to take this up? How many are going to take it up when police cannot do their jobs?

Again, police are hamstrung because the government does not want to really do anything. They just want to use weasel words to be able to turn around and say, ‘You know what, we’re looking after you.’ Well, you are not looking after my community. I can tell you that. You are not looking after us. You have done nothing to look after us. Where are the consequences? Every single community when they are victims need their time in the sun for a government to stand up for them. What does the Labor Party do when it comes to that? They turn around and say, ‘Well, we’re going to stand up against antisemitism and Islamophobia at the time of October 7.’

Where was the Islamophobia at the time of October 7? When the Muslims had the Christchurch massacre, we stood here in unity against Islamophobia. We did not talk about antisemitism then because the Muslims needed the government to have their backs. You do not use moral equivalence to be able to walk both sides of the fence and say, ‘You know what, we look after you and we look after you as well.’ Stand up for it when it is wrong. Call it out when it is wrong. This government does not call any of it out. They just want to be able to use headlines and press releases to be able to say, ‘You know what, we’ll keep you safe.’

But when we asked last night a very important question to the former Attorney-General about the kinds of hate slogans that have been used at these rallies, ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free’ – I am sure the member for Richmond might have some comment about that shortly –

Matthew Guy interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: And we have heard some Labor staffers also using those kinds of commentaries. What about, also, ‘All Zionists are terrorists’? Well, when we asked that question, ‘It depends.’ We still do not know whether using the word ‘Zionists’ as camouflage for ‘Jews’ is going to be called out as an issue in terms of hate speech or not. We do not know, yet the Jewish community has been calling for years, and certainly since 7 October, to be able to call out those haters that are using the word ‘Zionists’ as a replacement, cut and paste, to ensure that they are really targeting Jews.

That is what they are doing. That is what they are saying. That is why when people use a phrase like ‘All Zionists are terrorists’ it needs to be called out for what it is – it is hate speech. It needs to be prosecuted and police need the powers to do it, to call it what it is. There is only one reason the Greens have put this amendment up, because they want to continue to march out with Adam Bandt and co and go for broke and call out whatever they like, targeting Jews. That is what they do. Jewish hate – that is what they do. That is what the Greens do, and now we have got the Labor Party backing the Greens again. They are defending the Greens again. I cannot believe that Labor are defending the Greens again. Are you serious? Do you have any moral compass at all, that you would defend the Greens? You are a disgrace.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! I am on my feet. The member for Caulfield has the call. Members should show the member for Caulfield respect while he is on his feet.

David SOUTHWICK: For this government to again stand side by side with the Greens and to defend the Greens when they have used the most damaging, hateful language since 7 October, they should be ashamed of themselves. That is appalling. I was talking about the Greens and what the Greens have done in these protests, and again Labor were backing them. What an absolute disgrace. We saw it last night at midnight when Labor took the Greens’ amendments and said, ‘You know what, off we go. We’ll give you any leg room you like, any rope you like to go out there and do whatever you like and say whatever you like to the Jewish community’ – side by side against the Jewish community. That is what Labor is. That is what the Greens are. That is what they do. We know that

Labor need Greens preferences in any government, federal or state. We have got a federal election coming up – let us see what they do in Macnamara. Does Labor preference the Greens in Macnamara to save their own skin? Do they when they have seen firebombings and attacks? Will they? This government has no courage to stand up against the Greens. At every single parliamentary sitting the member for Richmond stands up and blames the Jews for everything. Everything is the Jews' fault time and time again.

Members interjecting.

Gabrielle de Vietri: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask the member for Caulfield to withdraw that last statement, as I take offence to it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Member for Caulfield, I was not able to hear what the last statement was because there is too much disorderly conduct in the house. If there was anything unparliamentary said, I would ask you with to withdraw, but otherwise I would ask you to use the remainder of your time and to ensure that this is a civil debate.

David SOUTHWICK: Thank you very much. I do not believe there was anything unparliamentary, so I will not be withdrawing. I will be continuing on by saying that this government, along with the Greens –

Juliana Addison interjected.

David SOUTHWICK: The member for Wendouree can interject all she likes, but on this particular issue with the Greens, I would have expected her to be side by side with us on a unity ticket. The member for Wendouree has a synagogue in her electorate, and she should be side by side with the Jewish community. She should be, and Ballarat should be as well. A disgrace you all are. This was an opportunity to do something, and you failed.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Order! Member for Caulfield, I ask you to withdraw that last comment. It was a reflection on the Chair.

David SOUTHWICK: I withdraw if there was anything to you, Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I will give the call to the member for Richmond. Before I do so, I remind members that this has been a very emotive debate. I ask all members to show courtesy to members on their feet and for members on their feet to show courtesy to other members.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (12:34): I rise to speak in support of this bill. It is a bill that we are extremely grateful to see come before this Parliament. The Greens and the community have long campaigned for anti-vilification laws to be expanded to protect people on the basis of other characteristics, to protect LGBTIQ+ people and to protect disabled people as well as people on the basis of race and religion, and we really welcome the government's move to bring this bill before Parliament.

We are also really grateful for the collaborative way in which the government has worked with us to seek to make this bill work as intended, and I will speak briefly to the intention behind the amendments. We received concerns from stakeholders and shared those concerns about the risk that these laws might be unintentionally open to misuse by police against marginalised and overpoliced communities, so the amendments that we sought to include mitigate that risk.

The bill will now include a preamble statement that refers to the right of all Victorians to participate equally in a democratic society, the promotion of diversity that exists within our society, the right to

equality and the need to balance this with the right to freedom of expression in both the civil and the criminal clauses. The purposes clause now states that the intention of this bill is:

to promote full and equal participation in an open and inclusive democratic society, without impeding robust discussion that does not vilify or marginalise others based on a protected attribute ...

It also very clearly states that the intention of this bill is to protect people who experience systemic injustice and structural oppression, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and others.

We were glad to see that the government was willing to retain the requirement for police to obtain DPP consent to proceed to prosecution. This additional oversight ensures that a third party is able to assess charges and whether it is in the public interest to continue to proceed to prosecution, whether the human rights elements have been adequately considered in the application of these charges. It ensures proportionality and fairness in the prosecuting of these laws. We are very grateful that the government has agreed to incorporate the requirement for DPP consent to prevent police overreach.

Second last, we have also introduced a requirement for the DPP to consider the circumstances of the offending, including the historical, the social and the cultural context. We believe that that is important to be able to ensure that these provisions do not inadvertently criminalise those who are vulnerable; for example, someone experiencing homelessness, someone experiencing mental illness, young people. That DPP oversight is now guided to take those factors into consideration.

Finally, we have sought to clarify the religious exception to ensure that the scope of the religious exception displays a strong and close nexus between preaching and proselytising and a person's religious beliefs. We believe that that adequately is reflected in the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and has a strong precedent for its interpretation. We are very grateful that this amendment has also been supported by the government.

We would like to also thank the crossbench in the upper house for their close collaboration on ensuring that this bill works as intended, from Legalise Cannabis and the Animal Justice Party as well as a number of stakeholders that have worked with us to ensure that this bill works as intended. I will non-exhaustively name a few stakeholders, including the Federation of Community Legal Centres, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the Human Rights Law Centre, the Fitzroy Legal Service, Equality Australia, the Jewish Council of Australia and the Islamic Council of Victoria, who have been very helpful in guiding our negotiations on this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): The Attorney-General has moved that the amendments from the Legislative Council be agreed to. The member for Ringwood has moved further amendments to the amendments. I will therefore split the question to deal with the amendments proposed by the member for Ringwood. The question is therefore:

That amendments 1 to 7 inclusive be agreed to.

Assembly divided on Council amendments 1 to 7:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, 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, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell,

David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Amendments agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The member for Ringwood has moved further amendment 1 to Council amendment 8. The further amendment seeks to remove words and replace them with the words in the further amendment. The question is:

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

Members supporting the amendment by the member for Ringwood 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, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Darren Cheeseman, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Assembly divided on Council amendment 8:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, 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, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Amendment agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The member for Ringwood has moved further amendment 2 to Council amendment 9. The further amendment seeks to remove words and replace them with the words in the further amendment. The question is:

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

Those supporting the amendment by the member for Ringwood 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, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Darren Cheeseman, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Question agreed to.

Assembly divided on Council amendment 9:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, 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, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Amendment agreed to.

Assembly divided on Council amendment 10:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, 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, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell,

David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Amendment agreed to.

The SPEAKER: The member for Ringwood has moved further amendment 3 to Council amendment 11. The further amendment seeks to insert the words in the further amendment. The question is:

That the further amendment be agreed to.

Amendment defeated.

Assembly divided on Council amendment 11:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, 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, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Amendment agreed to.

Assembly divided on Council amendments 12 and 13:

Ayes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, 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, Melissa Horne, 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, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Amendments agreed to.

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

Sitting suspended 1:05 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery former member Geoff Howard.

Rulings from the Chair

Questions without notice and ministers statements

The SPEAKER (14:02): Before we commence question time, I would like to respond to a point of order raised by the Manager of Opposition Business yesterday. This is quite a long ruling, so bear with me.

Questions are a way for members to seek information from ministers about public policy and government administration for which those ministers are responsible to the house. Similarly, ministers statements are an opportunity for ministers to inform the house about matters in their portfolio areas for which they are accountable to the house. From this principle flow various conventions and rules about questions which prohibit discussion about issues outside the remit of government administration or seeking or providing opinions.

This brings me to hypothetical matters. The guidelines state that a question cannot seek a solution to a hypothetical proposition. A minister cannot be responsible to the house for hypothetical matters, which is why the guidelines about questions and answers – and I will include ministers statements in that – prohibit canvassing hypothetical matters. It is reasonable to expect the house to canvass the effect on government administration of a range of external factors, though. For example, it is fair for members to ask a minister what the government’s policy is in the event of an external event happening – a natural disaster or economic changes globally – or what planning is underway for various scenarios in a minister’s portfolio. It is reasonable for the house to be satisfied that the government is thinking about these things.

In that vein, Speaker Maddigan ruled that, where information about proposed federal government reforms has been provided in the press, it is not hypothetical for a minister to answer a question that relates to Victorian government business and the effect that government policies – federal or any other – may have on the state. Speaker Maddigan also ruled that it is reasonable to discuss the effect of federal government policies on Victorian government administration but it is out of order to discuss how a possible future federal government might affect the state as it is hypothetical.

Clearly the rule against proposing hypothetical matters does not prohibit asking questions or discussing any future event. In relation to Speaker Maddigan’s latter ruling, while it is hypothetical to speculate about what a future government might do, where specific policies and commitments have been announced it is reasonable for a minister to canvass how these policies and commitments will affect government administration. However, ministers should confine their comments to specific policies and commitments and not speculate on unannounced policies a future government might implement.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Victoria Police

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): My question is to the Premier. Victoria’s crime crisis is at record levels under the leadership of the Allan Labor government. Today it was reported that acting chief commissioner Rick Nugent is not applying for the role of chief commissioner. Can the Premier guarantee to any person who applies for this role that the continuous political interference will end, allowing them to get on with the job of reducing crime in Victoria?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): In acknowledging the Leader of the Opposition’s question, can I make it absolutely clear that I absolutely reject the statement that he made at the end of his question regarding this government’s role. I think, though, those of us on this side of the house can understand why the Leader of the Opposition thinks this, because this is exactly how the former Liberal government behaved when they were in government. I absolutely reject the

allegation that has been made in the question, and I also thank acting chief commissioner Rick Nugent for continuing to serve in the role.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): The government continues to ignore advice, including calls for the Allan Labor government to not weaken bail laws in March 2023, which has led to record crime in Victoria. Will the Premier guarantee that the next chief commissioner will have full independence to do their role in keeping Victoria safe?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Again, in answering the Leader of the Opposition’s question, I reiterate that the government I lead – the way this government interacts with Victoria Police – is one that respects the hard work of the men and women of Victoria Police. Of course in taking the advice and indeed as part of respecting the hard work of the men and women of Victoria Police just consider the actions of my government in the last few weeks. We have the toughest bail laws in the country, Australia’s first machete ban and, as of today, toughened hate crime laws, giving police more power –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was very narrow, about whether the chief commissioner will have full independence.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I did answer it at the outset, Speaker, and I was going on to refer to how, in listening to the advice of Victoria Police, hate is now a crime in this state. You cannot pick and choose which law and order issue you are on the side of. We are on the side of Victoria Police, and we back the hard work of the men and women of Victoria Police.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will be removed without warning. Yes, I am looking at you, member for Eureka.

Ministers statements: health services

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:08): Labor believes in universal health care. We founded Medicare because we believe that income should not dictate access to care. That is why on this side of the house we will always back our healthcare system and our hardworking healthcare workers. For the past three years we have had the good fortune of having a partner in Canberra who we can work with to roll back almost a decade of neglect under the former federal Liberal coalition government in Canberra. The Albanese Labor government has tripled the bulk-billing incentive, delivered cheaper medicines, supported our rollout of urgent care clinics and stopped the war on Medicare.

But it has not always been this way. Victorians remember Peter Dutton as health minister, who planned to cut \$50 billion from our public healthcare system. We remember how he tried to introduce a GP co-payment and told us that there were too many free Medicare services. When Victorians cannot afford a visit to the GP, do you know where they go? They come to our emergency departments, and it is our hardworking healthcare workers who bear the brunt of this Liberal Party neglect and disdain for public health care. When Peter Dutton and his cut squad descended on Victoria yesterday, we heard the same hollow ‘No cuts to health’ –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, there is no such announced policy. That is a hypothetical, and I ask you to ask the minister to desist.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Minister for Health to clarify what she was referring to.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I was referring to what the federal Leader of the Opposition said yesterday. He said that there would be no cuts to health. We well remember when Tony Abbott said this back in 2013: ‘No cuts to health.’ This was all said.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I refer to your earlier ruling in relation to the minister's ministers statement. Clearly we are on the first ministers statement and the government is abusing your ruling by using this as an opportunity to simply play political sledge games, and we expect it for the whole of question time.

The SPEAKER: The minister was referring to previous federal governments.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on this point of order. It is about future governments that I ruled, not past governments.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: While we are talking about the past, let us not forget that Peter Dutton was the man that Australian doctors voted the worst health minister in a generation.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Leader of the House withdrew from chamber.

Commonwealth Games

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:12): My question is to the Premier. Yesterday the final report into the 2026 Commonwealth Games found that poor ministerial oversight and accountability were to blame for the debacle. Does the Premier accept responsibility for torching \$589 million of Victorians' money?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): I thank the member for Nepean for his question. The member for Nepean referred to a report that was tabled in this place yesterday regarding the Commonwealth Games, and I do take responsibility and do restate that it was the right decision. It is not just me who thinks it was the right decision; it is in the report that was tabled yesterday. The committee found unanimously that it was the right decision. Indeed, if I recall correctly, I think the former opposition leader also agreed –

Members: Which one?

Jacinta ALLAN: to be precise, the member for Hawthorn.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Narre Warren North withdrew from chamber.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, the question related to poor ministerial accountability and the Premier's responsibility when it comes to torching \$589 million of Victorians' money. I ask you to bring the Premier back to answering that question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I was answering the member for Nepean's question directly and quoting from the report that he referred to in his question. I know that it is a little bit inconvenient for the member for Nepean to have these facts pointed out. Also in affirming that it was the right decision, as the committee itself unanimously reported on yesterday, we are getting on now and delivering right now in regional Victoria investments in building more homes, in building sport infrastructure –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be succinct in answering, and the question was very narrow, about accepting responsibility for torching \$589 million of taxpayers money, not talking about accountancy and other policies.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Manger of Opposition Business knows not to repeat the question. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: That investment is being made right now, whether it is in Ballarat or Geelong or Bendigo or the Latrobe Valley or indeed right across regional Victoria. We are attracting more events to regional Victoria, we are seeing more visitors come to regional Victoria and we are making these investments right now.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I think the Premier is abusing your ruling on coming back to the question. It was a very narrow question about the \$589 million wasted.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:16): The now Premier and the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop were the ministers responsible for the Commonwealth Games debacle. The same ministers now preside over the Suburban Rail Loop. Why should Victorians have any faith the government will not mess that up as well?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): Victorians know two things. When it comes to the Suburban Rail Loop it is only Labor governments that will deliver the Suburban Rail Loop, regardless of who the minister might be, because it is a project Victorians want and it is a project Victorians need. Infrastructure Australia agrees. The federal government agrees, which is why we have a partner in the project. Victorians know that the Liberal Party oppose this project, oppose the workers, oppose the train line to Monash University –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, it is a baseless imputation to say that we oppose workers, because we do not. I would ask the Premier to desist from imputations.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Manger of Opposition Business, that is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: I also say this: Victorians also know that I will fight for Victoria. On this side of the house we will fight for Victoria, not take our riding instructions from a Queenslander who wants to live in Sydney and who cannot find Melbourne on a map.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Mordialloc withdrew from chamber.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:18): I rise to reaffirm to the house that the Allan Labor government will never, never go nuclear – absolutely never. Instead we are getting on with the job of building the cleanest, the safest and the cheapest new energy there is: renewable. The results speak for themselves. We are on course to deliver 40 per cent of our electricity supply coming from renewables this year. With new records set already in both January and February, we are not slowing down. It is our record investment in renewables that has given us the lowest wholesale electricity prices and the lowest retail electricity prices in the country, saving hardworking Victorian families money – back in their pockets. We recently signed a really important agreement with our partners in Canberra, the Albanese Labor government, that will deliver a further \$14 billion in renewable energy investment in Victoria by 2030.

But all of this is at risk with Peter Dutton’s policy to build toxic, expensive nuclear power plants right here in Victoria. Nuclear is the most expensive form of new energy that you can build, and one thing is for sure: it will guarantee higher electricity bills for every Victorian. The CSIRO says nuclear will cost 400 per cent more than renewables – \$600 billion, in fact – plus managing the toxic waste alone would cost \$14 billion. We will never allow that in Victoria. We will never allow Victorians to be sluggish with nuclear. Why would you, when you have got plenty of wind and plenty of sun to decarbonise our energy system, keep power bills down and create thousands of jobs in the meantime? We will keep on working with our partners in Canberra because that is what is going to deliver more renewables, keep the lights on, power bills down – *(Time expired)*

Commonwealth Games

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:20): My question is to the Premier. The Commonwealth Games inquiry found that there was inadequate planning and consultation, logistical issues caused by the proposed multicity model and poor ministerial oversight and accountability. How can the Premier defend the cost to Victorians of \$589 million during a cost-of-living crisis for an election commitment that was never going to be delivered?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): As I have said previously on this matter, when the Commonwealth Games needed a host jurisdiction to step in at short notice, we were willing to help but not at any cost, so when the Leader of the Opposition refers to –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Will the Leader of the Opposition come to order.

Jacinta ALLAN: When it came to considering how we could invest now in those benefits that come from housing, from sporting infrastructure and from tourism infrastructure, we made the right decision – a decision that had the unanimous support of the committee that reported to this Parliament yesterday and a decision that the former Leader of the Opposition agreed to as well. We are seeing these investments that are being made in regional Victoria right now. That is what we are focused on. When it comes to supporting cost of living, delivering cost-of-living measures to support families right across this state, I was proud to stand with the Minister for Education this morning at Abbotsford Primary School announcing another way that we are supporting parents with the costs of getting their kids to school at a great government school.

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

Ben Carroll: On the point of order, Speaker, from Speaker Brooks:

A minister is to relate remarks to the question asked.

The question went very clearly to planning and logistics around the Commonwealth Games. The Premier has gone to planning, housing, tourism and cost of living, which were all in the substantive question from the opposition leader. I urge you to rule that point of order out of order.

Sam Groth: On the point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business’s point of order related to the Premier debating the question, not the relevance of the answer, and I ask you to uphold that point of order.

The SPEAKER: I cannot tell the Premier how to answer a question. She was being relevant, but I remind the Premier of the narrowness of the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about cost of living, and I was detailing for the Leader of the Opposition how just today we are adding to the way that we are supporting working people and families in this state with those very real and challenging cost-of-living pressures – helping get their

kids to school in school uniforms, helping them with the free breakfast program. I know you opposed Fresh Fruit Friday and you cut Fresh Fruit Friday –

Bridget Vallence: Speaker, I renew the same point of order. The Premier is debating the question. It has got nothing to do with the matters that she has just referred to. It is very narrow about the cost-of-living crisis and the waste of money for an election commitment that they then reneged on.

The SPEAKER: I reiterate that I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question, but she was being relevant to the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:24): Premier, is it government policy to continue with poor ministerial oversight and accountability, seen with the Commonwealth Games, for the Suburban Rail Loop, which will cost Victorians billions of dollars for a project that will never be delivered?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): Clearly the Leader of the Opposition is just once again not across the detail, because work is happening right now on the Suburban Rail Loop –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Nationals, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Gippsland South withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: and only someone who is not across his brief and not across the detail – only someone like the Leader of the Opposition – would make that statement. No, I correct myself; I also heard the federal Leader of the Opposition say the same thing. So you have got a Queenslander who lives in Sydney who does not know what is going on in Melbourne, and it appears his man in Melbourne also does not know what is going on in Melbourne. Heaven help us; heaven help the Liberal Party here. There is work happening right now. There are thousands of people, and they are the workers whose pay packets will be cut if those opposite have their way.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was very narrow, about poor ministerial oversight, and I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: transport infrastructure

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:26): Yesterday I updated the house on the federal opposition leader's latest plans to short-change Victoria again. For the best part of 10 years the federal coalition government ripped billions of dollars out of Victorian infrastructure projects, and in doing so they left the state with a choice. We could either invest and protect our famed livability or let the federal Liberals send us backwards by decades. We chose to invest because Victorians deserve it. We went it alone on the Metro Tunnel project, freeing up capacity in the city loop and delivering a turn-up-and-go service. We went it alone on the West Gate Tunnel project, that vital alternative crossing to the West Gate Bridge, saving travel time for commuters in our west. And of course we went it alone on 84 out of 85 level crossing removals across our state, easing congestion and boosting safety across Victoria.

But things changed a few years ago, and we now have a partner in Canberra in the Albanese government. They know where to find Victoria on a map. They have invested \$7 billion into airport rail, they have invested \$2.2 billion in the Suburban Rail Loop and they have invested \$1.2 billion in outer suburban roads because they know that no matter where you live in this state you deserve to have the projects delivered that make a meaningful difference to your everyday life, and they have partnered with the state in that vision. We all know, and Victorians know, that Liberals cut and close. They short-changed us for a decade and have promised to do the same again.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, former Speaker Brooks ruled quite clearly that ministers statements are not an opportunity to attack the opposition. I would ask you to ask the minister to desist from doing so.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to refrain from attacking the opposition.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: Those opposite need to decide whether they are the champions for Victoria or the champions for Queensland.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the next Deputy Premier was defying your ruling.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Homelessness

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:29): My question is for the Premier. Last week I met a mother with two young children. She came into my office after exhausting all local homelessness and support services, left with nowhere to go and facing the prospect of sleeping in her car with her two young children, a two-year-old and a five-month-old. My team and I spent hours calling housing organisations, churches and support services, desperately seeking help for this family. Every single organisation told us the same thing: ‘Tell the government we need more money.’ They are at capacity. They cannot help the growing number of families like hers who have nowhere to turn. Premier, it is completely unacceptable that in Victoria a mother with two young children is left without shelter because the very organisations meant to support her are telling us they do not have the funding to do so. What is the government doing to ensure homelessness organisations have the resources they need to support families in urgent need of assistance?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:30): In thanking the member for Ringwood for his question, he details what is a really difficult set of circumstances. I think when we hear that experience and the challenges that mum is having while having two very young children, it does really bring home the great challenge that we face as a society and a community about how we need to support people, whether they are in the very dire housing need that the member for Ringwood has identified or are vulnerable to being in that situation. That is why I understand that we need to continue to invest, both in funding for services for homelessness agencies and those who work in those crisis moments, but also the overall challenge is making sure we build more homes either as a government, which is what we are doing through our Big Housing Build, and making sure that in building more homes there is the identification of vulnerable groups who are prioritised through that process and then looking at what more we can do to build more homes. I say to the member for Ringwood – and I acknowledge the remarks that he has made about the work that his staff undertook to support this mum – if he is willing to provide further details to either me or the Minister for Housing, we could examine this matter further to see what more can be done.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:32): The homelessness organisations and support services we spoke to frequently exhaust the money they have available for emergency accommodation in the first three, four or perhaps five days of each calendar month when that funding arrives. What will the government do to address the ongoing, systemic monthly shortfalls in emergency funding budgets for these organisations?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:32): In addition to the comments I made to the member for Ringwood in my answer to his substantive question, in terms of his supplementary question I will seek further advice from the Minister for Housing about what more needs to be done. He has clearly identified some challenges that are occurring in his part of the world, in the Ringwood electorate – I have made an assumption that this mum is a constituent in the Ringwood community – and I will seek some further advice from the housing minister.

Ministers statements: veterans support

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (14:33): I rise today to highlight how important it is to support our veterans. Serving in the defence forces is an act of bravery and sacrifice, but it can leave lasting effects and many veterans return home with significant physical and mental impacts as a result of their service. That is why the Department of Veterans' Affairs is so important. It is a frontline service that ensures veterans get the help that they need when they lodge their compensation claims, which can be life saving. In 2022 there was a backlog of 42,000 claims due to outsourcing and cuts to the public service. We know that veterans were sometimes waiting for many years to have their claims processed. It took a Labor government in Canberra and 500 extra DVA staff to finally clear that backlog. Veterans, who have just been through a royal commission, on the eve of Anzac Day are distressed to hear that Senator Hume and the Liberal Party want to cut those DVA staff again. This would wind back the clock and take us back to those dark days that cast a shadow over our veteran community. The mask is off and the Victorians Liberals have been silent on this issue, but on this side of the house we will not stay silent while the Liberals cut essential public service jobs and while the Leader of the Opposition waits for his next –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I think the minister is abusing your ruling. I would ask you to ask the minister to stop attacking the opposition during her ministers statement.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to refer to matters that are in the public domain only.

Natalie SULEYMAN: What I can say is that as the Leader of the Opposition waits for the next policy announcement, whether it is coming from Queensland or whether it is coming from Washington, we will keep investing in our frontline services and our veterans.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the minister was reading a speech.

The SPEAKER: Was the minister reading her speech?

Natalie SULEYMAN: No, I was referring to notes.

Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:35): My question is to the Premier. The Treasurer said that the new emergency services tax is weighted at those that can afford to pay more.

Members interjecting.

Emma KEALY: Speaker, please can I have the same courtesy extended to other members?

The SPEAKER: Order! I expect all members to give each side of the house the courtesy they deserve.

Emma KEALY: On what basis did the government decide to increase the tax on farmers by 189 per cent, almost double that of every other Victorian?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:36): In thanking the member for Lowan for her question, the government has made a policy change to –

The SPEAKER: Can I just remind the Premier that this legislation is currently in the upper house and to be mindful of anticipating further debate.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you for that guidance, Speaker. Being mindful of that, I will refer to previous government statements on this matter, where we have clearly identified that the fire services levy that was introduced by, I think, the then member for Malvern or maybe the then member for Rowville, following a recommendation from the 2010 royal commission into the 2009 Black Saturday fires, was designed in a way to provide support for those emergency services that go out each and every day and support our communities, whether they be farmers, whether they be households,

whether they be businesses, in every part of the state. Following representation, particularly from the state emergency services, who for various policy reasons at the time were not covered by this levy –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, on relevance, Speaker, this is about farmers being disproportionately impacted after the government have said that they are targeting those that can afford more, when clearly farmers cannot.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant, but I do remind the Premier that it was referencing a particular section of our community.

Jacinta ALLAN: I mentioned farmers, I mentioned households and I mentioned businesses, and we are seeing how the more and more frequent and fierce natural disasters are impacting every corner of the state. In terms of what we have recognised in being able to bring more –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I would like the Premier to be shown the same courtesy that the member for Lowan requested.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker, for that protection from the member for Lowan. We are seeing more and more frequent and ferocious –

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: natural disasters in this state, and we are seeing, more and more, not just our fire services being called upon but our broader emergency services being called on to do more, which is why we think it is only fair that the levy be expanded to include emergency services like the SES. In consideration of how the rate is struck, noting that the mechanism –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is required to be factual, and the fact is that this tax is actually going to be funding core government and public service back office jobs, so I would like you to ask the Premier to come back to the very narrow question about why farmers particularly are being slugged 189 per cent more of this tax.

The SPEAKER: I am aware of the question, but thank you for that point of order because it gives me an opportunity to remind the house about rulings. As I have noted on previous occasions, standing orders require questions and answers to be factual. I have also noted that while it is incumbent on members to be factual it is difficult for the Chair to be the arbiter of the veracity of all information presented in the chamber. In debate, members will seek to argue that other members are right or wrong, and that is a normal feature of debate. I share the guidance offered at paragraph 22.13 in *May*, 25th edition, which states:

The facts on which a question is based may be set out as briefly as practicable within the framework of a question, provided that the Member asking it makes themselves responsible for their accuracy ...

While this paragraph is about questions, the logic obviously extends to answers and other debates. The Premier to continue, with relevance.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked a question about the rate being struck for farmers, and I think before the point of order I was going directly to saying how the government considered how the rate was being struck for consideration for all property owners across the state, noting that this is a levy that already exists, the mechanism for collection is remaining the same and the opportunity by including other emergency services to have every dollar that is raised through this fund invested back into those emergency services –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question in her response. I ask you to bring her back: why are farmers being slugged 129 per cent more than other Victorians?

The SPEAKER: Please do not repeat the question in a point of order. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: The advice I have from the Treasurer is that the increase in the levy for primary producers is the equivalent of 0.5 to 0.8 per cent of agricultural production, which also recognises the large landholdings of primary producers and the risk they face in the event of fire.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:42): Groups ranging from the UFU to the VFF and nearly all local government organisations are opposed to this great big new tax. Given the government undertook no consultation on this massive change, will the Premier now withdraw this tax and provide some relief for farmers, residents and businesses during Labor’s cost-of-living crisis?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:42): I was asked about relief for farmers. In acknowledging that farmers, like all Victorians, are experiencing the challenges of the pressures of cost of living, I will say this to the member for Lowan: we have the lowest payroll rate in regional Victoria of any jurisdiction in the nation, we have exempted primary production from land tax, we invest in regional communities right across the state –

Emma Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating her response. Most farmers do not pay payroll tax, because they do not have more than 20 employees.

The SPEAKER: Member for Lowan, I ask you to state your points of order succinctly. It is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about relief for farmers and support for farmers, and there is the support we have been providing to farmers in the south-west of the state as they continue to experience dry conditions. Let us remember what our emergency services do for farmers and indeed all regional communities. They provide them with support. They provide them with relief when there is a fire and when there is an emergency, and we think they deserve our support.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Polwarth withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: We believe they deserve our support, which is why every dollar will be reinvested back into those emergency services.

Ministers statements: government achievements

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:44): On this side of the house we stand for Victorians, we stand with Victorians and we are building for Victoria’s future. We are delivering for Victorians, and we want to support Victorians in work to succeed. But we know not everyone in this house shares that same passion for building for Victoria’s future, for backing Victorians. We know some love spending more time in Queensland than they do here in Victoria. We know that same person also enjoys getting his marching orders from Queensland as well.

On this side of the house, as we back Victorians with those projects that are building for Victoria’s future, we are also investing in those vital frontline services. Whether it is in our world-class hospitals, whether it is in our TAFEs or whether it is in our schools, we are investing in those areas that families and working people need their government backing every day to succeed. Also there are those important projects that are underway, including the Suburban Rail Loop. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that work is underway. Memo to the Leader of the Opposition: work is underway. There is also the Metro Tunnel. Memo to the Leader of the Opposition: not a dollar for this project, because Peter Dutton sat at the cabinet table and blocked Victoria and took money off Victoria for this project.

Of course you can visit any community in this state and see this investment in action. The community of Berwick had a visitor yesterday. A visitor from Queensland went to Berwick yesterday. Who knew that the Leader of the Opposition had the federal Leader of the Opposition in his own backyard? They could have talked about expanding the Casey Hospital, removing the Clyde Road level crossing –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to the ruling that you made at the commencement of question time, the Premier is clearly talking hypotheticals now.

Jacinta ALLAN: On the point of order, Speaker, the federal Leader of the Opposition was in Berwick yesterday, and I am not sure that that is a hypothetical. I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition is not across the detail; I am a little surprised his Manager of Opposition Business is not as well.

The SPEAKER: It is inappropriate to talk about potential funding announcements that could or might have been made.

Jacinta ALLAN: If the two leaders of the opposition got together in Berwick, they could have talked about removing the Clyde Road level crossing, the investment in Clyde North police station, upgrading Thompsons Road – a whole range of projects –

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, again in relation to the ruling that you made at the commencement of question time, the Premier is alluding to things that are hypothetical, and I would ask you to ask her – in relation to your ruling that you were very clear about at the commencement of question time – to desist.

Jacinta ALLAN: On this point of order, Speaker, it is a fact that Labor has invested in Casey Hospital, the Clyde Road level crossing, upgrading Thompsons Road and a new police station in Clyde North. These are not hypotheticals. They would not exist under a Liberal government, because it is only Labor governments that make these investments.

The SPEAKER: Premier, that was not really a point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Constituency questions

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:49): (1080) My question this afternoon is to the Treasurer in the other place, and my question is: Treasurer, can you tell my community of Apollo Bay whether they will at last this year receive much-needed funding for the upgrade of the Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club on the beautiful Apollo Bay foreshore. The Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club provides a fantastic service to the people of Apollo Bay, to the surrounding community and most importantly to the many, many visitors and tourists that come our way over the various summer seasons. The Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club has submitted to the government now for many years a comprehensive plan for redevelopment on its beautiful foreshore but involving many other community agencies and groups such as the local Apollo Bay P-12 College. The reason this is important for the community is because a redeveloped Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club will keep the community safe and help attract visitors to Apollo Bay.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:50): (1081) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Environment. What action is the government taking to protect existing tree cover, increase urban greening and ensure sustainable development across Melbourne's west? Last week I had the great pleasure of visiting the year 6 students at Aintree Primary School as part of their studies on government and its role in shaping our communities. After spending the term learning about how government works, these engaged and very thoughtful young students took the opportunity to ask insightful questions about issues that matter to them. One of their biggest concerns was the

environment. The students spoke passionately about the importance of trees and clean air, supporting biodiversity and maintaining a healthy environment for future generations. They are deeply worried about the effects of increasing development in Melbourne's west and want to understand what steps this government is taking to ensure that green spaces are protected and expanded. It was truly inspiring to hear from the students at Aintree Primary School. This generation is one that we should be proud of.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:51): (1082) My question is to the Treasurer in the other place. Will regional Victoria finally receive its fair share, in the upcoming state budget? Last year we got just 13 per cent of the infrastructure spend, despite making up a quarter of the population. We are being short-changed. The Treasurer has the Euroa electorate budget pitch on her desk, but here is a refresher. Kilmore needs a public high school and Broadford needs school upgrades. Euroa, Nagambie and Heathcote still need fluoridated water. Seymour, Avenel and Swanpool are desperate for more child care and housing. Pick a town – a lack of new builds has seen waitlists reach over two years for social housing. But if you want more, try our crumbling roads in Murchison or the CFA brigades, like at Strathbogie. It is stuck with a 30-year-old truck and unusable sheds. While I am at it, our health services are being stripped back before our eyes – 11,500 square kilometres, and you cannot safely deliver a baby. Funding is about to run out for RFDS. Patient transport, family violence and homelessness services have been cut in Benalla. It is time the government realises Victoria is more than just Melbourne and that infrastructure projects can go beyond CFMEU favours. Stop gaslighting regional Victorians and govern – *(Time expired)*

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:52): (1083) My question is to the Minister for Education, and it is: what is the total amount of money that has been invested since the 2015–16 budget on school infrastructure across Wyndham? Since becoming the member for Tarneit I have witnessed remarkable growth in our local educational infrastructure. I have had the pleasure of opening five state-of-the-art, brand new government schools just in this term alone. Our local independent schools are thriving as well. Just last week I participated in the sod-turning ceremony for stage 2 of St Teresa of Kolkata Catholic Primary School, which has benefited from a \$6 million investment from our Building Fund for Non-Government Schools. We have also seen a number of fantastic upgrades, including Tarneit Rise and Davis Creek primary schools receiving \$200,000 from the Inclusive Schools Fund for playground equipment; Hoppers Crossing Secondary College receiving \$10 million; the Grange, \$10 million; and Tarneit Senior College, \$5 million. And that is just the beginning. I am so proud to be part of the Allan Labor government – *(Time expired)*

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:53): (1084) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, when will Transport Victoria or VicRoads ensure that damaged road signs along major arterial roads throughout my electorate are repaired or replaced in a prompt and timely manner when they are being reported? My office has recently been contacted by a number of local residents and commuter motorists who are angry at the slowness – and in this case the complete lack of action – by Transport Victoria in fixing these signs. One such major large road directional sign had been located on a median strip heading west along Ferntree Gully Road, Scoresby, just before the Stud Road intersection and close to the nearby EastLink, which had been indicated on the sign. The sign was knocked down in the 2024 storms and despite having been reported has lain there for months and months amongst the high grass.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:54): (1085) My question is to the Minister for Industry and Advanced Manufacturing. I have been approached by local business Deep Hole Drilling

Specialists, who previously received support from the state government to install a biochar production system that uses a pyrolytic heat process. The company produces the biochar from non-chemical-treated pine crates sourced through the circular economy. Clean heat from this process is, in turn, used in the company's pre-heated ovens for the deep drilling process, thus reducing the reliance on gas. The company is now looking for opportunities to sell the biochar. Biochar can be used in agricultural applications but also as an industrial agent for improving chemical properties of materials including concrete, asphalt, industrial ink, paints and resins. Minister, what is the government doing to support business in my electorate to locate markets and educate industry about the benefits of such products and processes?

Ringwood electorate

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (14:55): (1086) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. What protections and remedies are available for existing apartment owners who have discovered serious defects or undisclosed issues shortly after purchasing their properties? Over the past 12 months several constituents in my electorate of Ringwood have contacted me with concerning reports of poor building practices and significant defects in the properties they have purchased. These issues include structural faults, water damage and substandard workmanship, and they were not disclosed before purchase. Many of these residents have struggled to find an appropriate avenue for redress and as a result are left powerless and financially burdened by the cost of repairs. They are costs they should not have to bear. While the new Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 is a step forward, the government must ensure that residents already suffering because of building defects receive the protection and the support they urgently need, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Eureka electorate

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (14:56): (1087) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. As we mark the 80th anniversary of the CFA, I want to thank the 34 brigades who protect and support my communities. These amazing volunteers deserve the very best equipment and resources to provide their vital service. I thank the minister for her support through the volunteer emergency services equipment program. Could the minister please advise how many VESEP grants have been provided to brigades in my electorate since 2018?

Hawthorn electorate

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (14:56): (1088) My question is to the Minister for Education and is regarding the leasing arrangements for newly upgraded sporting grounds at Fritsch Holzer reserve under the care of Swinburne secondary college. Up until 2022, when works began, Fritsch Holzer was the home ground for the South Yarra Football Netball Club, and there was an implicit understanding that this would be the case after the works were completed. In June 2022 then Premier Daniel Andrews said of the government's multimillion-dollar investment that 'community sport is the big winner'. On 19 March this year South Yarra Football Netball Club informed me that their bid to lease the grounds and facilities had been rejected. I understand that the club was well off the mark, being around \$80,000 behind the successful party. As I am advised, the school's decision was based on commercial grounds that I can certainly understand but which raise broader questions about the capacity of community and volunteer-based organisations to compete with independent schools and associations that also need facilities for sporting and recreational purposes. Given such – *(Time expired)*

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:57): (1089) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport and is regarding train services on the Ballarat line. How is the Allan Labor government increasing the frequency of train services to Ballarat? Access to frequent and affordable train services to and from Ballarat is so important to my community. I know firsthand that more people from across the Wendouree electorate are choosing to take public transport than ever before thanks to

our cheaper fares policy – my teenagers caught the train on the weekend. The introduction of fair regional fares for V/Line has delivered huge savings and cost relief for commuters, students, daytrippers and families. Almost 40 million train and coach trips have been taken on the V/Line network and more than \$120 million has been saved by passengers since the fare cap was introduced in March 2023. I look forward to hearing from the minister and sharing the response with my community in Wendouree.

The SPEAKER: The time for constituency questions has ended. I just wanted to refer to a point of order. Near the end of the sitting night of 20 March the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party raised a point of order about the conduct of the member for Tarneit earlier in the debate. I took the point of order on notice as I was not in the chair for the situation the deputy leader referred to, but I have discussed it with the Deputy Speaker, who was. In my view the Deputy Speaker dealt with the situation appropriately by directing the member for Tarneit to apologise and suspending him for 90 minutes. Accordingly, there is no point of order. However, this gives me an opportunity to remind all members that they must not refer to or engage with the public gallery at any time for any reason.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, I have some unanswered questions to raise if I may. They are question on notice 1977, constituency question 986 and questions on notice 2025, 2024 and 2027. If you could please ask the ministers –

The SPEAKER: Please hand your list to the Clerk.

Bills

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.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (15:01): I know that today has been a fairly intense day in the chamber, through a number of debates, but I guess the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025 will probably ease the tone of the afternoon and allow members – some opposite maybe – to sink back. Like the member for Narre Warren North – you can maybe just sink back into your phone and not have to yell, because I suspect having half an hour of me talking about e-scooters, e-bikes and pushbikes you may not find to be the most combative. However, I will do my best just for you.

This is a bill that the coalition will not be opposing and I do understand why the government, while I know they have been preparing this now for some months, are getting around to putting it in place, because clearly with the rise of e-scooters, e-bikes and all these kinds of active rideshare mechanisms coming into place there does need to be a level of safety, probity and governance attached to those who will seek to be operators in this field. I think that is a wise thing to do because we have to ensure that when councils across Victoria – and I would argue, if we could, we should synchronise this across Australia – see operators come, particularly overseas operators, and I will come to that, who are seeking to put in place these kinds of active transport mechanisms, then we need to make sure that there are levels of safety that they are adhering to and that for councils when they go to approach these organisations, or vice versa, there is a level of understanding that they are professional and that they will be able to produce an outcome that does not end up like what we have seen in the past, which is bikes thrown into the Yarra, but actually becomes a value-add to our cities.

I will be frank from the outset: I am a big fan of e-scooters. I own one. I used to ride one around my electorate, which I am sure was a little bit fascinating to many people.

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Matthew GUY: I did. I used to use it to go the hardware store, to my electorate office and to the shops, and then I realised it was replacing my actual ability to go and get steps in and be a little active myself, so I ceased using it for those purposes. But I am a big fan of using e-scooters for the simple reason that they are convenient. They are a very easy way to get around, particularly if you live within a, let us say, 5- or 10-k radius of the CBD of Melbourne. Melbourne is fairly topographically flat, so these kinds of e-scooters as a mechanism to get around – and throw in on top of that e-bikes and throw on top of that pushbikes, which I will come to in a minute – are a great means of transport. I have been a keen bike rider for many, many years. When I was in my teens, I used to ride from Montmorency to Whittlesea and Montmorency to Donnybrook before they were suburbs. It was fascinating to be able to ride into the country back in those days with mates. I am one of the few MPs I think who – maybe not so much recently – actually has ridden into Parliament as a means of getting into Parliament, till I had an argument with some maps in relation to getting around Yarra Bend, but that is another point. It left me late for a party room meeting.

But that aside, it is important that we provide mechanisms for not just regular people who live in a city who want to use a pushbike – or increasingly e-bikes, which are just as convenient and, particularly in hillier topographical locations, just as useful, and e-scooters – but also visitors to these cities, particularly if you go out further, Acting Speaker O’Keeffe, to your electorate of Shepparton, to regional Victoria. They are a fabulous way of getting around and they can bring a location into a tourist’s realm of approachability; they can make a location much easier to get around than if they had to rely on an Uber, a taxi, walking or public transport in itself, such as a bus – or maybe even a train or a tram if it was in a Melbourne case. I am very much a fan of e-scooters, e-bikes and cycle transport, but in the bill’s case around e-scooters and e-bikes, because I think that they need to be embraced as part of our active transport regime.

I know the government is seeking to then say ‘All right, well, if this is the case, then there are certain operators who are coming all around certain local government areas. We want to make sure that those who are seeking to be operators in this space are credible and most importantly are going to adhere to the safety requirements that we put in place many years ago’ – such things as compulsory wearing of helmets and how they attach and being able to make sure that the bikes are fully charged, that they are of reasonable quality and that they will not cause any odd slight accidents that leave people injured in any way. They need to have that level of accountability, hence the bill. I understand why the government wants to say – although it has been some time, over a year, I understand – ‘Well, we want to make sure that these operators will then register or go through the Department of Transport’, where the secretary of the department will then provide an assurance or put these providers as accredited, if you like, and then these operators will be able to be accessed by or approach councils around the state to operate in their municipality.

That is straightforward and I understand it, particularly in relation to safety, infrastructure and integrity of the e-scooters and the e-bikes; convenience, such as the display on the scooters, particularly in relation to battery but also speed – and I will come to speed because there are a number of cities which do speed limit; indeed the GPS on the systems will speed limit as you approach certain zones, which I have encountered in Darwin, in Adelaide and in Buenos Aires; and of course the technology. You might have older technology on some bikes that do not register the GPS, for instance, if they have got an overseas operator that might be trying to throw a cheaper material into Melbourne. We want to make sure that is avoided, and that is what the registration system would, I believe, do. I think that is quite a worthwhile point in doing so. There are obviously two sections of the bill in relation to those who will be registered afterwards should this bill pass. It looks to me like it will certainly go through the lower house. Then those who are operating at the moment would have to then retrofit themselves to sections of that regime, which again, I totally understand.

There is a section in the bill in relation to PSOs and a widening of the PSOs’ power. PSOs are a great initiative. I think we all must remind ourselves that the expansion of PSOs, a Baillieu government initiative, was a very good initiative. It was a very wise initiative to have protective services officers

do more than limit themselves to a number of buildings around the city, to expand them out to broader use. Under this bill they might be able to issue fines, for instance, to those who might be breaking the law, such as someone who is riding on a footpath where it clearly says no scooters are allowed; where there are multiple people on an e-scooter, which clearly, as you take the e-scooter on, it says you cannot do, so they are breaking the law; or someone is riding without a helmet, which has been an offence in Victoria, from memory, since the Kirner government days. I remember riding to and from school and having to put a helmet on, thinking ‘This is now the law’, and it was the law. It became law I think, from memory, in around 1990–1991 for all bike riders. These are basic laws that now need to be upheld for those using these scooters, and giving the PSOs the ability to issue a fine to those not adhering to those laws is understandable. It is certainly something that does need to be factored in in terms of the growth of e-scooters and e-bikes into the future. E-bikes in Melbourne have probably been around less so – they have been more for private use – as opposed to the e-scooter, but in the future I imagine you will see both of those.

As I said, I am a keen supporter and user of e-scooters. Not so much e-bikes; I do not own one, and I have used one only very briefly. I will talk about e-scooters, because I have used them in many cities, apart from my own electric scooter, and I think they are a fabulous way of being able to first of all get around traffic and second to get to meetings in reasonable locations. I have gone on them quite a distance, I might add, in a very convenient manner. Particularly in a warmer climate where it is not raining you can move fairly freely and fairly easy.

In a place like central Melbourne I think e-scooters would absolutely enhance the city. I am going to give some examples as to how they can. I am very disappointed in the City of Melbourne for removing them and cursing them and claiming that they have been a scourge et cetera. If there is a proper regime in place, they should not be. In fact I think the concept of riding an e-scooter from the top end of town, if you are a tourist, down to the Docklands or down to look at the MCG – Melbourne has enough paths on which they can be used safely. Melbourne has plenty of paths along the Yarra on which they can be easily speed limited on a GPS system.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Matthew GUY: Well, you know, that is probably the friendliest thing you have said all week, so I will not bite. But I say to the member for Point Cook it is something that I am very passionate about. I also remind him I need to fill another 19 minutes.

I am passionate about them because I think they are a worthwhile form of active transport, and I really do not understand why Melbourne – it is not a state government issue; Liberal, Labor, whatever – as a local government area is not embracing them more given other cities do. I understand why Sydney has issues, because topographically Sydney is pretty difficult to get around outside the CBD, and the streets are narrow. Although Brisbane has them the top end of the Brisbane CBD towards Roma Street and up to Spring Hill really is quite hilly, and it would be very difficult for them to operate. But in Melbourne through our CBD area, particularly along the Yarra and Southbank, e-scooters are a fabulous opportunity.

I have used e-scooters in a number of cities, and I want to talk about some of those experiences. Recently when I was in Darwin – hot and steamy, as it is, Darwin – I had to get around from where I was on the Esplanade. I had a couple of meetings up at the parliament, at the Legislative Assembly. I wandered down and, like with everything you do in Darwin, you think it is fine as a southerner and then you realise you need to change your shirt because you have been walking outside and the 9000 per cent humidity has not been friendly to your Victorian view of weather. You have turned up thinking, ‘Oh, I don’t need a jacket, but I’ve got a long-sleeved shirt,’ to which most Territorians, quizzically looking at you and laughing, say you must be from the south. That is correct. Then on the way back I got an e-scooter, and the e-scooter was fabulous because of course you do not have to put up with the obvious, which is exerting yourself in that kind of weather.

That aside, the Darwin e-scooters are actually a very good system. They are Beam scooters. They are speed limited to 15 kilometres an hour. I rode them from midway up the Esplanade down to the Legislative Assembly across the road. I walked and then grabbed another e-scooter to a meeting I had all the way out in Cullen Bay, which is about 3 kilometres away, which is a lot for Darwin. They are very, very easy to get around on. They are speed limited to 10 kilometres an hour in certain areas through Cullen Bay. Then, getting back on the e-scooter, I probably looked a little strange to most of the passers-by, going north past Mindil Beach as I was going up to Fannie Bay to another meeting, 5 or 6 k's out of town. I am pointing out here the convenience around a central business area. Darwin is fairly flat topographically – not entirely – and they can be used fairly well. So I was quite pleased to use e-scooters around Darwin.

With my son on a private holiday I have used them on the Gold Coast. Everyone likes going to the Gold Coast. It is a great place to get away. The e-scooters make it much easier to say, 'Do you want to grab a bite to eat?' – if you are staying in Surfers – and head down to Broadbeach. Rather than walking it – my son is a teenager, and he looks at you with great disdain if you offer the concept of walking more than 500 metres – you can grab the e-scooters.

Again I point out for the house's benefit the use in tourism. Their use not in a business context but in a tourist context means we have other options available. Melbourne could be exactly the same, with the potential of taking an e-scooter down to St Kilda or down to Docklands if you are staying in town or up to the northern suburbs. Particularly now that we have these bike lanes – and I know some people love to hate them and some people love to love them – there is another possibility. If they can be used and can be used properly, then use them.

I was in bike lanes all the way to Fannie Bay in Darwin. I was in bike lanes through certain parts of the Gold Coast. They were very helpful and provided a level of security to those people like me seeking to ride in them. Recently I was in Adelaide, which has a wonderful CBD similar to Melbourne's – obviously the light grid makes Adelaide very easy to navigate – and I used scooters around Adelaide. They were Beam scooters again, the same company as in Darwin and similar to what could be the case in Melbourne. They are also speed limited through the CBD area to around 15 kilometres an hour, which is what you would call a light jog in terms of pace for someone like me if I am not thinking otherwise, so the scooters are quite safe and easily operated.

The difference between Adelaide, Darwin and the Gold Coast and other examples which I will mention is that those scooters can be left anywhere. There is an app which you download on your phone and link your credit card to. Those scooters can be left, for instance, out the front of an apartment block. You simply take a photo and it clicks back and gives you an approval as to whether that is an appropriate place to leave it. This causes much consternation in Melbourne. I understand this. People say if they do not have docking ports, then people will leave them everywhere. I do not always think that is the case. In some cities they have teams from these companies who go around, find the scooters, attach them to the back of a trailer and then take them to a central point to be recharged and put back in certain locations.

But there are other ways, and I want to talk for a little bit if I can about e-scooters, e-bikes and pushbikes which are hired at docking points and returned only to docking points in Buenos Aires in Argentina, which I think is a huge opportunity in markets for Australia and particularly for Victoria. I say at many opportunities that I think the South American market is hugely untapped for our state, and there is huge advantage in farming, education and commerce. There are huge opportunities for us which we as a country do not focus on but should. I note people are starting to look at Brazil, and maybe Chile because of APEC, but we should be doing the same with Argentina, whose economy is starting to rebound.

What they have in Buenos Aires gets around the issue of people just leaving bikes anywhere. I would urge the government to consider it, although I do not think it is crucial to any part of this bill. The method in Buenos Aires is there are large ports for the company, Ecobici. You literally walk down,

download the app – there is an English translation for it – and have the option. It will be a third, a third, a third of e-bikes, pushbikes and e-scooters, and you can take your pick. The member for Narracan and I – we were in Argentina going from one meeting to the next – had a long walk up to Palermo towards the Australian embassy and lo and behold came across these bikes in their ports. I had used them before but never like this. They had been cleaned up and put into the docking stations, and a very polite local explained to us not only the app and how to use it but importantly that you have to return them to the docking stations. You can go in effect from station to station, and there are lots of stations, so it is not as if there are a few. There were many around. If you do not return them to a station, you incur a fine after I think about 48 hours. It is a very good system. It was funny turning up to the Australian embassy on an e-bike or e-scooter, but you do.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Matthew GUY: He and I, the member for Point Cook should be informed, both used e-scooters and both used them quite comfortably. At one other stage when there were none left we used pushbikes. The point is we had other options: taxis, Uber or the subway – the subway was harder to get – but we chose these as a method to go from meeting to meeting. It seems a bit lighthearted, but it becomes a method of active transport. This is why I say this is a method that must be considered. Here we are as a perfect example: well dressed and going from meeting to meeting.

Members interjecting.

Matthew GUY: Well, it was.

But I do say this: we were not alone. There were many people doing this, and they were not just locals. People would get these bikes and go from Puerto Madero, which is the port area, up to places where we were going. Another meeting was over towards the national congress, which was a little more difficult through some of the busy streets, but people get used to them. What it tells you is that in these cities – and these are a little faster, at about 25 k's an hour – there are docking ports, and I think this is the key to what we should do in Victoria.

E-bikes, e-scooters and pushbikes being available for hire through, for example, the Ecobici app is a fabulous idea, but the most important thing is to have people's mindsets of, 'Oh, they're just going to be thrown in the Yarra,' put at ease. I do not want that either, and it is unsightly for the city. Having locations where you can dock, which you can clearly see on your phone on the app – and the legislation the government has put forward is asking for people to be able to be provided with that information, because it talks about technology that must be provided – I think can solve those problems. I think for Melbourne it could be a fabulous idea. You could go up to a port, which might be, for instance, in the gardens next to Parliament. You might hire five of these as a group, do your run around Melbourne on the scooters and at the end of the day return them to where you are staying, which might be in Docklands, or come back to Melbourne. You can also reserve them, importantly. You can click on 'reserve' on the e-scooter and come back in an hour, if you are at a meeting. You get a nominal charge, but it reserves it.

That to me is a fabulous way of using e-scooters for tourist potential or visiting professionals potential throughout the central business district or downtown, inner-city areas of Melbourne but further out towards places like Footscray that are not that far out. When the works are all concluded, you will be able to move out there fairly easily on these paths and to the inner north and to the inner south, which I know are well blessed with bike paths not just along the bay but also along some of the major roads. There is so much potential, and that is why I am very positive about this as an idea. We have to look at options, we have to look at opportunities outside of just what is conventional transport.

I took e-scooters when I was in Santiago in Chile recently, on the way through to Buenos Aires. The reason I want to mention this is because in the downtown area of Santiago the Chilean government has noted – and I have got to get the figure right, because I was stunned – a 30 per cent reduction over certain periods in certain areas of car use. What they are getting are huge numbers, for instance, of

students. I understand the impression of Santiago is always that it would be hilly as it is in the Andes, but it is in a bowl, so most of the city is fairly flat. When you get out of it, it starts to get hilly, but if you are in the downtown area you can move around very easily, and there are waves of scooters.

I am talking about an evidence-based approach from a reasonably sensible and modern government who are saying these e-scooters and their use have had a dramatic impact, particularly through the area of Providencia. They have had a major impact upon car usage. I think this is a tremendous example. I was jet-lagged and wanted to see a certain fascinating building. I got up at 4:15 in the morning and thought, ‘Well, it’s 4.15, but I’m on Melbourne time. It’s 6 at night,’ or whatever it was, so I went downstairs and got myself an e-scooter. I rode, I think it was, about 8 or 9 kilometres to Vitacura on the foothills of the Andes, which must have really freaked out some of the car drivers. I went around roundabouts at 25 k’s an hour on an e-scooter in 3 degrees, and my hands were certainly aware of it by the end of that trip. But using them is a way of getting around without taking a taxi or taking public transport if they are not available at that time. That is another option I would put forward. They did not have docking points like Buenos Aires, but they did have the scooters. The Lime app, which is in Santiago, is exceptionally good and very easy to use. I would use them again. I think I used them a couple of times in Santiago as a result.

I say it again for the purpose of discussion on this bill and from an evidence-based approach: they were an exceptionally good way of getting through and getting around. It was a foreign city to me, but I had my phone sitting on the portal, which was in front of me in a little holder. There you can put on your Google Maps and it tells you exactly where you are going. So I had my Google Maps, knowing exactly how to get from Providencia to Vitacura in front of me. It might have been late, but I had the speedo and the battery desired in front of me and I was running on a bike lane. It made it exceptionally easy. Melbourne should have the same.

Geelong is hillier topographically, but it would be worthwhile in some of our major regional centres like Ballarat and Bendigo, particularly Bendigo.

Juliana Addison: We’ve got some.

Matthew GUY: You have got some – you do have to them in Ballarat? I am sorry, I have not used them in Ballarat. The member for Wendouree will correct me, I am sure. But the point is we have the opportunities to use them, and I would encourage councils to keep doing so.

I would also in my last few minutes encourage the government to look at furthering some of the discussions around how we can encourage councils throughout Melbourne to work together on the use of these scooters. In Buenos Aires they have the same issue we have in Melbourne. They have one area, the central government area of the city, which is like Brisbane City Council – it is fairly large – but you cannot take the scooters beyond the boundary, because they would enter another province. Most of the urban area, metropolitan area is outside of the city limit and the contract for Ecobici is only within the city of Buenos Aires as opposed to the metropolitan area, even though it is a flat city and you can run up the Rio de la Plata fairly easily from meeting to meeting, when going out at night or whatever you want to do.

In Melbourne I would encourage the government to get local government operators to work together. For instance, I might be able to use a scooter that goes into the City of Yarra, into Hobsons Bay or into Bayside et cetera, but then there are docking ports so the scooters are not littered across locations, do not become unsightly and do not become a focus of disdain for what should be an exceptionally good method of getting around a city – particularly like Melbourne, which is large geographically, very large nowadays, but whose central city area is obviously congested. Nothing is going to solve that overnight, we know. But I urge having a look at the model of Santiago, which really is quite stunning for traffic levels through the downtown area, through Centro and Providencia, where traffic, particularly around the student areas and student zones, has massively reduced. That would only be a

great positive for us if we are looking at emissions reductions and ways to have an integrated public transport system.

I just want to conclude with some remarks around public transport. We have bike storage, and bike storage is great at Bulleen park-and-ride, at most railway stations and at regional stations. It has been that way for many, many years in Victoria. Having docking ports or charging stations for e-scooters, particularly private scooters as well, would be just as helpful. What it would mean is that people would not say, 'Well, if I rode my e-scooter to Bulleen park-and-ride' – if you were in the City of Manningham – 'it's going to run out of battery by the time I get there and I'm going to be pushing it home or ringing a spouse, parents or whoever to come and get me because it's run out.' Most of them have a fairly universal charger – most, not all – but there could be a number of key charging ports where you can go and put your e-bike or e-scooter in a locker, put it on the charge, swipe your card or tap or whatever might be easiest way to pay for the cost of the charge – it might be a few dollars – and then be able to charge your e-scooter or e-bike at the location, at a park-and-ride or at a railway station, for instance, whether it be Ballarat, as the member for Wendouree said before, or somewhere else, and ride home knowing you have got a full charge.

My wife and I have got an electric car. One of the advantages of an electric car is that you come down every morning – it has been on off-peak charge – and it has a full tank of charge. It is a full charge by the morning. You can go anywhere with a full charge, and so I think it is incredibly convenient. Having the same option for an e-scooter or an e-bike would be fantastic because you would be able to take it that extra distance. In my area – the City of Manningham – it is pretty hilly, and that takes a lot of the juice out of the battery. I used to have to take my battery pack to my electorate office when it was in Bulleen. If I was riding my scooter from where I live 5 kilometres to my electorate office up and down hills, I would have to charge it at the electorate office. Assuming someone does not have the ability to do that when they are going to a park-and-ride, if there were universal charging points at the park-and-ride, then they would be able to take their e-scooter or e-bike, do the charge for the day and tap on for a charge at the facility. You might see it on an app – it might be a Lion app, an Ecobici app or a Beam app – that tells you it is fully charged when you come back to pick up your e-bike at the end of the day or whenever it might be. My point is that there are so many other options we should be going further with. It is a good start and a reasonable start to say we need to have a level of regulation around this – I totally understand, and we do not oppose it on this side of the house.

But what I do say is please take on some ideas for the future, for the department to go back and look at, on ways in which we can push the delivery of some of these e-scooters, e-bikes and bikes, because they are great ideas. In my view they are a really good method for transport and public transport, and they should be considered as such. I say it again: I understand why the government needs to put in place mechanisms for PSOs to make sure that people when they use them obey the law, because that is important, particularly for safety. But let us see if we can make some great strides forward as a Parliament to get e-scooters and e-bikes in particular as part of our broader active transport and public transport means into the future.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:30): I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to follow on from the member for Bulleen on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. In my time in this place I have heard numerous half-hour contributions from the member for Bulleen, and that half hour actually went quite quickly. The member for Bulleen promised to take the tone down on this debate and he delivered on that. I thought it was a measured and quite respectful contribution to what is a change for our city and our state and what will be the continued rollout of e-scooters, e-bikes and the like.

Just as the previous member spoke about, I am personally a big fan of e-scooters and e-bikes. The opportunity to move around our cities, regional towns and local communities in a way that provides for greater accessibility, much easier access and in many respects the ability to move short distances and take those short journeys in a short space of time is something that I know is quite warmly welcomed across many communities. What is important, and the reason that we are bringing this

legislation before the house this afternoon, goes to the regulation and safety standards and providing some certainty right across the board for councils, departments, local communities and, most importantly, those that use these devices. But certainly from my perspective the opportunity to link into existing modes of transport, to be able to use them at the end of a journey and the start of a journey and to, as I said earlier, move a short distance is indeed very important.

There are certainly a number of cities, towns and regions across the world that have embraced in many ways the use of e-scooters and e-bikes. When doing some research this morning I found they are used in 130-plus cities in the US, and they are used widely throughout Europe and indeed many other places right across the world. Working with private providers – and for personal use, if you have a scooter yourself – to make sure, as has been mentioned already, that education, awareness, safety and training are part of the mix is, we know and understand, most important. Ensuring that those things are considered – that is the importance of the legislation that is before the house this afternoon.

The sustainability, the convenience, the accessibility, the affordability and of course the measures around safety and regulation go to what has been a journey, certainly through the late 1990s and into the early 2000s as battery technology has improved, as the use of e-scooters and e-bikes has evolved. We have seen this roll out across communities as individuals wanting to take them up has resulted in increased use.

This bill before the house goes to some of the regulations and safety standards, making sure that we are implementing a comprehensive and robust set of rules to regulate the use of e-scooters, rules that are aimed at protecting both riders and the public.

What we know is the current regulatory framework for e-scooter riding in Victoria is the strongest compared to other jurisdictions, promoting responsible use of e-scooters across the network. These rules are practical, safety focused and aligned with best international practice. Whilst many e-scooters are privately owned, a common way of using them, and the previous member spoke about this extensively, is through app-based sharing schemes. Under these schemes devices are available for hire in public places, and operators of such schemes have a role to play in ensuring that road rules are followed and that they do not adversely impact the amenity of local areas that their devices are available in. The bill delivers on our commitment to improve e-scooter safety and compliance through amendments to the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 by setting up a pre-qualification regulatory framework for prospective share scheme operators. Under the framework operators of e-scooter sharing schemes will be required to comply with the safety standards, as I mentioned earlier, and obtain approval from the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning in addition to the existing requirement of having an agreement with the local council.

That takes us to the municipal arrangements around the use of e-scooters and making sure that councils are supported but also support the use and the rollout, providing local residents with that certainty and surety. And it is a shared agreement, so ensuring that those that provide the vehicles are making sure that they are fit for purpose, that they are safe and that they are serviced but also making sure that there is some compliance around the way that we do that is very important.

Within the legislation there is also, as was mentioned earlier, powers for protective services officers to enforce e-scooter rules, and this recognises the need for improved compliance with the road rules. The government has committed to strengthening enforcement capability. This is achieved by the bill amending the Road Safety Act 1986 to provide protective services officers with the power to serve infringement notices for road safety offences that involve e-scooters. That goes to matters such as wearing a helmet.

Just moving around this city and other cities across this country, and the previous member also spoke about travel in other cities across the globe, what is clear is that the use of e-scooters is here to stay. With the significant and large-scale investments that this government is making in transport right across the state, making sure as we have got a growing population we are connecting local

communities through road and rail, ensuring that shorter travel – that goes to the use of e-scooters and e-bikes and the like – is safe and is well regulated is something that I believe is warmly welcomed across the community. All of those matters go to the provision for certainty and for making sure that those arrangements are in place and give legal certainty to private providers but also to those that have the devices themselves. Making sure that that is something that is done within our state is a very important matter. For those reasons, and many others, I am supporting this bill.

In the time that I have got remaining I am going to what I think is a practical view of these matters, and certainly we have seen examples where things do go wrong and we know that on all matters when it comes to transport accidents do happen.

Ensuring that those safety provisions are in place, provisions around the management of PSOs and the enforcement and additional powers and making sure that education and driver education are there as well is incredibly important. We have got an opportunity through this legislation to enable people to move around local communities, cities and our state safer and better, and for those reasons we know that the changes that are contained in this bill will go to providing what I believe will be an effective and safe method for people to move around.

It was not quite the half an hour that the member for Bulleen delivered – I only had 10 minutes – but with those comments I commend the bill to the house, thank everybody for their work and wish it a safe passage.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:40): I rise today to speak on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. Given everybody seems to be telling their e-scooter stories, about how they are used in various cities around the world and in Australia, I think that I really should make a point in this debate to actually announce that I am an early adopter of scooters. Before there were e-scooters, there were scooters, and back when I lived in Alice Springs, my dear darling father managed to pull out a small petrol one – it was actually on a little lawnmower engine. It was over 20 years ago now. I was scooting around the streets of Alice Springs between my house and the hospital where I worked in pathology, and it was a lot of fun. It was potentially quite dangerous at the time. There were certainly no rules around how scooters were used at that point in time. The biggest questions were if it was too great of an engine size to be ridden on the footpath or had to be ridden on the road, and did you need a licence to be able to ride it? Fortunately I had a licence, so that was not the reason –

Wayne Farnham: Did you take it to the pub?

Emma KEALY: No. I take up the interjection, which I know is unparliamentary of me, but the member for Narracan has asked: did I take the scooter to the pub? No, I did not. But I did use it, and it was incredibly useful. It was a great form of transport, and that is a reason that we have now seen batteries developed over that time and we now have the evolution of e-scooters. They are a fabulous way to get around. They are an enormous amount of fun. I think that Brisbane does it best. I like the way that they manage the e-scooters, in that they are always visible in the streets and around the parklands and along the promenade there. The e-scooter companies have an obligation to keep the scooters neat and tidy on the side. They are always lined up very beautifully. They are not in the road at all, and they are not lying down on their side. They are managed very, very well and they always have a full charge when you are looking to take one or to hire one. I think that there is possibly an opportunity here for Victoria to take a leaf out of Brisbane and Queensland's book when it comes to the management of scooters in particular.

There are some elements that I would like to build upon around the theme that I think that this is a good piece of legislation. I think that e-scooters are a great form of transportation for many, many reasons, as was well covered off by the member for Bulleen, but I think there are some concerns that need to come through as well. We still have some safety concerns around risks for e-scooter riders and for the broader community, whether they are pedestrians or whether they are fellow road users, not

just in Melbourne but around the state, and there might be some missed opportunities in terms of the scope of this legislation where the government could have gone further, and also around structurally how we make sure that our roads are safe and fit for purpose for scooter riders.

I would first like to touch on that exact point, which is around road safety. There are a number of amendments within this legislation which go back to the road rules and also the relevant Road Safety Act 1986. For our cars, we know that they need to have a roadworthy certificate. Our cars must be roadworthy to go on the roads. However, our roads do not need to be car worthy. Unfortunately, across vast areas of this state, in all corners of the state, our roads simply are not up to scratch. We see more and more potholes, we see crumbling edges and we see rutting of roads, which is where the tyre marks carve out a section of the highway in particular. If you want an example of that, travel to Horsham, my hometown, where I live, the largest community in my electorate of Lowan, and have a look at the intersection of Baillie Street and McPherson Street.

This has got an area which is terribly rutted. It is on the Western Highway, which is the main highway between Adelaide and Melbourne. It is in fact the second busiest highway in Australia. There were some works undertaken a matter of weeks ago in relation to removing some of the dangerous rutting at the traffic light at the intersection of Baillie Street and McPherson Street. And you would not believe it – only a couple of weeks later we are seeing those ruts come back into play. This is something that is not a surprise for the contractors that we used. In fact they were speaking to local businesspeople. They actually took the labelling off their vehicles when they were fixing that road. They knew that the road was going to fall apart because they had not been given enough money from the Allan Labor government to fix that intersection properly and make that road safe. The scope of works that was issued to them, they knew, was not up to the standard that would be able to handle the heavy vehicle traffic that turns at that corner.

This is a concern, and it is something that we hear time and time again. We are simply seeing perpetual cuts to the road asset management budget. We are heading up to another budget this year, and it does greatly concern me that we will see yet another round of funding cuts for road asset management. VicRoads do the best that they can with the money that they have got. They simply cannot make money out of thin air. They can only do the roads and fix the potholes and fix the crumbling edges with the budget they are given. Labor perpetually takes money out of the country Victorian areas, out of some of those regional road areas, and puts it into that great, big burrow, that great big hole in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. We do not get it out in the country. In fact most of Melbourne does not see much of that money. It is essential that we make sure that we have safe roads, because we know that safer country roads will save country lives.

Speaking of the roads budget, the road resurfacing spend is down 82 per cent in Victoria. Ninety-one per cent of roads are in poor or very poor condition; this is according to the government's own survey. We hear in our offices so many times from people who have got either flat tyres or, getting even further, rims cracked or smashed altogether, and we hear of terrible accidents that can be directly attributed to the condition of the roads. In fact recently I heard of a situation where there was an incident – a truck crash on the Western Highway. Officially it is set down as a medical incident on the part of the driver, but that medical incident was that he drove through a pothole that was so significant that he hit his head on the steering wheel, and it rendered him unconscious. That is what the real cause of the accident was. It was the poor condition of the road.

The Western Highway continues to miss out on funding. We were supposed to see that road duplicated in full down to at least Stawell back in 2016. We still have not seen the appropriate level of funding from the Allan Labor government in Victoria delivered to that project. The sad consequence of that is that we see so many accidents, and there was yet another fatality only a couple of weeks ago. This road must be fixed. There are too many lives being lost. It is a matter of priority for any government, state or federal. No matter what colour you are, just fix that road. It is just too dangerous, and I have seen too many people involved in accidents along that section.

As I mentioned earlier, I feel that there is a missed opportunity in relation to the management of e-scooters. The member for Bulleen spoke about docking stations, which would be very useful because you could charge the scooters at the same time. We do need to look at the enhanced management of scooters. Whether it is e-bikes or e-scooters, I see too many of them in the streets of Melbourne that are on footpaths and even on roads or lying out in our beautiful parklands. We need to put a greater onus on the operators of these e-scooter and e-bike businesses so that they take responsibility for keeping their assets in good order, so they are not thrown in the Yarra, not lying around our beautiful parks, not on footpaths and not on roadways. They need to make sure that they are in places which are convenient to pedestrians or potential e-scooter or e-bike users but are also nice and neat and do not pose a risk to the community, to other pedestrians, to other e-scooter and e-bike users and to people who are in vehicles.

My third point is around how this is more cost shifting to local government. One of the greatest cost-shifting issues that our local governments have got at the moment is that they do not know how on earth they are going to be able to manage this new great big volunteers tax that the government is busy putting on farmers across our state. It is up to local government to work out how this money will be managed. It is an enormous amount of money that will be coming in.

In fact it is over \$100 million each and every year that will be taken from country Victoria and plugged into Melbourne core government services. Councils in my region have flagged that they are very, very concerned that they will be the ones who will be left to manage which volunteers' residences will then receive this potential for a section of their tax to be reduced or rebated. There is concern, and I received a message only earlier today from a volunteer saying they do not even think Labor will deliver on this promise that there will be any relief at all for volunteers around this tax, because we have seen time and time again that Labor cannot manage money, and it is consistently Victorians that have to pay the price. Whether it is through their pockets – paying more taxes – whether it is about driving on terrible roads or whether it is about substandard health services, Labor always makes Victorians pay the price.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (15:51): It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak to this bill today, the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. As the member for Lowan did just say, road safety is absolutely paramount to all of us. I do not think anyone in this place or the other would ever debate or question that.

The Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025 has two main focuses, one being on regulation of e-scooters, the sharing scheme, and also the enforcement of the e-scooter road safety rules. I have got to say I know that in my electorate of Kororoit we have got e-scooters out there. We have got them in many of the surrounding councils and local government areas as well as here in Melbourne, which is great. It really is a form of transport that allows people – young and old – to get around. I was speaking to some of my staff about this bill, and one of the young women in my office mentioned that she often uses e-scooters at night because it is a lot easier to get around the city. Sometimes if the trams are packed or the train is packed, she finds it quite simple to go from point A to B. That seems to be the flavour of many, many people that I have spoken to. I know my young one absolutely loves scooters, and my husband actually used an e-scooter during the election to help me pamphlet, so there are many modes by which you can use them, but they are definitely a good mode of transport.

This legislation is not merely an administrative update. It is also a crucial step forward in ensuring the safety, efficiency and sustainability of our transport network. As our cities grow and evolve, so must our laws. The expansion of vehicle sharing schemes has presented incredible opportunities but also significant challenges – challenges that this bill aims to address with comprehensive and well-reasoned reforms. We must take decisive action to ensure that innovation in transport aligns with the principles of safety, accessibility and of course sustainability.

I am sure that we all know that e-scooters have become increasingly popular as a convenient mode of transport, and Victoria's e-scooter sharing schemes have been among the most successful in the world.

There is no doubt that these vehicle sharing schemes have transformed urban mobility, providing affordable and flexible transportation options to reduce congestion and of course improve the environment. The benefits of these schemes extend beyond convenience. They contribute to reducing our reliance on private car ownership, which in turn obviously alleviates traffic and reduces emissions.

However, the rapid growth of these schemes has outpaced existing regulatory frameworks, leading to safety risks, inconsistent service standards and gaps in accountability. Without robust regulation we risk allowing unsafe vehicles on our roads, jeopardising the safety of passengers and pedestrians alike. Unregulated expansion can result in an increase in poorly maintained vehicles, improper parking and reckless riding behaviour. As those who have spoken prior to me have said, too often we see e-scooters around the streets, and that is something that nobody likes. I remember reading a big article a few years back about so many e-scooters being in the river just up near Southbank – something that we cannot have.

Victoria currently has the strongest regulatory framework for e-scooter riding compared to other jurisdictions, promoting responsible usage within our transport network, but these rules are practical. They are safety focused and aligned with international best practices. They ensure that operators uphold the highest safety standards while enabling individuals to enjoy the convenience and affordability of vehicle sharing services. This bill delivers on the Allan Labor government's commitment to improving e-scooter safety and compliance and will strengthen the regulatory environment for vehicle sharing schemes. One of the most critical provisions of this bill is the introduction of stricter safety requirements for shared vehicles.

Operators will now be required to conduct regular inspections and ensure that vehicles meet higher maintenance standards. Existing and new operators will need to apply to the secretary of the department and provide evidence that they can comply with safety standards and that they are deemed a fit and proper entity. The preapproval process will support local councils in selecting share scheme operators to operate in their municipalities by providing assurances that the operators have and implement the required safety measures and technologies. This change addresses growing concerns about poorly maintained vehicles posing risks to users and of course other road users. Numerous reports have documented incidents where mechanical failures have led to accidents, and this bill will help mitigate such risks. By ensuring that shared vehicles meet stringent safety criteria we protect not only those who use these services but also everyone who is sharing the road with them.

Recognising the need for improved compliance with road rules, the Allan Labor government has committed to strengthening enforcement capability. The bill will also amend the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 to enable the prescribing of scheme standards, which are the minimum safety standards, technologies and requirements for vehicle sharing scheme operators. There continue to be issues with hired e-scooters being ridden on footpaths, being parked in a way that blocks access, introducing tripping hazards or otherwise impacting the amenity of public spaces. The sharing scheme standards will address these issues by requiring operators to implement systems, technologies and other safety measures, and these standards will be mandatory. These standards will cover requirements for vehicles and devices available under a sharing scheme, standards and requirements for footpath detection, proper parking of devices, helmet use, use of vehicles outside a permitted area and detection and prevention of intoxicated riders. These measures are designed to ensure that public spaces remain accessible and safe for all members of our community. Ensuring that shared vehicles are used responsibly is not just a matter of convenience. It is a fundamental public safety concern.

In various cities worldwide unregulated vehicle sharing schemes have resulted in an influx of poorly maintained vehicles causing safety hazards and operational inefficiencies. Numerous cases have emerged where users have been unfairly charged for pre-existing damage or technical failures, highlighting the need for clearer consumer protections. This bill introduces clear guidelines regarding liability and consumer rights. Users must be informed of their rights and responsibilities, ensuring they are not unfairly penalised for issues beyond their control. Additionally, new provisions will ensure that

users have access to efficient and transparent dispute resolution mechanisms. Many users of vehicle sharing services have encountered difficulties in resolving disputes, particularly regarding unexpected charges and service malfunctions. This bill will provide a clearer legal framework to handle such concerns, ensuring fair treatment for consumers. Strengthening consumer protections will encourage more people to utilise these services, fostering greater adoption of sustainable transportation options.

A well-regulated vehicle sharing market builds consumer confidence, ensuring that the services remain an attractive alternative to private car ownership. By promoting vehicle sharing schemes as a viable alternative to private car ownership, this bill aligns with broader sustainability goals. Shared mobility reduces the number of vehicles on the road, leading to decreased traffic congestion and lower carbon emissions. The amendments also introduce incentives for operators who adopt electric or low-emission vehicles, ensuring that environmental benefits are maximised. Encouraging cleaner transportation options will contribute to our long-term environmental goals and improve air quality in urban areas. These measures underscore the Allan Labor government's commitment to enhancing safety. Strict enforcement coupled with effective education ensures that vehicle sharing schemes contribute positively to urban mobility without introducing unnecessary risks.

Given that e-scooters are often used as the first- and last-kilometre connection to other public transport services, providing protective services officers with additional powers will serve to improve enforcement capability with existing resources and in turn support improved compliance by e-scooter riders. We must ensure that all elements of our transport network work together seamlessly to provide an efficient, safe and integrated system. In addition to these comprehensive regulations, the government is committed to ongoing education and awareness campaigns. These initiatives aim to inform the public about the safe and responsible use of e-scooters, highlighting the importance of following the rules and understanding the potential risks. By raising awareness we can foster a culture of safety and responsibility among e-scooter users and the public at large. Community engagement is essential in shaping positive transport habits and ensuring that new mobility solutions are embraced safely. E-scooters, particularly those made available under vehicle sharing schemes, are an important part of the transport system.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Cost of living

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

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for allowing Victoria to spiral into a cost-of-living crisis as a result of:

- (1) failing to manage the economy and allowing net debt to reach \$155.2 billion by the end of the financial year;
- (2) imposing or increasing 60 new taxes, which are driving up the costs of renting, energy and grocery prices;
- (3) breaking its promise to build 80,000 new homes a year, causing housing prices to remain unaffordable for many young Victorians; and
- (4) failing to implement any meaningful measures to ease cost-of-living pressures for Victorians.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (16:01): The Allan Labor government has allowed Victoria to spiral into a cost-of-living crisis. There is a simple question that Victorians will be asking themselves now and in November 2026: am I any better off than I was back in November 2014 when this Labor government came to power? The answer is a resounding no. We only have to look at the Premier's spiralling decline in the polls, plummeting to the lowest ever in her time. On every metric Victorians are now worse off than they were when this tired Labor government was elected back in 2014, a decade ago. Everything is harder under Labor. But you do not need to take my word for it – the facts

speak for themselves. No matter how hard this Labor government tries to spin the facts, the truth will always shine through.

You do not have to look very far to see that Victorians are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis, as they are right now. The Allan Labor government's midyear budget update, their midyear financial report, released just last month, confirmed that Victoria's budget is spiralling further into crisis, with debt surging, interest repayments ballooning and reckless spending damaging the state, adding to inflation and adding to Victorians' cost-of-living pressures. The figures expose Labor's complete failure to manage Victoria's finances, proving that more taxes, more borrowing and more waste do not help your economy. This Labor government has only made it harder for Victorians, who are already struggling every day with cost-of-living pressure. Remarkably, the midyear budget update has shown that Labor has already blown through 66 per cent of its budgeted increase in net debt. If this trend continues, which it no doubt will, Victoria will record a blowout in net debt of over \$4 billion this financial year.

However, we know this government has pulled a swifty and is making Victorians pay their land tax bill twice in one financial year – dodgy accounting. It is a desperate bid by this tired Labor government to make their revenue stream look better than what it actually is. The Allan Labor government has taken Victoria from being a financial powerhouse in Australia to a state in serious decline. But do not take my word, as I said, look at what the credit rating agencies have to say. In 2014 Victoria had a AAA credit rating, which was the legacy of many reforms implemented by the former Kennett Liberal government. It was maintained by the Bracks and Brumby governments, who knew what it meant to be fiscally responsible, but this Allan Labor government decided to trash the legacy of their Labor predecessors and have run the economy so badly into the ground that Victoria was downgraded to a AA credit rating by Standard & Poor's.

This is the lowest credit rating of any of the Australian states. Even Tasmania enjoys a higher credit rating than Victoria. This demonstrates just how broken our economy has become. What is worse is that S&P has warned the government that unless they bring their reckless spending under control and stop the budget blowouts on the Big Build projects, they will face a further downgrade.

To demonstrate how broken the budget really is, in just the last six months Labor has borrowed another \$15.7 billion, pushing net debt to a staggering \$146.8 billion as at the midyear update, and it is projected to reach \$155.2 billion by the end of this financial year; however, dare I say that will be blown. In the 2019–20 budget Labor said it was committed to stabilising net debt at 12 per cent of gross state product. Today net debt as a percentage of GSP stands at an incredible 22.9 per cent, almost double what Labor committed to. That is an extraordinary figure, an absolutely extraordinary figure. Net debt now represents almost a quarter of GSP, and the government has conceded it has not even peaked yet. It is a disgraceful reflection of how bad things in Victoria have become, and it is completely unsustainable.

It is also an indictment on the budget papers. In recent years we have seen this Labor government allow the budget papers to be filled with rhetoric and slogans rather than detail and precise figures. Sometimes budget figures are omitted altogether – completely omitted because this government are so embarrassed that they refuse to be transparent on how much they are spending. How many times have we seen that 'TBC' written in the budget papers? That is just hiding the true cost of things, and that is an absolute indictment on this government. To borrow a quote from the recent Auditor-General's report into the cost blowouts on major projects, the Auditor-General said the budget papers were 'not useful or reliable'. That is a damning indictment also on how reckless and reprehensible this Labor government's economic vandalism has become.

As we know, borrowing more money always comes at a price. The cost of Labor's debt is skyrocketing, with interest expenses blowing out to \$3.3 billion in just six months – a 27 per cent increase from last year. Victorians' money is just flying out the door, and what that is doing is adding to Victorians' cost of living. Rather than being spent on hospitals, more police, more nurses, more

teachers, fire equipment or fixing roads – fixing potholes – millions and millions of dollars is being thrown out the door just to keep up with the interest repayments on Labor's debt. In addition, public sector wages have surged by \$1.5 billion, tracking now at 51 per cent of the annual budget in just six months, further proof that Labor's spending is completely out of control. And today we are facing budget deficits across the forward estimates, with spending running well in excess of revenue. Victoria does not have a revenue problem – it has a spending problem. Debt continues to rise with no plan or strategy to pay it off. Simply put, Victoria's economy is in a shocking state of disrepair and decay under this tired Labor government, a government that has been in for 10 long years.

Gross state product is the most accurate measure of the state's economy, and GSP has fallen by 1.2 per cent per capita across the year in Victoria. This is the worst of any state in the country, except Western Australia, which is explained by some structural weaknesses in the mining sector. It just goes to show how poorly the economy is performing under this Labor government.

Cost-of-living pressures are hitting Victorian businesses hard too. Business insolvencies in Victoria are at their highest. Victoria has recorded the fastest increase in insolvencies among the mainland states, with 2560 businesses going under as at the December quarter last year. That represents a 63 per cent increase in comparison to the same time the previous year. That is a truly terrible statistic, to see more businesses going under in Victoria than anywhere else in the country. When Victorian businesses go under, Victorian jobs are lost, and those poor workers who lose their jobs find it even harder to deal with the cost-of-living pressures.

With more businesses closing, as I said, more jobs are being lost. Victoria's unemployment rate is now at 4.6 per cent, which is higher than the national rate of 4.1 per cent. With an economy that is so brittle and weak as Victoria's economy is at the moment, it is little wonder that Victorians are suffering in one of the worst cost-of-living crises in recent times. A stronger economy means improved confidence and stronger economic outcomes for Victorians. But we know that after 10 long years – a decade – this miserable, tired Labor government does not have the capacity or the fortitude to save our economy from the financial ruin that it has created.

Tax, tax, tax is the language of this Labor government. We know that Labor's only response to its economic disaster is to tax Victorians more. The mid-year budget update showed Victoria's tax revenue is at record levels and increased by \$1.3 billion in just six months. Yet this has done nothing to fix the budget, with the government still running a \$3.9 billion deficit. Instead of getting spending under control as it should, Labor continues to make wrong choices, racking up debt while delivering less for Victorians. They are really giving that credit card a shameful workout.

If a state wishes to spend more, it can only do so by borrowing more or taxing its people more. There is no such thing as public money, there is only taxpayers money. After promising on the eve of the 2014 state election not to introduce or tax Victorians more, Labor has done exactly that on no less than 60 separate occasions. That is right; this Labor government has increased or added new taxes 60 times – 60 new or increased taxes. That is an utterly shameful record, an absolutely, utterly shameful record. In 2013–14 tax revenue was at \$16.9 billion. That was around \$2867 per Victorian. In complete contrast, the budget update under this Labor government just recently reported tax revenue had ballooned to \$38.9 billion. That has spiked to \$5504 in tax per Victorian – almost double in the space of 10 years under this Labor government. If that is not bad enough, the tax take is estimated to increase to a staggering \$45.8 billion over the forward estimates, translating to \$6160 in tax for every Victorian taxpayer. It is an absolutely shameful record under this Labor government; when they spend more, when they spend recklessly, they tax Victorians more, and it adds to Victorians' cost of living.

Under this Labor government Victorian households are absolutely being crushed by Labor taxes. We have also seen what the Treasurer thinks about taxing Victorians more. In true Labor fashion the Treasurer said that people with properties could afford to pay more when it comes to getting hit hard with increased taxes and the outrageous COVID debt levy. What the Treasurer seems to forget, what this entire Labor government seems to forget, is that some of the hardest working people in the

Victorian community are those who worked hard and saved to purchase an investment property. These include occupations such as teachers, nurses, electricians, truck drivers and police officers, yet our Treasurer thinks teachers and nurses deserve to be taxed more because they worked hard to help create financial security for themselves.

Under Labor there is now no incentive left to work harder. Rather, the harder you work under Labor, the harsher you will be penalised with taxes. It is utterly perverse that we live in such a penal economy. Under Labor, only in the last sitting week did we see another harsh tax through the new emergency services levy – so-called. This massive new tax will see Victorians pay \$2 billion more over the next three years. Labor has tried to disguise this tax by suggesting revenue will go into a new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, but we all know that that is just spin. This tax will be used to fund core government agencies like Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, Emergency Recovery Victoria and the State Control Centre. These are public sector agencies. This comes after Labor ripped \$38 million out of the Triple Zero Victoria budget in the last budget, so they are taxing Victorians more to plug the hole from the cuts in the last budget.

These public service agencies have always been funded from consolidated revenue, but now Labor is taxing Victorians more to prop up these back-office operations. Every Victorian is going to be paying more under this new tax, with our farmers being the hardest hit. The residential commercial property rates will double, the industrial rates will go up by 64 per cent, but primary producer rates for farmers will go up by a whopping 189 per cent. Farmers right across Victoria will be forced to pay massive increases in the levy. Many of them are the very people that go out and fight the bushfires when there are fires. They are the people that go out in the first place to fight the bushfires, using their own equipment that they have paid for, yet this Labor government wants to tax them 189 per cent more.

This new tax will cause extreme financial strain on local farmers in a cost-of-living crisis that will result in higher prices for fresh produce in the shops. Farmers will suffer tens of thousands of dollars of increased taxes under this new levy, and farmers will have no choice but to pass it on. This means everything that we rely on that our farmers produce; whether it is beef, lamb, chicken, cheese, fruit or vegetables, Victorian consumers will cop this new tax. It just demonstrates everything that is so wrong about this government, making the cost of living so much harder.

Victorians now know that they cannot trust this government, a tired Labor government which is hurting people's cost of living – *(Time expired)*

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (16:16): It is a pleasure to rise in opposition to this matter of public importance (MPI), and to bring some sense back to this chamber. The member for Evelyn has moved this motion – and I acknowledge and respect that – that this house condemns the government for the cost of living and our approach to economic management; the cost of housing, renting, energy and groceries; our goal to build 800,000 new homes over the next decade; and supposedly failing to implement meaningful measures to ease the cost-of-living pressures for Victorians.

I rise on this MPI not because I agree with it but quite the contrary. You would have thought that, number one, with a federal election currently underway and a federal Liberal opposition out there campaigning to secure the support of Victorians and Australians more broadly, this Liberal opposition would be working as hard as they could to get good, quality commitments for Victorians from their federal colleagues instead of going after this state Labor government, which day in and day out has been delivering real action on the cost of living. That is point number one. There was no mention of the federal Liberal inaction for over a decade here.

Point number two: it is a motion that really alludes to the Liberals' intention, if they were to get into government at a federal or definitely a state level, to cut, close and burn public-facing services. Make no mistake: when the Liberals cut, Victorians will pay the price. Number three: if the opposition had

actually been paying attention, I actually moved the inverse of this motion exactly two weeks ago. That is the main reason why I am speaking on this matter now.

On 5 March I moved an MPI— and like I said at the time, if you look at the almanac from *Back to the Future*, it will be in there.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Pascoe Vale will not use props in the chamber.

Anthony CIANFLONE: It states:

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

Do you know what is interesting about the motion by the member for Evelyn? She has intentionally left out the words ‘education, health and transport’ in her motion. That is because, we know, the Liberals do not believe in investing in health, education and transport. They never have; they never will. They only know how to cut health, education and transport.

There are a couple of other words I can use to describe this motion as well. Firstly, it is misleading. It is misleading about the real actions and what we as the Victorian Labor government have actually been doing to support people with the cost of living. There is a definition that comes to mind when I go to ‘misleading’, and I have got the dictionary here, Acting Speaker – Speaker. My apologies, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Order! Speaker. And I would ask you not to use props in the chamber, member for Pascoe Vale, dictionary or not.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Pascoe Vale, I believe, is going to defy your ruling. He seems to have a prop located on his bench there.

The SPEAKER: I have ruled on that matter.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate your guidance. I was literally picking up this dictionary to quote from it. I appreciate the member for Nepean’s enthusiasm, and I will get to him in a moment. The matter is misleading because it does not accurately reflect what this Victorian Labor government has been doing to support Victorians with the cost of living. The definition of ‘misleading’ is ‘to give the wrong idea or the wrong impression’, and we know the Liberal opposition leader in particular has a good habit of misleading his own party room. He did not tell them. We are talking about cost of living here.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Lowan! Member for Brighton!

Anthony CIANFLONE: This is an opposition leader that just went on a cruise ship holiday and misled his party room about whether he was on a holiday or not. That is point number one.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, if the member has not got the capacity to speak – on relevance –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: I just said, Speaker, on relevance, if the speaker has not got the capacity to speak on the motion, perhaps he should sit down.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask you not to make a statement when you raise a point of order. Member for Pascoe Vale, stick to the matter of public importance.

Anthony CIANFLONE: I certainly believe I am sticking to it. I am specifically going to the very essence of the matter and why I believe it is very much misleading and inaccurate on many, many levels. There are quite a few other ways I can describe the matter, but one of the ways, just to skip

along the way here, is to describe it as a baccalà of a motion. In Italian we have a word, baccalà, which describes quite a few things. It is an Italian fish that is enjoying extreme popularity amongst much of the Mediterranean, but baccalà is also used to describe someone who can be considered a salted codfish or someone who is good for not much, and that is what this matter really is. When you look at the definition there is also a photo of who is a baccalà –

The SPEAKER: Member for Pascoe Vale, I will sit you down if you use another prop. I will not allow you to defy my rulings. This is the third time I have warned you, member for Pascoe Vale.

James Newbury: On a different point of order, Speaker, referring to the member for Evelyn in that way is extremely unparliamentary.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: I just said – referring to the member for Evelyn in a completely inappropriate way –

The SPEAKER: Member for Pascoe Vale, I would ask you to be mindful of not referring to members of Parliament in a disrespectful manner.

Sam Groth interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Nepean, would you like to leave the chamber? You can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you, Speaker, I will certainly be following your ruling. To clarify, it was not about the member for Evelyn, it was about the member for Nepean. I do just acknowledge that. But in all honesty, all jokes aside here, the reality is that every single motion we as a government have sought to move and progress in this chamber when it comes to cost of living for young people, for families, for workers, for older people, you name it, the opposition have actively opposed and campaigned against and talked down.

What the member for Evelyn did not get up and talk about was whether or not a Liberal state government would support the ongoing retention of the \$400 school saving bonus. To date that has put \$150 million in Victorian families' pockets on new uniforms, books, excursions and the like. There has been no commitment from the Liberal opposition on whether or not they would maintain that, let alone whether they would have committed to it originally. There has been no commitment from the opposition about whether they would retain free kinder, which is saving \$2600 per child per family for three- and four-year-olds. That will be on the chopping block. That will be on the cutting block, dare I say. There is no commitment –

Bridget Vallence interjected.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Correct me if I am wrong, member for Evelyn.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Pascoe Vale, through the Chair. The member for Evelyn will cease interjecting.

Anthony CIANFLONE: There are the \$200 Get Active Kids vouchers as well, which are helping so many families and local sporting clubs with uniforms, boots, shin pads and the like for participating in local sport. Again, you never would have heard that announcement from a Liberal government. The free school breakfast program – we know they cut Fresh Fruit Fridays. If they get elected, are they going to retain the school breakfast program, the free dental care in schools program, free-to-study teaching, free TAFE courses – over 80 TAFE courses – free-to-study nursing, free L- and P-plates and urgent care clinics?

We know the federal Liberal government over a decade decimated Medicare and bulk-billing, and as the Minister for Health spoke about in question time today, we know that has placed increasing pressure, record pressure, on Victorian hospital emergency departments. We have opened up urgent care clinics. Would a Victorian Liberal government maintain and grow and expand those urgent care clinics? Again, dare I say they would not.

The motion talks about energy. We have introduced the Victorian default energy offer, which is keeping wholesale and retail prices in Victoria low for families and low for businesses. The Solar Homes program – hot water, solar panels, battery rebates and loans – this whole investment we have been making through the Minister for Energy and Resources and the Minister for Environment, is about providing households with the cheapest form of renewable energy. Again, the Liberals have not, as far as I am aware, come out to match that ongoing commitment.

The council rate cap – we introduced the council rate cap. It is 2.75 per cent in 2024–25. We know some Greens councils in particular want to abolish that rate cap, which we will work to ensure does not occur.

We know that this motion really does not belong in the chamber of this Parliament, to be frank. It belongs on a comedy reality show. It takes me back to an old episode of *Seinfeld* where Cosmo Kramer went out the back of the NBC studios and found the old Merv Griffin show set. He brought that up to his apartment and invited his friends Jerry, Newman and George Costanza to talk about nothing. That is what this motion is about. It is basically a Liberal Party branch meeting motion where you have got Newman, the member for Brighton, and others talking in an echo chamber about what they are going to cut and what they are going to close. Because whether it is on economic management, housing, renting, energy, the cost of living or generally, we are taking all the action needed to make life more affordable and accessible.

Let us go to some of the points that the member for Evelyn spoke about in terms of our economic management. She has totally disregarded the geopolitical external factors and inflationary pressures that have happened – a once-in-100-year global pandemic – that have played major roles in terms of the current state of the international and national economy in particular. There were 13 interest rate rises by the Reserve Bank. Mind you, inflation was growing at record rates not under the Labor federal government; there was a Scott Morrison Liberal federal government when inflation was out of control – 13 times in a row rates rose, and the rate cut happened under the federal Labor government. So when you talk about economic management, talk about the facts. The Liberals do not like the facts getting in the way of a good fake Liberal narrative.

I take the house to point 1 of the motion in relation to economic management, because the fact is the Victorian government's mid-year financial report ABS figures show that Victoria's economy, labour market and levels of business investment continue to drive nation-leading growth. Almost 900,000 new jobs have been created since 2014 and there is record low unemployment. Gross state product increased by 1.5 per cent in 2023–24. The economy is now 11.5 per cent larger than prior to the pandemic. Our economy has grown by over 9 per cent in the last two years alone – that is according to the Deloitte report. Business investment – the member for Evelyn does not want to refer to this fact, but business investment in this state has grown by 30 per cent since 2020–21, higher than any other state and reaching a record high share of overall economic activity. Business investment also has grown by 3.7 per cent over the last year to December 2024, compared to -0.1 per cent nationally. Nationally it is going backwards, but we are going forwards in record levels. That is a fact. 108,000 businesses have opened their doors in Victoria since June 2020, an increase of 17 per cent of new businesses in Victoria, the largest growth of any state.

Let us talk about business. We have released the economic growth statement, which is all about backing businesses, cutting red tape and building the new skills that businesses are asking for, through that free TAFE, which the Liberals would never have delivered and will not maintain if they ever get in. The economic growth statement contains those things that businesses told us they wanted, like

streamlining liquor licensing, which will save \$7000 for hospitality businesses and allow them to open up to six months earlier. It will also look at other sensible ways to cut red tape and save money for businesses and save time for small businesses. Small business Victoria and the Minister for Small Business and Employment are doing a sensational job in progressing much of these and other reforms.

We have committed to halving the number of business regulators by 2030, saving small businesses up to \$500 million over five years by decreasing bureaucracy and other costs. We have also worked on a major program of tax reform, including increasing the payroll tax threshold, abolishing business insurance duties and reforming commercial and industrial stamp duty, which I remember the Liberals spoke against in this chamber, basically. We listened and made those payroll taxes fairer for businesses, because the payroll tax threshold of \$700,000 we knew was too low. To better support small businesses across our state from 1 July 2024 we have raised the threshold to a \$900,000 tax-free threshold, with a further \$1 million from 1 July 2025. The reforms will save 26,000 Victorian businesses up to \$14,550 per year, and around 6000 of those businesses will stop paying payroll tax altogether.

In relation to our expenditure, which the motion also talks about, we are creating those jobs and we are building that infrastructure through kinders, schools, hospitals, community facilities and social services. There is \$12.8 billion in the midyear budget update towards infrastructure, which is about the Metro rail tunnel, level crossings and North East Link. Locally, for my school community there is an \$18 million new rebuild of Pascoe Vale Primary School, a \$17.8 million COVID technology hub, \$14.5 million for John Fawkner secondary college, \$11 million for Pascoe Vale Girls College, \$10 million for Glenroy College and much, much more. The money is going to things that we need and that should have been done, and we continue to deliver going forward.

But it is also about the population. If things are so dire, as the opposition want us to believe, why do people want to keep moving to Victoria in record droves. They are moving to Victoria in record droves. Our population is growing at the fastest rate in the nation – 130,000 more people in the last 12 months – with 2 per cent growth compared to New South Wales' paltry 1.3 per cent growth. But there are also the major events. Two million people attended Victorian major events – international, interstate and intrastate visitors – with record crowds at the at the grand final and 200,000 people at the Avalon airshow. Speaker, if the state is in such dire a situation as the Liberals are claiming, why are more people moving here? Why are more people investing here? Why are more jobs being created here? Why are more businesses opening here? Victoria is the best state in the nation to live in.

The SPEAKER: I cannot answer those questions, and it is not appropriate to ask the Speaker questions.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (16:31): I speak in strong support today of the matter of public importance raised by the member for Evelyn. It is clear that there is an enormous disparity between facts and reality. I challenge the members opposite to get out into their communities and speak to real people on the ground, to speak to women who are struggling to pay for food at the supermarket and put food on their family's table and to speak to the people that you hear from, the mums in tears who are having a sandwich in the pantry and telling the kids, 'No, don't worry about it, just eat without me. I'm busy doing something' or 'I had something earlier today' because they could not afford to buy enough food to feed the entirety of the family at once.

These are the people that Labor members are just dismissing outright in saying it is something that only the Liberals and Nationals are talking about. These are tears that are being shed by Victorians each and every day who cannot afford to live here anymore. They cannot afford their groceries. They cannot afford to keep up with their energy bills or with their gas bills that keep on getting higher and higher and higher. They cannot afford to pay their rent. They have written off their idea of a dream home because it is being taxed beyond their reach. They simply cannot afford to live in Victoria and live the life that they desire and the life that they deserve. Their hopes and aspirations are what I and my National and Liberal colleagues believe can be reinstated in the state of Victoria. We can rebuild

Victoria so that it is again a place of hope, where we actually look at the outcomes of media releases and budgets rather than just putting out media releases on the day saying, ‘These are the numbers. These are the inputs. This is how much taxpayer money we are throwing at this, and yet we still have a situation which has got dire outcomes for Victorian families right across the state.’

It is not just me saying this. All of the data that you look at points to the incredible cost-of-living crisis that every single Victorian is facing. This is of course because – what have we had in Victoria for the last 10 years that is consistent? We have had a Labor government. And we know that Labor know how to spend, spend, spend taxpayer money. It is not their money; it is taxpayer money. It always is Victorians that pay the price. It is Victorians who are waiting longer for health care, for an ambulance, for their school to be upgraded and for that pothole to be fixed to make sure their road is safe so they can get to work, take their kids to school and go to footy and netball training, and it has never, ever, ever been delivered by Labor.

In fact life is getting so much harder under Labor because they cannot manage money, they cannot manage projects, and it is Victorians that are paying the price. Demand for food banks is going through the roof, with 65,000 Victorians a year looking for support to feed their families. That is up 30 per cent in just one year. Grocery prices are up 30 per cent – it is costing a fortune to feed your family. In the last six years alone groceries have gone up 30 per cent. Food prices overall have gone up by 17 per cent since 2020, and this is set to increase even further with Labor’s new volunteers tax that specifically targets farmland, the people that are growing our food to put on the supermarket shelves. What do you think will happen to food prices if Labor is slugging them with a massive, massive new tax that will increase by 189 per cent for farmers alone?

A member: How much?

Emma KEALY: 189 per cent for farmers. These are farmers that are already living on the edge. These are the same farmers that have been dealing with an incredibly dry season this year. These are the same farmers that spent their time on either CFA trucks or private appliances fighting bushfires this entire summer bushfire season. These are the people that deliver the service, and they are going to be the ones that pay for it, and gee they are paying for it. They are paying for it big time and they are pushing back. It is Victorians that will pay the price, because it is not just the farmers, it is anybody who consumes food in this state, and you know what, that is every single Victorian. They will all pay the price for Labor’s great big new volunteer tax that just puts extra pressure on those volunteers who will turn out when we need them. I thank them so much for all that they have done over this summer because there has not been a lot of support from the government. We have still got businesses who cannot access the \$5000 bush recovery support from the government, because while they announced it on 11 March, submissions are still closed. You can put an expression of interest in, but you cannot apply. That money has been locked down in a box and is not flowing to my community, and that is simply not good enough.

This is a government that does not care about people at the end of the day. You have forgotten where you come from, Labor. Labor have completely forgotten where they come from. They have become used to the life of having ministerial drivers and lovely dinners and all of these free tickets – grand prix or Taylor Swift anybody? All of these high-end functions – what about the person who could not even think about taking their daughter to Taylor Swift because they would not be able to afford it? What about those families that could not even think about going to the grand prix because they cannot afford school uniforms to put on their children’s backs to make sure that they can turn up and not be embarrassed at school? These are everyday working families that Labor have turned their back on. These are the families that are paying the price for Labor’s mismanagement and incompetence and just taking the micky out of every Victorian.

Power bills are up 22 per cent since 2021. The average household bill is up \$1667. You think a \$250 little grant every so often will fix that? It does not even touch the sides of Labor’s absolutely botched transition of energy. You cannot keep on cutting back the sources of energy and not expect there will

be a massive increase in prices because demand is outstripping supply. It is simple economics. I think I learned that in year 8, but somehow we have got highly paid ministers who are making decisions that are just making Victorians pay the price. It is simply unacceptable.

Housing is becoming less and less affordable, with over 1 million Victorian households under mortgage or rental stress. There are 15,500 fewer rentals in Victoria in the past year alone, and this is government changes. This is changes to laws that mean that landlords are not interested anymore. They are pulling out of the market. You have made it harder to get a rental. Labor have pushed up the cost of rentals for all Victorians. There are more than 60,000 Victorians on the public housing waitlist, and Labor made a promise to Victorians before the last election that it was going to build 80,000 homes a year.

A member interjected.

Emma KEALY: They have desperately failed that. More than 25 per cent fewer homes have been delivered. In fact in Victoria we have the lowest house building rate in 30 years.

People cannot save for a deposit. They cannot afford to save for a deposit because all of their money is going out the door to these increased cost-of-living pressures under Labor's cost-of-living crisis. Regional housing is even harder, because the cost of regional homes has gone up 45 per cent in the past few years alone.

On health care we are just left abandoned in regional Victoria, where we are seeing massive amalgamations of hospitals. We have worse health outcomes anyway in regional Victoria, but in my region of Lowan, where a lot of my bigger hospitals are being merged in under Ballarat, we are seeing fewer local jobs, with the laundry services being shut down. These are some of the lowest paid hospital workers, and they were told on Valentine's Day they were going to lose their jobs. There are fewer jobs locally. There are fewer health services locally. It is not fair at all on those hardworking hospital staff who are doing their best that they cannot make a decision locally because all the money is being siphoned to Ballarat under Labor's completely botched hospital services plan. It is the wrong way to go, and our Victorians are worse off out of it.

This could be fixed. The government are good at putting a hand in your pocket when they run out of their own money. They have introduced 60 new taxes since they came in over 10 years ago, and what did Andrews promise before he came into government last election? No new taxes. Well, that is 60 reasons that you should never, ever vote for Labor again, because you cannot trust a thing they say before an election. What they will only deliver is more pain in the hip pocket for every single Victorian. You want to fix what is happening in Victoria? Never, ever vote Labor again – only put a number 1 in the box for a National Party member or a Liberal Party member.

The SPEAKER: I remind members to direct their comments through the Chair.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:42): It is interesting, I think the opposition speak with forked tongues frankly when it comes to expressing all this will and desire about expanding housing and housing affordability in our state, because every chance they get they take the opportunity to block, block, block. We saw protests in Brighton. We have seen protests in Hawthorn. I have had pushback in my seat as well. Here we are, but thankfully we have been able to cut through and that bill is well underway, because we know that for younger Victorians in particular, but not exclusively, they want to have the opportunity to get into the housing market. I have many people, millennials and down, who are deeply concerned about their ability to get into the housing market, save for the housing statement, because after that announcement we got so much feedback. I can speak personally from my seat, where younger people were saying, 'Thank you, you've actually considered us,' in making sure that we are providing a mechanism for them to get into the housing market.

But it is not only younger generations, though that is incredibly important. It is also making sure for mature generations as well, when they want to downsize et cetera, that they do not all have to go out

to the broader areas of Victoria necessarily unless they want to. If they want to do a sea change, well that is part of the concept as well. When we are talking about the housing statement, it is giving Victorians the freedom to live where they want to and do what suits them.

I know from speaking to a lot of younger voters in particular, a lot of them – and I will not speak for all – do not necessarily want to be reliant on cars. Many of them – and I pay full credit to them – want to have more active transport and want to use public transport, and therefore they want accessibility. This is what underpins the activity centres and the planning around them for Victoria – making sure that we have the convenience that Victorians want and need, because that means that they can actually take public transport if they want to. They might want to bike ride, they might want to walk, they might also want to use other mechanisms to be able to travel that are far less expensive than necessarily having to use a car. Of course if they want to use a car, that is fine too, but we know that the only way to reduce congestion into the future is to make sure that we facilitate good public transport, hence major infrastructure investments.

Those opposite see any money that is generated and contributed to by Victorians as simply a waste, when in fact we know things like Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel for instance are actually going to massively help in terms of facilitating Victorians to get where they need to go faster, cutting time in their commutes, which is so much better when you are looking at also accessibility to jobs and having that freedom that they all deserve.

But it all depends how you frame it. If you frame every expenditure of the state as simply a waste, then you are belying the fact that, for instance, we will have built a hundred new schools by 2026. Are those new schools considered a waste by the opposition, or do they deem Victorian students as having the right to a full education and the infrastructure that they need and deserve close to where they live? I am putting that question out to the opposition because I would say, and certainly it has been reflected in my community, many schools we know back in the Kennett era were closed. I am just saying we had to rebuild, because that is what Labor governments do. We do not just say it is all too hard and it is too expensive; we know that Victorian students need somewhere to be educated and at an optimal standard, hence South Melbourne Park Primary School and South Melbourne Primary School. We also have Fishermans Bend primary school coming. We have Port Melbourne Secondary as well. These were all delivered by the Labor government. I put that question: would the opposition deem those a waste, or is that a good investment in terms of public expenditure by the government? These are the questions that we should actually be talking about. When you just talk about waste and red tape it is very easy to dismiss absolutely valid and valued investments in community, but at the end of the day that is what it is all about.

If we come back to that question of housing, we are reforming our planning system, clearing the backlog of planning permits and giving builders, buyers and renovators certainty about how long approvals will take and a clear pathway to resolving issues quickly if those timeframes are not met – cheaper housing closer to where you work. There is nothing worse than spending 1½ hours, 2 hours a day in the car when you could be at home playing and having fun with your kids or just resting, reading a book – I do not know – shopping, cleaning and doing all the things people have to do. I know as a Southbanker that we have many families living in high-rise. I live in a 37-storey building. People look at me and go, ‘How can you live in this situation?’ There are plenty of families there, and they go to, guess what, South Melbourne Primary School, which was delivered by our Victorian government. What they love is its accessibility to the arts quarter. They have got all that at their fingertips – great sporting facilities, Albert Park and JL Murphy. When you are looking at the overall lifestyle, this is about choice, isn’t it? Instead of looking aghast and saying, ‘Why should people live in apartment blocks?’ and looking down on it, we should say this is about giving choice for people. This is about giving choice.

On the other hand we have given greater certainty because also there are families who want to live in other parts of Victoria; they might want to live further out or might want to have acreage. They want to have that choice, and that has been an important part of the plan. I am not here to imply that a person

should live in one or the other situation, but the fact of the matter is that for every dollar you spend when you are talking about uplift in the inner burbs it is \$4 when you are going in the outer areas when you are thinking about what you can deliver for community. Every time you open a new suburb you are having to look at new ambulances, new police stations, new fire services, new schools, new electrical infrastructure et cetera, and we do invest in those services. But you also have to preserve our beautiful forests, certainly when we are thinking about climate change as well, so there is a delicate balance there. The point of me raising that issue is that there is a good imperative on so many levels – and this is what is built into the housing statement as well – to make sure that we do not increase urban sprawl to an extent which makes it no longer livable and amenable for Victorians but at the same time find that right balance so that they can have affordable mechanisms to live where they want to live and have a reasonable commute to their work or school or other areas.

I know that, for instance, when we were looking as part of the housing statement at how we would be facilitating these changes when it comes to housing, the 10 pilot activity centres will deliver more homes. The plans for each have evolved in response to feedback from the community. I joined the Minister for Planning at one of the local feedback sessions. Actually there has been extensive engagement with community, contrary to what was proffered in the previous discussion that was raised by the opposition. I should say that there has been extensive discussion because, contrary to what they might think, actually people do not necessarily all want to live in big, grand homes. They can be expensive to look after and they can also be onerous with all of the cleaning, maintenance and all the other things. It is about choice. It is not about saying one or the other and it is not about being snobby or looking down on people who live in apartment blocks. It is about choice.

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton will show some respect to the member on their feet.

Nina TAYLOR: This is really important. For instance, under the previous draft plans all proposed catchment areas had a four-storey height limit with scope for up to six storeys on larger blocks that are more than 1000 square metres and have 20 metres of street frontage. Under the updated plans, catchment areas will be split into two, inner and outer. Inner catchments will be closer to the core and will have the same four-storey limit or up to six storeys on larger blocks. Outer catchments will be farther from the core and will have the new three-storey limit or up to four storeys on larger blocks. There is a lot more information that needs to be shared on this matter, but I do not have the time in this chamber and it has already been shared publicly.

A member: Extension.

Nina TAYLOR: No, no, that is fine. That is all right. There is plenty more that other people want to say, I am sure. Some of the fearmongering by those opposite has been very destructive because it is not fair to community. Community deserve to have reflected what is actually being delivered for their benefit through consultation, with community being taken on the journey.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (16:52): It is good to be back and to rise to support the member for Evelyn's matter of public importance:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for allowing Victoria to spiral into a cost-of-living crisis as a result of:

- (1) failing to manage the economy and allowing net debt to reach \$155.2 billion by the end of the financial year;
- (2) imposing or increasing 60 new taxes, which are driving up the costs of renting, energy and grocery prices;
- (3) breaking its promise to build 80,000 new homes a year, causing housing prices to remain unaffordable for many young Victorians; and
- (4) failing to implement any meaningful measures to ease cost-of-living pressures for Victorians.

The truth is that Victorians are worse off under Labor. Under the Allan Labor government everything is costing more. This is what it looks like in real terms for Victorians in the last few years. Health care is up 10 per cent. Food and grocery costs are up 12 per cent. Education costs are up 12 per cent. Housing costs are up 14 per cent. Rents are up by 17 per cent. Insurance is up by 19 per cent. Electricity is up by 32 per cent. Gas, although they want us to not be able to use it, is up by 34 per cent. The truth of the matter is that Victorians are living in a cost-of-living crisis that has been created by the financial mismanagement, ineptitude and recklessness of the Allan Labor government. The truth of the matter is that those opposite are pure economic vandals on a frenzied spending spree with Victorian taxpayers money on their pet projects, jobs for mates and lining criminals' pockets through the CFMEU.

To add insult to injury, not only is everything costing more in Victoria but also Victoria is the most taxed state in the country. The Allan Labor government has introduced 60 new or increased taxes in the course of its government. In a cost-of-living crisis, in a mess of its own making, the Allan Labor government figures, 'Yeah, all right, you know how we'll fix this? Let's slug 'em with more taxes,' again and again and again and again – 60 times over.

Victorian homeowners, businesses and farmers are to pay \$2.1 billion more in tax thanks to Labor's fire levy – yup, you betcha. Victorians are paying more property taxes than any other state thanks to soaring land tax and stamp duty – all yours. The solution to the cost-of-living crisis in Victoria from the Allan Labor government is more taxes for every man, woman and child. And how is this, according to Labor's new Treasurer, Victorians can afford to pay more.

Just last week the Treasurer claimed that rental providers can afford to pay more in tax. We know who these rental providers are, because the ATO has the figures. The Australian Tax Office says that there are 561,600 property investors in Victoria, and 403,000 of them only own one property. We are not talking about multimillionaire, multibillionaire land barons in Victoria. We are talking about, and the data shows it, people that own one property, and they are teachers, nurses, tradies and police officers. I mean, give it up. The Allan Labor government is worse than Robin Hood. They are not stealing from the rich to help the poor – they are robbing Victorians of their livelihoods by taxing them through the nose at every single opportunity to be able to pay off this eye-watering debt of \$187.8 billion by 2027–28. It is scandalous. State debt, as I said, is set to reach a record \$187 billion by mid 2028. This is something I am acutely aware of, having recently, as I mentioned before, had my first child. It is really good when you are sleep deprived to be able to stand in the chamber and say all these things.

James Newbury: You sound better than them.

Nicole WERNER: Thank you, that is very kind, member for Brighton. My son Bobby is 11 weeks old today and he is absolutely the light of our lives, he is wonderful. As I have said before in this chamber, I am the daughter of migrants, migrants who moved from their home country of Malaysia to Australia, to the lucky country, to make a better home for their future family. As a new parent I now have a deeper appreciation of why they did this for us. Every parent wants a better life for their children than they have. Every parent wants to provide for their children the best opportunities that they can. Every parent is aspirational for their children, their futures, their lives, their success. But the reality for my child being born into Victoria is that he has been born into the worst debt of all of Australia and what was once an economic powerhouse is now being labelled by economists as the poor state.

As our first child, our baby was given, as many first children are, so many gifts from friends, family and community members, but the gift that he received from the Allan Labor government for being born in Victoria is his share of this \$187 billion debt. At 11 weeks old, here is a bill for you, buddy: \$25,000 – that is your share of this state's skyrocketing debt. We are talking about that being the truth for every single Victorian – intergenerational debt that our children and their children's children will have to pay off, state debt per person in Victoria amounting to \$25,000 for every single man, woman and child in our state – 44 per cent higher than the next highest taxing state, South Australia. This financial mismanagement has bankrupted our state. Twenty-six million dollars is paid in interest on our debt – every single day we pay more than a million dollars for every hour that goes by thanks to

the Allan Labor government's squandering of our taxpayers money on their pet projects, corruption and incompetence. Every single Victorian is paying the price.

The fact is Victoria has now become a poor state. For the first time, this year the government is to receive more from GST revenue than we contributed. According to economist Saul Eslake, fundamentally what the GST system is meant to do is to redistribute revenue from rich states to poor states. After nearly 25 years of contributing more to the GST than we get back, being the second largest state with a historically strong economy, we are now that poor state. We used to be the economic powerhouse of this country. Now we need all the help that we can get, and other states have to bear the burden of propping Victoria up.

We should be able to have pride in our state's economy and industry. For decades we have led the country in sectors such as manufacturing, financial services, agriculture and education. We have the oldest Parliament in the country, we are the home of the 8-hour work day, and as far back as the 1850s gold rush we were the economic powerhouse of our nation. But sadly much of that greatness is now fading away.

Our businesses and households are the most taxed in the nation, our manufacturers are struggling to compete because of the cost of electricity and gas and our government is wallowing in state debt. We need to return to being a state that leads, not lags, a state that contributes, not one that begs for crumbs. It does not have to be this way. Victoria does not have to be the poor state. We have the people, we have the potential and we have the ability to turn things around. What we need is a government with the discipline and economic credibility to turn things around. And Victorians have that chance just next year, in November, to make a choice to vote in a coalition government to boot out this mob of corruption and incompetence and financial mismanagement, to boot out this mob that care more about jobs for mates and care more about buying votes in regional Victoria than actually delivering for Victorians in regional Victoria. They have the opportunity to vote out those that would make a promise at election time, only to seek to break it right after at a cost of – how much was it? – \$559 million. So Victorians have that choice come November 2026 to vote out this corrupt, incompetent state government.

John LISTER (Werribee) (17:01): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance, or what seems to be an opportunity for the Liberal Party to record some grabs for their social media. It is a bit disappointing, as someone who is new to this house, to see what they are spending their time on today. But it is a good chance. It is like groundhog day, as my colleague the member for Pascoe Vale alluded to before. It is a good opportunity to go back and have a look at some of those cost-of-living measures that we are investing in.

I do refer to my dictionary when I look at point (4), where the matter of public importance refers to failing to implement any meaningful measures to ease cost-of-living pressures for Victorians. I refer to my dictionary that I got from my learned colleague. Of course, I am not looking up salted fish; I am looking up the definition here of the word 'meaningful', and the definition is 'serious, important or worthwhile'. I want to challenge those opposite by asking whether or not these particular programs that the Allan Labor government has initiated are meaningful.

I would like to first start with congratulations to the member for Warrandyte on the arrival of her new bub. It is fantastic to see so many bubs around here in Parliament. One of the initiatives that we are doing to support young families is the baby box, and that baby box – for anyone, regardless of income, regardless of where they are from – provides those important first things for parents when they head home from hospital. Is that meaningful? That is the question that we could ask – not reflecting on the Chair.

The other thing that I would ask is: is it meaningful, the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which helps many people in my electorate and many young people to be able to go on important excursions that help shape their education but also help them build and grow as young people?

The other thing that we have invested in to help young families and families generally when it comes to cost-of-living support is the school saving bonus – \$4.8 million has been invested in this just in my electorate alone across schools that I have worked with and worked in, and that is available to families in those state schools and eligible families in the Catholic sector. The member for Lowan previously characterised these sorts of programs as the government ‘throwing money at’ these programs. I think that is a little bit insulting when we think about it. Are we throwing money at the opportunities for young people to go on those camps or sports or excursions, or are we throwing money at kids being able to have a proper uniform and a good start to the school term? I think it is pretty cynical for those opposite to say that we are throwing money when these programs are having a real impact in communities like mine, in Werribee, Wyndham Vale, Manor Lakes and all in between.

We have also provided cost-of-living relief through our active kids grants. Our active kids grants make sure that those kids that would normally not be able to access sport programs in communities like mine do get those things. We have provided – and this has been a key thing for this Labor government ever since we have been in – the free TAFE program, making sure that more young people and people trying to transition into a different career can get access to that sort of program. I do not know – is that throwing money away or are we investing in communities like mine?

The member for Evelyn mentions, in point (3) of the matter of public importance, housing. If the Liberal Party seriously cared about building new homes, they would not have their members, including the member for Brighton, out there protesting against doing exactly that. They need to look in the mirror, and they will be able to see what our biggest barrier to housing affordability is in Victoria. They are opposing new homes in Hawthorn. They are opposing homes in Malvern. They are opposing homes in Brighton. They are blocking good projects to help provide housing for young people and people looking for affordable housing near good public transport and services.

When those opposite have the gall to cross the West Gate and venture into Wyndham, they may notice a whole lot of houses being built at a nation-leading pace. Over 2700 planning approvals have been granted in the City of Wyndham in the financial year to January. It is my community and the communities of the member for Point Cook, who I see has just joined us, and the member for Melton that are doing the heavy lifting when it comes to housing availability in our city. It is about time the communities those opposite represent do more of this heavy lifting too. In fact in the City of Bayside, which the member for Brighton represents, a little over 800 planning permits have been approved in the financial year to date, which is cute compared to what we are doing in Wyndham.

I want to tell a story of how a young person from my community who grew up in Wyndham Vale has been supported to move to an apartment – in the electorate of the member for Caulfield, no less. Look, while I was sad to see them leave the amazing community of Wyndham Vale, they wanted to move closer to those services and move closer to those jobs that are in that community. I am sure we are all aware of the Help to Buy scheme. We have recently had a discussion in this house on that. In Victoria we have seen the success of our own shared equity scheme, the Victorian Homebuyer Fund. For many Victorians, the homebuyer fund has been a game changer – the difference between owning a home, being forced to rent indefinitely or not being able to move out of their family home. With the government contributing 25 per cent of this young person’s deposit, they have saved up another 5 per cent in order to avoid costly lenders mortgage insurance. With this they were able to buy an established apartment in the member for Caulfield’s electorate. Of course this did mean that I lost them, but it is fantastic to see that they get to live where they want, close to work and close to friends from university.

This government has also released a housing statement with a focus on these key areas: good decisions being made faster, cheaper housing closer to where people work, protecting renters rights, more social housing for Victorians and a long-term housing plan. As part of this we are building homes around high-frequency train lines with our activity centres program, giving people the opportunity to live near established public transport routes. While we do a lot of hard work in our outer-western suburbs to provide that infrastructure, we know that it already exists and there is capacity for people to live in these inner-city suburbs.

Our housing statement is not just about buying a home. I am one of the few members in this house to rent their home. This government has the back of people in my situation. Renters make up a huge chunk of our population – around 18 per cent of the Wyndham community, according to the last census – and it is telling that we rarely hear the opposition speak up for them. In stark contrast, this government is committed to ensuring that renters like me feel secure in their homes. We have minimum rental standards in Victoria and we have established a rental taskforce, who are cracking down on rental providers and real estate agents who do the wrong thing. The taskforce has conducted weekend inspection blitzes across Melbourne, including in my electorate of Werribee, to make sure that renters are not having to put up with conduct that is not only unfair but also illegal. We support renters through Consumer Affairs Victoria to challenge unreasonable rent increases. I myself used this service last year to successfully challenge an unfair rent increase that was well beyond market value, and this is something that I was able to do to set an expectation in our community that we cannot go unfairly increasing rents and pushing people out of good houses.

To make this rental system fairer we also have Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria and the portable rental bond scheme, which I was able to access not too long ago when I moved house. There is plenty more that we have done for renters rights in this state, and I am proud that renters like myself are ensured protection and dignity under these laws.

I want to conclude my remarks with this: as people in the western suburbs, it is always amusing for us to see the Liberals remember every few years that there are communities living on the other side of the West Gate Bridge. Werribee is a great place to live, work and raise a family. Whether it be in established areas in Werribee and Wyndham Vale or in our new estates further out, people choose to call these places home and are proud to do so. We do not necessarily need to hear those opposite tearing down our communities. We need to see them supporting our communities by taking their fair share of housing and making sure that we have a balance of housing across our entire city, rather than being out there standing with protesters, while we continue to take all that housing in the area I represent. The Allan Labor government is committed to supporting families in communities like the one I represent.

I want to end by reflecting on what I started with: whether or not those programs that I have described are meaningful and, most importantly, whether or not they are likely to be cut by those opposite if they have the chance. These are so important to my community, and we need to make sure that they are safe.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (17:11): Let us get back to the basics. This is a matter of public importance submitted by the member for Evelyn: ‘That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for allowing Victoria to spiral into a cost-of-living crisis’. We are seeing a \$155.2 billion debt. It is extraordinary. Have my colleagues across the other side of the chamber forgotten what real life is? I am one of the newest members in this Parliament, and I can tell you now that the people of Pahran are over it, absolutely over it. The spiralling cost-of-living crisis was a major issue in the recent Pahran by-election, where voters overwhelmingly rejected the economic failures and policies of the Labor government and the Greens. Whilst I am on the Greens, may I say what hypocrites they are. We are talking about a cost-of-living crisis. We are talking about the cost of rent. Where are they? The three amigos are not here at all to even contribute to this discussion.

Every day on the campaign trail locals told me just how tough life was for them. They were struggling to pay their rent or their mortgage, they were struggling to put food on the table and pay their household bills, including their power bills, and they were struggling to keep afloat. Some had lost their jobs and others were working reduced hours and earning less money as Labor’s mismanagement created a massive economic crisis in this state. Since the by-election people have continued to highlight to me the financial problems they are struggling with and the consequences of these problems, which include rising mental health issues and more homelessness, which we see constantly in Pahran. All I need to do is walk down Chapel Street. Not only do I know these homeless people by name – it is really extraordinary – but they are there day in, day out because there are not sufficient facilities that are

covered by this government because they do not have money because they have misspent. We have got a rise in mental health issues, an increase in homelessness and an increase in crime and unfortunately we are seeing more and more family violence.

Labor's 60 new or increased taxes have made life even tougher for Victorians. At a time when they are looking for relief the state government is whacking them even harder with more taxes, leaving them with less money to pay their household bills. With 30 of these 60 taxes being property related, this government has made it even tougher for renters. More than half of the residents in Prahran are renters. Any increase in property taxes is directly passed on to these people by landlords. Labor and the Greens seem to think they are attacking landlords with more regulations –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: If members would like to have conversations, they can do it outside.

Rachel WESTAWAY: higher land tax and other property taxes. It is of no consequence for those who are renting properties from these landlords.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Prahran has a right to be heard without interjections.

Rachel WESTAWAY: The Labor government and the Greens think that they can defy basic economic reality. Every time you increase taxes and charges on landlords, these costs are passed on to renters in the form of higher rents. Let me say it again: for the people of Prahran, over 50 per cent rent, and they are hurting.

As taxes and charges keep going up, landlords are getting out of property and they are selling their rental properties, usually to owner-occupiers, meaning there are less properties available for rent, which again leads to higher rents. The consequences of the government's tax grabs and ever-increasing rents are hitting the people of Prahran very hard, and it is making it even tougher for them. According to realestate.com, the average rent for a unit or apartment in Prahran has gone up by 5 per cent in the last 12 months. That is about \$525 a week people are paying. Likewise the average rent for a house in the area is now \$855 a week, a 4 per cent increase. These increases far outstrip increases in salaries over the same time, and a large part of the blame for these increases lies with the outrageously high property taxes that this government has imposed on Victorians.

It is renters in Prahran and across Victoria who are paying the price for these new and increased taxes. ABS stats show that the Allan Labor government's economic mismanagement and higher taxes and charges have led to inflation in the Melbourne area being higher in 2024 than in any other capital city except Perth. People tell me that it is not just rent and the cost of housing that is going up; food prices are going up, electricity prices are going up, transport prices are going up, insurance is going up – almost every household bill in this state is going up, and we are all feeling the pressure. State government fees for public transport and car registration are also going up to feed this government's addiction to higher taxes and out-of-control spending. At a time when Victorians are crying out for some relief from rising costs, this government simply makes it harder for them.

The great retail strips in my electorate like Chapel Street, Toorak Road, Commercial Road and Inkerman Street are suffering as a result of this government's appalling economic mismanagement. The tale is sadly similar across the whole state. People are finding it tough to keep a roof over their heads and put food on the table. They have reduced their discretionary spend, therefore hospitality is hurting, the entertainment industry is hurting, the rag trade is hurting, and as a result many retailers cannot even make ends meet. When they inevitably close their doors, as I have seen on Chapel Street, rising property taxes, especially land tax, make the rents unaffordable. With less shops in the area to attract customers, foot traffic drops, impacting on the profitability and viability of existing businesses.

The state government is smashing small businesses, and as a result the government is destroying jobs for all Victorians. According to the ABS, in February 2025 Victoria had the highest unemployment

rate in any state in Australia, at 4.6 per cent. That is much higher than the national unemployment rate of 4 per cent. It is tough enough for people who still have jobs to deal with the cost-of-living crisis caused by this government's reckless economic mismanagement. The challenge becomes almost impossible when people have lost their jobs. The social consequences of the government's economic failures are devastating across this whole state, but these consequences are highly visible in my electorate. They are in your face when you walk around, with more homeless people appearing every day on our local streets, rapidly rising levels of crime, brazen drug abuse in public – I recently posted about it – and in local parks and the continuing increase in family violence. These are the high-profile, highly visible consequences.

But behind closed doors there are financial problems causing increased mental health issues for many families. Mothers are telling me how their financial struggles are badly impacting on their children, who see their parents struggling to pay the bills and who sometimes have to give up their much-loved pets because they simply cannot afford to feed them. The impacts on these children can be devastating and long lasting. But as the cost-of-living crisis spirals out of control and as the social consequences of this crisis manifest in my electorate and across Victoria, this heartless government carries on and pretends that these very real issues and serious problems simply do not exist. 'Nothing to see here' is the mantra of this government. They continue to run massive deficits and they continue to increase taxes and charges.

They are already suggesting that there is more pain to come in the May budget, but for Victorians there is no gain at all from this pain. Despite the massive deficits, the government is not investing in more police to deal with rising crime and antisocial behaviour. It is not providing more crisis accommodation, especially for women and families fleeing domestic violence and for people facing homelessness, with waiting lists for priority housing blowing out rather than decreasing. The government is not investing in more mental health services or in more drug treatment facilities to allow people struggling with these problems to access the help that they need in a timely manner.

The member for Albert Park spoke about investment in schools. I would like to tell you about St Kilda Primary School. If this government had sufficient money they would be investing in a community hall for my local primary school. The 500 kids in my local primary school sit on the asphalt when they have an assembly, and if it is raining they have nowhere to sit. I would like to know where the investment is in my electorate. We need to pull down –

Members interjecting.

Rachel WESTAWAY: It is not funny, my colleagues across the other side of the chamber; it is a disgrace, to be frank. You are allowing the sale of the Windsor community childcare centre, affecting 100 families. In a cost-of-living crisis, how are those families expected to work if they do not even have basic facilities for child care or when people have got mental health issues? It is absolutely disgraceful. I have got friends in the school community that have had to move their kids out of the local area because they simply cannot afford to live in this local area. It is disgusting.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The house will come to order.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (17:22): I will just stand here for the next 10 minutes whilst they interject if they want.

Peter Walsh interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: I tell you what, Walshy, it will be better than any contribution you have ever made, mate. You have been here for 20 years – wowee.

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member knows to address people by their proper titles in this house. It is especially disrespectful for –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage all members to use correct titles. It is very hard to hear over the interjections, so the member to continue without assistance.

Dylan WIGHT: I cannot hear myself think, Deputy Speaker. The height of rudeness – wowee. It was quite a contribution by the new member for Prahran. I thought she had run out of puff about halfway through, but she brought it home strong, the blue vein coming out of the forehead and all. It was really Warrantdyte-esque, to be honest.

The member for Pascoe Vale should be somewhat offended. If you are going to steal somebody's homework, at least change it slightly. Two weeks ago we were debating a grievance exactly in reverse. I could pretty much open *Hansard* and word for word just speak the speech that I did two weeks ago. Honestly, when I opened this up yesterday evening I thought those opposite were taking the P155. They walked in here today with a matter of public importance that addresses cost of living in the same week that they came into the same chamber and voted against giving working families in Victoria rights over dodgy builders to save them from financial ruin. They come in here and they talk to us about cost of living. I mean, well, well, well, how utterly absurd: they have the audacity to come in here and give this government a lecture on cost of living when they are happy to see working Victorian families hit the wall and see their dream utterly destroyed because they want to protect some people in the building industry who are doing the wrong thing. I mean, really, it speaks volumes about this opposition. It speaks absolute volumes.

It is always great when the opposition stump this sort of stuff up because it just gives me a chance to speak for 10 minutes about how the Allan Labor government are supporting Victorian families. There are usually some interjections; I might go for 8½ minutes or so, but it gives me a whole bunch of time to talk about how the Allan Labor government is supporting Victorian families.

Let us start with our fair fuel policy. On 20 January this year the government announced its fair fuel plan, which included the launch of a new fuel finder app to address cost-of-living pressures. What we know is that shopping around is important, because data from the ACCC shows that Melbourne motorists could save up to \$333 a year. The member for Melton has spoken on this many, many times and on what happens there in Melton.

What we know is that some, not all, fuel providers, service station operators, are surging their prices. You can travel 10 kilometres between service stations that have bought the fuel at the same price and there will be a 30- or 40-cent-per-litre difference. We know that fuel prices go up before every single long weekend. You can bet your bottom dollar that before the Easter long weekend, fuel will be up around \$2 a litre. What have we done? We have made it easy for Victorians to compare fuel prices to make sure that they are getting the best deal and that they are getting the cheapest prices at the bowser. That is how you support Victorian families. That is how you support with the cost of living.

We can go on to the Victorian energy upgrades. We know that right now, like it or hate it, electricity is far cheaper as a fuel than gas is, so we have incentivised Victorians by, when their gas appliances are coming to the end of life, making it cost effective and incredibly cheap for them to move to electric appliances. If you have got an old gas hot water service that comes to the end of its life, through our incentives you can replace that with an electric hot water service, for very little electrical work, member for Narracan –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: because I have seen it, right? It costs no more than what it would cost to replace your existing gas hot water service with another gas hot water service. It costs no more. This whole nonsense from the member for Narracan about three-phase power – what, to replace a hot water service? Give me a break, member for Narracan.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Give me a break, member for Narracan. I mean, you clearly were not a sparky, mate. You were a chippy, no dramas.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, without assistance, member for Narracan.

Dylan WIGHT: To replace your existing hot water service – to try to stand up here and lie to us that you have got to rewire your whole house – I mean, give me a spell.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Narracan.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Kick him out, Deputy Speaker. He has been going all day.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Without reflections on the Chair please, member for Tarneit.

Dylan WIGHT: Indeed. Let us move on to our Victorian school saving bonus, which I have spoken on in this house many times, with \$400 for each student to help with those costs of uniforms, of excursions and of textbooks. I have seen all the way throughout my electorate kids in the west, kids in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing pimped out in their brand new school uniforms. A lot of these families would most certainly not have been able to afford those school uniforms.

I have spoken about a young girl that I spoke to at the Grange. She is one of five children in both primary school and high school right now. She does not come from a family of means. She is one of five kids. That means that for each of those kids the family has \$400 to be able to spend on school supplies and those school uniforms. Without that they do not have a new school uniform. Without that they do not have the capacity to go on excursions. The \$400 school saving bonus is absolute gold in my community, because it means that kids in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing that may not have had the opportunity to do so can participate in school fully. They can be proud of their brand new school uniform when they walk in the door and when they walk through the school gate. They can go on excursions and they can have textbooks. I have said it before. In 2026 – at the end of next year – if people have not figured it out, this is what is at stake.

Do you think those opposite care enough to be able to provide a \$400 school saving bonus to every Victorian schoolkid? Absolutely not. Do you think that those opposite, who still have many climate change deniers amongst them – I am not saying it is anybody at the table right now – are going to continue with the Victorian energy upgrade? No, they are not. What that means is that when an appliance comes to the end of its life, you are going to have to replace it with a gas appliance and you are going to be paying more for power every single month. That is what is at stake. What about free kinder? We are making sure that every Victorian child has access to three- and four-year-old kinder, because as the Victorian government we know, and all the research shows, that those early childhood educational years are absolutely paramount. The member for Werribee knows, because he is a local schoolteacher – and a CFA volunteer of the year, if you have not heard. The member for Werribee knows. Without a Victorian Labor government, do you really think that those opposite are going to continue with free kinder? Do you think they are going to continue with school breakfast clubs, making sure that every Victorian kid, regardless of how much money is in the bank, goes to school with a full stomach? We know that kids with a full stomach are able to learn better; they can concentrate and have better educational outcomes. All of these things – that is what is at stake at the 2026 election.

They can bang on about cost of living all they want. They have not had a cost-of-living policy in their life. They believe in government so small that I am surprised that any of them run for it. We have been supporting Victorian families since we came to government. We know that those opposite will not, and that is what is at stake in 2026.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (17:31): It is my pleasure to make a contribution to this matter of public importance put forward by the member for Evelyn. One of the matters raised in her submission

is of course around housing, and it will not come as a surprise to anyone in this chamber that that is what I will be focusing my commentary on today. I am very pleased that the shadow housing minister is at the table and very pleased that a former housing minister from the government side is at the table as well, because the problems we have in this sector are substantial, and whilst the government has made some inroads, there is so, so, so much more to do.

The reality is that permits do not build houses and press releases do not lay foundations, and a housing target without the follow-through is simply a broken promise. Victoria does not need more plans and processes, it needs more homes. Whilst the 80,000 homes target was ambitious, it was also, in my view, a necessary target. I would much rather have a government with some ambition putting a target out there and working towards a target, even if they have fallen short, than to have no target at all. But the reality is there is a shortfall, and the shortfall has significant consequences – consequences for families without shelter, families without safety, families without certainty. The 80,000 homes target from the government has made a difference but not anything like the substantial difference that we need. We need more shovels in the ground. We need the construction. We need houses and hallways and hope and not permits and paperwork and pain. We need real action that will create more homes for more Victorians. It is as simple as that. So I will be spending a little bit of time today talking about the things that are being done and the things that can be done to improve the situation.

These homes need to be built to increase supply, largely because supply of homes is one of the main catalysts for changes in price – supply goes up, prices come down. We want homes to be more affordable. I do not think there can be any doubt about that. Indeed, Alan Kohler's essay in *Quarterly Essay* recently spoke about the very simple fact – we all know it – that the median house price has now risen to about seven and a half times the annual household income. We are talking about circumstances where household income typically reflects two wage earners now, whereas once upon a time it reflected one or maybe one-point-something wage earners. That seven and a half times household income is up from three and a half times household income when Alan Kohler bought his first house in 1980 – from three and a half times what was probably a single income to seven and a half times what is probably a dual income.

Stockland, one of the biggest developers in the country, responsible for a very large number of greenfield housing estates, have said that their average first home buyer – a Stockland estate is very much the middle of the market within greenfields; not exorbitant, but also not the absolute entry level – is 32 years old.

Fourteen years after completing school maybe you get into a house in a greenfield estate. This is simply preventing under-30s from entering the housing market. It is institutionalising a generation of renters. It is creating a circumstance where a whole generation risk having no wealth to retire into after a lifetime of working. The current housing system presents a major change to how wealth is created and how it is passed on, or not passed on, generationally. This is an enormous economic challenge, it is an enormous social policy challenge and it is enormous cultural challenge. It is literally tearing at the fabric of what we understand it is to be Australian, what we understand it is to be Victorian.

The other thing is it is not enough to build more homes; we need to make sure that those homes are quality homes. I am very pleased that the Building Legislation Amendment (Buyer Protections) Bill 2025 is in this place, without in any way anticipating debate on that – I can see your screwed-up eyebrow there, Deputy Speaker. I am very pleased that the bill is before this chamber, and I will say no more. It is important always to have integrity in the construction industry, particularly if you are proposing to build 800,000 homes in a decade. But you need certainty for the industry, you need certainty for consumers. I have referred in this chamber to a recent experience with constituents of mine who bought these apartments and they have suffered major defects – water ingress, major structural problems, emergency and safety systems that simply have failed – and the developer has used his controlling numbers on the owners corporation to thwart any attempt to get those rectifications done. Any bill in this place introduced today will likely have prospective effect, not retroactive effect, and it is important that we recognise that there are a whole bunch of problems that have crystallised

already in the construction industry. We need to be live to making sure that those people are assisted as well as making sure that future purchasers of apartments do not run into the same issues.

I want to talk also about homelessness. Where the Shadow Minister for Housing and I might disagree is to what extent the private market is going to solve the shortage of rental properties. I heard Michael Sukkar speaking at a conference just yesterday and he railed against, to some degree, faceless corporations being your landlord. I think the build-to-rent sector is a very promising sector. I think it is delivering actual homes that people can live in where the structure of those buildings and the structure of those communities is far more conducive to long-term rentals than some of the other offerings we currently have in the market, particularly the offerings at the most vulnerable end of the market.

For as long as Australia and Australians treat housing as an investment class, not as a social good, you will continue to have problems. You will continue to have problems with the private market not being able to meet the needs – the very reasonable, the very explicable, the very defensible needs – of a whole bunch of Australians to simply have a place to call home, security, safety, stability and certainty. These are absolutely fundamental factors, and the needs of the private market are not always going to be consistent with those needs of the end user. We need to understand that housing is a social good, not just an investment class. Negative gearing – I heard Mr Sukkar say that you can negatively gear a share portfolio, so why shouldn't you be able to negatively gear a residential property? That analysis holds true if you think that residential property is just an investment class, but it is not. At the end of the day you do not need to own BHP, you need somewhere to live. The fundamentals are that these economic imperatives and the social imperatives are not the same, and I say to the shadow housing minister that the private sector has not got all the answers here. I say through you, Deputy Speaker, to the shadow minister that the private sector does not have all the answers. They will have some of the answers for sure. It might well be through build-to-rent. It might well be through exploring land lease models. It might well be through a bunch of other factors.

I want to talk specifically about a constituent that came into my office this week, a young mother in distressed circumstances – deadbeat dad, her mother had died. Her mother was evicted from her house the day after she died, and she, who had been looking after her mother, was facing homelessness.

She had a two-year-old and a five-month-old, and there we were in my office busily ringing every support service in the electorate, every church, every agency to try and find her accommodation for that night. Now, we were able to cobble together some short-term solutions and are in the process of putting together a solution that might look after her needs for a while, but to face the very real prospect of sleeping rough, sleeping in a car with a two-year-old and a five-month-old, is this really, really where we are happy to be as a city, a state and a nation, with all of the wealth and all of the opportunity that we have? It is an appalling set of circumstances that these things are even contemplated, let alone the lived reality for people not just in my electorate but right across the state. I am sure members right across this chamber can speak to circumstances of people finding themselves homeless that do not fall into the typical stereotypes about homeless people. These are people who have done nothing wrong. Circumstances have conspired against them, and to face the very real possibility of looking after a two-year-old and a five-month-old in an overstuffed car because we cannot even get them emergency accommodation – this crisis is real. The threat to people's long-term – and short-term, but clearly their long-term – welfare is real.

I have exhausted maybe a third of the notes I brought up to the chamber on this topic, and I could comfortably go for half an hour. Mercifully for members here, I will not. But let me say this: housing should be where you rest your head at night, it should be where you can raise your family and it should be a safe place, not an investment class. That is what the government needs to focus on.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (17:42): It is a pleasure to rise tonight to make a contribution on the matter of public importance raised by the very hardworking member for Evelyn. It is a shame she is not here, because I was hoping she would enjoy my contribution this evening. But I am delighted to have this

opportunity once again to speak to all that this Labor government is doing to help Victorians with the cost of living and ease pressure on household budgets. In particular I would like to focus initially on the fourth point raised by the member for Evelyn, that the state government has failed to implement any meaningful measures to ease cost-of-living pressures for Victorians. This cannot be further from the truth. In fact I wonder where the member for Evelyn has been, because if you have been paying attention, there is no way that you could miss everything that this Labor government is doing to ease cost-of-living pressures for Victorians. In fact we were speaking about this in the chamber just two weeks ago, and as the member for Tarneit mentioned earlier, in his contribution, he could repeat the speech that he delivered then and still be speaking to this matter of public importance and I could do the same. However, I will not. I thought I would take this opportunity to talk about some other things that this state government is doing to ease the cost of living, so I thought this would be a great opportunity to remind the member for Evelyn and all those opposite who are in the chamber with us right now of all the things that this government is doing to ease the cost of living for Victorians.

When it comes to supporting families our \$400 school saving bonus for every government school student is going down so well. This means that parents have \$400 to spend on school uniforms, on textbooks and on excursions and camps and other activities. It is \$400 that they do not have to find from the rest of their household budget. It is \$400 that they do not need to worry about. One of the best things about this is that for families where you have multiple students, it is cumulative. So it is \$400 for every student. If you have got three kids, that is \$1200 in your pocket, \$1200 that you did not have last year and \$1200 that you certainly would not have under a coalition government. When it comes to kinder, we are supporting families with free three- and four-year-old kinder, saving families up to \$2500 per child every single year, delivering that extra year of early childhood education for kids before they start their learning in school. Again, this is having a huge impact on household budgets.

We are also helping families who love the great outdoors and want to take the whole family out for a camping trip, whether it was over the summer holidays this year, the Easter holidays coming up or, if you are really brave, during the winter holidays later this year by making camping free in every national park and state forest in Victoria.

This is going to save families over \$7 million in booking fees. You can pack up the car, get your tent, get your swag or whatever it is and you do not have to worry anymore about having to pay to book a site. That is massive news for families, delivering even cheaper, affordable holidays for Victorians when they want them.

We have tripled the Glasses for Kids program. This is something I am really passionate about as someone who cannot see very well. Sometimes I think about: would I actually be good at maths if I could have read the whiteboard when I was in primary school and secondary school and maybe got my eyes checked before year 10 when I realised something was really wrong? This is massive for kids and families who need a bit of extra support with eye care in terms of providing free check-ups and also free glasses for kids, because glasses are expensive. Those costs rack up.

Of course there is our free breakfast clubs program that we are expanding to every single government school. This is on top of 40 million school breakfasts we have already delivered. All of the government schools in the Lara electorate are part of the school breakfast clubs program, and can I tell you that families love it, schools love it, students love it and teachers love it. They all love it for the same reason really, which is that kids are learning on a full tummy, and we know the difference that makes. It is not just the difference it makes to a child's education and their ability to learn in the mornings; it is also the difference that makes to a household budget. Imagine if you have got five kids and you suddenly do not have to worry about feeding them breakfast on school days because that is going to get taken care of at school with the school breakfast club. That is the exact kind of policy that Labor governments like this state Labor government are delivering.

Excitingly, with the school holidays coming up, we have delivered free zoo visits and Melbourne Museum entry for kids under 16. I know some of my colleagues have had the opportunity to see the

new elephant enclosure at Werribee Zoo. The member for Wendouree and the member for Point Cook are big fans, and I am sure they will be visiting with their families and their kids over the school holidays.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Ella GEORGE: Already done, member for Point Cook? I hope your son really enjoyed that.

Of course we have got our Get Active Kids \$200 vouchers for kids who are participating in sport. Again a really simple thing that governments can do is to support active recreation and to support families with those costs that come along with playing footy, playing soccer or playing netball – covering costs for uniforms, for equipment or for special shoes that you need. We all know that kids grow quickly and they grow out of those expensive shoes, so to have the ability for families to apply for this voucher in every single round is amazing. I know it is something that is taken up so widely across the Lara electorate.

Another area where we are doing so much work in terms of easing that cost of living for families and for students in particular is around providing cheap, accessible public transport. This is so important for young people, in particular in the Lara electorate. I am thinking about all those school leavers who have just finished year 12 and are thinking about university. We do have a great university in Geelong in Deakin University, and we have an amazing TAFE in the Gordon. But sometimes there are courses and programs that Geelong students want to access in Melbourne, and what we have done is we have made that cheaper. It is around \$5 a day now to travel up to Melbourne, so that is about \$25 a week if you are heading there five days a week on a concession. If you have to pay full fees for your tickets, maybe as someone who is a bit older and working full time in Melbourne, that trip is now \$10 a day or \$50 a week. Two years ago that was \$150 a week. That is a massive saving of \$100 if you are travelling from Geelong into Melbourne every day for work. That is real cost-of-living relief.

Real cost-of-living relief is what we are delivering on this side of the chamber and what those opposite do not have a plan for, they do not have any ideas for. They put up a matter of public importance about this, on an issue that we spoke about two weeks ago. Like I said, I am really pleased that I have this opportunity to speak on this again and to raise some of the other things that this Labor government is doing to ease the cost of living for Victorians, for young people, for families, for every household.

Again, for young people we have got free L-plate and P-plate licences and online testing and free 60-minute driving lessons for Victorian L-platers between 16 and 19 years of age. That is massive for families who might be struggling at the moment, might be finding things a bit tougher than usual. To be able to have access to those free lessons and free tests really, really makes a difference.

I have a confession to make. When I went for my Ps I think it actually took me three goes to get them. It did. I was not very good. It is a bit embarrassing, isn't it? But I got there eventually and it is safe to say that I am an excellent driver now, so maybe I just needed a little bit of extra practice at the time. Practice does make perfect. I actually have a question for the minister, which I will raise with her at a later point. If you fail your P-plate licence test that is free from the government, do you get a second go for free? I am not actually sure, but for someone like me who failed a couple of times that might be a great policy to introduce.

In other initiatives that we are doing to address the cost of living we have introduced free TAFE courses. Thousands and thousands and thousands of students are accessing these. We have introduced free midwifery and nursing courses and free teaching degrees so that students who are interested in these careers, where we need workers the most, do not have to pay their HECS debt. But that is not all, and I am conscious that I only have a minute left. I really could speak all day about everything that this government is doing to help Victorian families with the cost of living.

We had a really exciting announcement today around affordable school uniforms, and the Premier and the Deputy Premier announced changes to student dress codes to ban school logos on shorts, pants,

skirts and socks in Victorian government schools. This is a fantastic initiative and one that I know will go down so well in the Lara electorate. It is again something small that we can do to help families with the cost of living. But all of these different things really add up when you think about the entire package of cost-of-living relief that we are delivering on this side. All of these initiatives make a difference, because on this side of the house we have a plan. We have a plan to address the cost of living. We do not have a silly matter of public importance that is not going to get us very far and that we all heard about two weeks ago.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:52): Once again I find myself in the last place for this vitally important matter of public importance, and that gives me the chance to listen to all the other speakers. We are taking the Melbourne International Comedy Festival into the chamber it seems this week. There have been a couple of very comedic performances. The member for Tarneit was one. I thought, 'He's obviously been to a comedy show last night.' With the member for Pascoe Vale, there would have been a red flag or two go up with the props that he presented. Some questions might need to be asked about his obsession with the member for Nepean, with a whole scrapbook being presented. Again, I do hope security have noted that little red flag and look into that. Also, while we are on it, he brought up the mother tongue of our people, the Italians. I have a few more Italian words; I am not sure you would consider them parliamentary, so I might see how the rest of this goes and then bring them up.

But this is a vitally important matter of public importance. In fact, according to Victorians on the ground, it is the most important issue that we have by a long, long way. Cost of living and crime, make no mistake, are issues that have come about because of poor policy decisions by the Allan Labor government. There is no other cause for this. It is poor policy, and then to brush over these cost-of-living pressures with little token bonuses of \$400 for school or electricity, when your electricity bill has gone up, according to the ABS, 30 per cent in the last year, a measly little payment here and there, a little bit of an offset or a little tip here and there does not offset the pressures week to week when people are living pay cheque to pay cheque.

Should I start on small business? I spent 12 years running my own small business before entering this place, and every year, particularly toward the end and through COVID, it got harder and harder, to the point where it was near impossible to operate a small business in this state, especially when you have 60 new or increased taxes and have all of the extras. Depending on the industry, it is just so hard. I hear this on a weekly basis. Small businesses feel like they are being pushed out of business in this state, and rightly so, when it gets so hard.

Mind you, they can go and set up in New South Wales 5 minutes away and have access to the same market, the same Victorian infrastructure and those things that taxpayers are paying for, but it is much easier to do business in New South Wales.

While we are on it, let us talk about agriculture and how hard it is to produce food in this state. In the electorate of Mildura, which is the food bowl of this country – I know the member for Murray Plains thinks his is, but honestly. While I am on the member for Murray Plains, while the member for Tarneit was performing his comedy show skit before, I noticed I was actually personally offended. I do not want to get all mother-like on the member for Murray Plains, but there is one person in here that can get away with that. Sorry, you just cannot have a go at the member for Murray Plains; I take offence at that. You cannot do it; that is my job and mine only.

Getting back to agriculture, I hear this day in, day out. In Mildura last week we had a delegation from India, who are our major export partners for the almond industry. We grow 60 per cent of Australia's almonds in my patch. The other 40 per cent comes from the Riverland just over an hour away in South Australia. There is a reason that almond growers are corporate farms, to be fair, because it is so expensive to grow any food – for table grape growers as well. This was a conversation that was had the entire time last week, the entire week – the cost of audits, the increasing cost of the workforce, the issues with the Labour Hire Authority, water and illegal housing.

The Labour Hire Authority has created its own emergency, and it will occur very soon, with illegal housing construction. I have written to the minister about this – illegal extensions to house people on top of one another, making it incredibly unsafe, because the labour that is needed is vast, because we grow so much food at an incredible expense. But the housing that they are kept in now is insanely unsafe, and there will end up being a fatal disaster. I had a 52-year veteran of the CFA take me out to have a look at some of these houses last week, and it is horrific.

This leads me to the CFA and the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund and that levy rate increase of, as the member for Lowan said, 189 per cent. This is another levy. Particularly farmers, who can have multiple blocks, are faced with a 189 per cent rate increase. That is going to literally strangle some growers. They have already talked about it.

Meanwhile we have got long-term rental houses coming off the property market. We now have generational farms going onto the property market, and who is there to buy those generational farms? No-one, because you cannot get into farming. It is too expensive, and those generational farmers are walking off. What does that do for food security? They are growing food. The policy decisions of the Allan Labor government want to not only rip up the farmland to put in power lines, wind turbines, solar farms, batteries – if we stay there, the rates we have to pay on that land are simply not viable, and you have also got supermarkets that do not look after the farmers. It is just getting so, so hard.

Then we have got our CFA volunteers and SES volunteers, who do such amazing work. They are the backbone, the spine, the stomach and the heart of regional and rural communities. It is the 80th anniversary of the CFA today; it is right that I give them a shout-out on their 80th anniversary.

But they have had the guts ripped out of them. They struggle to get a bottle of water when they are out there fighting bushfires or grassfires. Things are dry out there. Farmers cannot afford to spend the chemical to spray. I implore members on the other side to leave the city every now and then. Honestly, come and have a look. I will take you for a drive. Come and have a look at how dire things are at the minute. There is life beyond the freeways, I promise you. That is where we are growing your food, and I know it will hurt when you cannot get your almond milk lattes and your avocado on sourdough bread, because we grow all that but at the moment it is drying up.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

Jade BENHAM: It is far too expensive to grow the food, which means it is far too expensive for people to buy the food. Here you are talking about how you are giving Victorians this much here and that much there –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Mildura.

Jade BENHAM: That is just insane and people are frustrated, which is why when you ask Victorians in this state what their biggest issue is they say cost of living.

The member for Pascoe Vale, who I am disappointed is not in the chamber right now, mentioned – I think he was referring to the member for Nepean – another Italian word earlier. I said I have got a few others. When I talk about this there are quite a few Italian words that come to mind, most of which I cannot say, Deputy Speaker, and I will not. But every Italian in this state at the moment is thinking ‘stronzo!’

Bills

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

Second reading

Debate resumed.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (18:02): I rise to speak on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. This is a bill that covers a

whole range of different things, but I want to talk particularly about scooters and some of the challenges we have got around these scooters, because we see these scooters being used quite a lot and they are very popular mode of transport. But we do need to ensure that we get the balance right, particularly around ensuring that there is proper regulation around these scooters.

We have seen lots of incidents with some of these scooters, and I have seen it a lot around my electorate, where get people that think, ‘Great, this is a quick mode of transport,’ and they use an operator. I differentiate between those people that have a scooter at home, who are more familiar with their scooter, and those that use them through a sharing mechanism, which is largely what we are talking about in this bill. There are real concerns that there are some good operators and some not good operators, and part of what the bill is trying to do is harmonise that to ensure that there is proper regulation.

I also want to recognise our Polish contingent who are here today. I know I cannot necessarily recognise people in the gallery, but our Polish contingent are very much into looking at new technology, new schemes and industry. In a roundabout way, when you talk about transport there is a huge industry and innovation piece in that as well.

Getting back to scooters, the issue is particularly around needing those operators to operate in such a manner that you know when you are using one of their scooters they have got almost like a tick of approval. That is quite important, because you can always in any industry get somebody that is a better operator than others and you want to ensure that the equipment that you are using is safe, that it has been through its proper standards and there are some mechanisms in place so when you are hiring one of these scooters you are able to do so with peace of mind in terms of what it does.

The other part of this is dealing with some of the problems of the user. I call that largely user error. We do need to be mindful of that because, coming back to where I was going earlier, I have witnessed a number of incidents where people have been very lucky not to do more serious damage than they have done.

In fact only late last year I was coming home and there was a middle-aged gentleman that was laid out under a truck. He was on his scooter and must have seen the truck, and he literally hit the truck from behind. The scooter was under the car, and he was laid out on the ground. Thankfully, he did not sustain any major injuries, but again, knowing the power of these things and knowing the potential of not being able to manage them properly, they can lead to all kinds of scenarios. That is one of the issues.

There are regulations which talk about the speeds at which these scooters travel. I think it is 20 or maybe 30 kilometres per hour. I am looking at the people in the box in terms of what the speed limits are – 20 kilometres per hour. That is what I thought. Over 20 kilometres per hour, they effectively become a licensed product, like a licensed vehicle, and they have a different set of regulations than those under 20 kilometres per hour.

There are people who will take a scooter and try to ramp it up to go beyond that speed limit, so going forward it is really important for us to monitor this to ensure that there are safety mechanisms in place. I know from talking to members of Victoria Police and members of the health industry that even in trying to monitor some of the injuries sustained from these scooters we still do not have enough data quite yet in terms of where things are going and what some of the issues are in terms of health and safety with these products coming to market. It is really important. I am not saying that they are not an important mode of transport, but I think the jury is still out in terms of what we need to do to ensure safety both for the user and more broadly for Victorians that might come into contact with somebody on a scooter. It will be very interesting to understand that.

There are other examples. If you look at Queensland, for instance, their roads and footpaths are flatter terrain, so they have less issues than we might have in our state. In terms of ensuring those standards are right, it is really important to understand that we need to monitor some of the problems connected

with it. I note that our Shadow Minister for Transport, the member for Bulleen, is quite passionate about the industry more broadly. It is really important when talking about transport to get things right, and this is one of them.

While I am on transport more generally, I think the government has missed a lot of opportunities when it comes to transport. I know it is not specifically in this bill, but it is a missed opportunity that it is not in this bill, and that is to look at how we get better connectivity. I think when you are looking at modes of transport you need better connectivity. If you are looking particularly at people in the west and in the north, they have missed out on some of that connectivity that they should have. Particularly when you look at the west you still have a lot of transport means that are running on diesel. We do not have electrification. It is part of the debate that I think we should be having now: how do we fund that? How do we ensure that, no matter where you are, whether you are in the north, whether you are in the west, whether you are in some of our growth corridors or whether you are in regional Victoria, you get your fair share of transport? I do not think we do that well here in Victoria. We could be doing that a lot better.

I do note, and I know that it is a point of difference between the opposition and the government, that the Premier said today that we are the side of politics that does not support the Suburban Rail Loop. I think that is probably a fair assessment. We have said that. We have said that because, number one, Victoria cannot afford it and, number two, when you put all your money and all your eggs into one basket, other people miss out. That is what has happened in Victoria. A lot of people have missed out on ensuring that they have their modes of transport properly taken care of, so I think that is something we need to look at going forward. Infrastructure Victoria have done some really good reports in terms of predicting the needs of transport, modes of transport and connectivity of transport, and I think that could be a really good starting point. Infrastructure Australia have made some commentary as well.

I think we should do better when it comes to using these major bodies. I know it was something the government did under former Premier Andrews, in terms of getting Infrastructure Victoria established, but I do note there is a lot of work that Infrastructure Victoria do that this government ignores. I think the government would pay themselves a good service to actually listen. If you are going to set up a body, if you are going to spend a whole lot of money on it and if you are going to put experts together, why would you ignore them? Why wouldn't you use them, when effectively it is your own policy and your own body? That is a huge missed opportunity by this government.

I think Victorians are probably waking up to see that when you have politicised transport options to literally win votes in different pockets at the expense of everybody else, ultimately all Victorians miss out. I do note that back in 2014 both Liberal and Labor went to the election talking about level crossings. We had 40; Labor had 50. I certainly understand that 50 always beat 40, and that was a key element in why Labor won the election back in 2014. But those level crossings, just like transport options, should not be just about one pocket of an area but should be across the state. All Victorians will recognise that you can solve transport options, whether it be in Warrnambool, Gippsland, Warragul or Prahran, right across the board. No matter who you are or where you are, you should be able to have the same kind of options when it comes to public transport, and that does not happen. Connectivity is important, and reliability, and we do not get those either. We have got a tram system, we have got a bus system and we have got a train system that still do not connect up, and that is a real missed opportunity. These other modes of transport like scooters are all great, but ultimately we have got to ensure that all Victorians get their fair share, and that is something that I still think Victoria misses out on.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (18:12): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. In the last few years we really have seen quite a revolution in this space of e-scooters. This new mode of transport is now in our daily lives and many find it a great way to get around their neighbourhoods in an efficient, convenient and really an environmentally friendly way as well. It has transformed the way that we are moving around our cities and our towns. In that short amount of years we have seen more people

taking up and buying their own private e-scooters, and we have tourists who visit and use the share schemes that are out there.

I see it across the Bellarine. We do not have a shared scheme in the Bellarine, but we certainly have many who use their own private e-scooters. I see it often with them going to their workplaces, or it may be students. I hope they are over 16. I am sure they are, because those are the rules and the law. They often use them, and I see them. It is a concern, though, some of the behaviour that I have seen locally from people who use e-scooters. They are certainly very vulnerable on our roads. We have a group called bSafe, which is a community group that meets with local police. E-scooters and the behaviour of e-scooter drivers have been raised at those meetings. Local police are certainly keeping an eye out for those doing the wrong thing. A majority do do the right thing, but I really want to emphasise that it is a really important issue for my community, and we want to make sure everyone is safe on our roads. We want to make sure that everyone gets home safely. As more and more scooters come onto our roads, we need to make sure that there are plenty of people who are aware of the law and the rules around them but also aware of the behaviours of others to make sure everyone is safe on our roads.

As I have said, there are some challenges with this innovation of e-scooters. We need to make sure that e-scooter users and the shared schemes are being responsible and are taking responsibility for safety and considering others around them, especially pedestrians.

Interestingly, through the last inquiry undertaken by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which I am on, we had a look at the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users and we did hear from a couple of e-scooter users. Unfortunately we did not get to hear from some of those larger shared-scheme companies that would have given a real good voice, a really important voice to that inquiry. We did not hear from those, but we did hear from pedestrians and other road users about e-scooters now being on our roads.

It is unrelated really to the COVID pandemic, but these shared schemes were introduced just after the pandemic. What we learned through the inquiry was our behaviour has changed on our roads. All road users have changed in their behaviour. E-scooters were introduced and there was a new form of transport, and adjusting to that change in a very quick, short amount of time was a challenge for a lot of councils. It was a challenge for government and a challenge for users to understand what exactly the rules were. Councils told us that an education piece was certainly needed. We then, as a government, announced that the trial would conclude in October 2024, and we would permanently allow that sharing scheme and private e-scooters to operate across Victoria.

One of the e-scooter users who did present to the inquiry was Patrick. I just want to quote what Patrick said a little bit about how he felt on the road using an e-scooter. He was concerned about his safety. He said he began to use an electric scooter on Victorian roads in early 2020 and since then he has travelled more than 3200 kilometres according to his e-scooter odometer. He cannot compare pre-COVID and post-COVID, but he said that he experienced multiple life-threatening collisions caused by motorists which deserved to be investigated by the committee. On top of these serious incidents, he had been subject to countless instances of unsafe driver behaviour and road rage. On three separate occasions, motorists had failed to give way to him at roundabouts while he was riding an electric scooter. These incidents represented a life-threatening risk to cyclists, scooter riders and motorcyclists.

What I want to indicate today in this contribution is that through that inquiry we did hear about these instances. We ended up with some recommendations for government to consider when we tabled the final report, and one of the recommendations was for the Department of Transport and Planning to develop an education campaign to reach all road users, including school children, about road rules relating to e-scooters. I have not had a chance to talk to this in this place as yet, but the government

has responded to that inquiry, and they supported this recommendation in full. I will just quote the response that was sent from the government in response to that recommendation:

The Victorian Government acknowledges that the rapid rise in e-scooter usage has outpaced public awareness of relevant regulations, contributing to crashes or near misses. Educating all road users, including schoolchildren, can help foster a clear understanding of e-scooter rules and promote a culture of safety and responsibility as the transport landscape evolves.

As part of legalising e-scooter use and ending the trial in October 2024, DTP ... developed and delivered a two-stage e-scooter safety campaign, the first of its kind in Victoria. The first stage was a functional campaign informing the community about legislative changes including the new and changed penalties. The second stage was a behavioural campaign which targeted high-risk and illegal e-scooter behaviours, highlighting the dangers of these behaviours and providing a rationale for the e-scooter laws. This stage of the campaign also included information targeting parents ...

What I want to highlight is about the changes that we have seen, the recommendations the inquiry has been able to present and about how government are acting on those and how we are doing that work. That is what this bill is also about. While this bill does focus on those share-scheme operators, I just want to touch on a little bit about what the bill will do for them particularly.

Operators of the schemes do have a role to play. They need to ensure that the road rules are followed and that they do not adversely impact the amenity of the local area. We want to make sure that this bill is delivering on safety and compliance, so under the framework, operators of e-scooter sharing schemes are going to be required to comply with safety standards and obtain an approval from the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning in addition to the existing requirement of having an agreement with a local council. Existing and new operators are required to apply, and that pre-approval process is about supporting local councils in selecting the right scheme operators. It gives everyone that confidence that everyone is going to be doing the right thing. The sharing schemes, though, are to address those issues. Operators are required to implement technologies and systems and other safety measures and to set a standard that will be mandatory.

We know e-scooters are going to be part of the landscape and the transport system for many more years, and regulation of these e-scooters is very important. While e-scooters, as I have commented, are privately owned as well, they are becoming a common way to get around, and these schemes and the operators need to ensure that they are part of the solution, as they have a critical role in ensuring that the road rules are being followed and that their devices, those e-scooters, are not adversely impacting the amenity of the local area. By providing evidence that they can meet the safety standards and that they are fit and proper to be engaged in a scheme, operators are going to support local councils in selecting the right share scheme operators. With this bill, together with the operators, we are going to ensure that this mode of transport continues to be a safe path.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (18:22): I am happy to rise today to talk about the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. We on this side of the chamber do not oppose this bill, and we understand why the government is bringing this bill in. I did a bill briefing with the government, which was quite informative.

Congratulations to the member for Bulleen for managing to drag this out for half an hour; that was no mean feat. We all did a wonderful tour of the member for Bulleen's e-scooter adventures around the world. But he did educate us, and e-scooters and e-bikes are going to be a part of our future. I think we can all accept that. I do agree with the member for Bulleen's sentiments; I do not understand why Melbourne City Council said they do not want them anymore.

I have had occasion to jump on an e-scooter, and I will admit, before everyone starts sledging me, it did struggle getting up Collins Street. I was probably about 12 kilos heavier and I do not think it was fully charged – that was the problem. Well, that is the excuse I am going to use. But I am actually a fan of the e-scooters and the e-bikes. I think they are great, and I would love to see them in my area in regional Victoria. I know they are in Ballarat; I think the member for Wendouree pointed that out earlier. They are in Ballarat, and I think it is great – I really do. I think they are a great thing.

But this comment I will make: I think we need to get them into the city more. It will ease congestion if you can just jump on an e-scooter and go from site to site and whatever. But we have rules and regulations when you are on a bike. A car has to be 1.5 metres away from a bike. The problem we have in the City of Melbourne is that you cannot do that around the whole city. Collins Street is a very good example. If you come up Collins Street, I think the bike lane is only about 600 mil wide and the car is right there, so it is impossible to get that distance of 1.5 metres between the appliance you are riding, whether it be a scooter or a bike, and the actual traffic.

When they were being trialled in Melbourne they were not meant to be on footpaths, they were not meant to do this, they were not meant to do that. I was down at Southbank, and you would see them zipping through Southbank. If the City of Melbourne had put a little bit more thought into this and said they can go on paths but we have to restrict their speed, that would have been one way to resolve the problem where we cannot legally have them on the road with that legal distance from car to scooter or bike.

I did travel with the member for Bulleen. We were in Buenos Aires, and they have a very good system. It took me about 2 hours to download the Ecobici app. What they have over there are stations where you would grab the appliance, whether it be a scooter or a bike, and you would take off and you would have your phone sitting there – it was all GPS – and it would tell you where to park the scooter or the bike. It is a very, very good system. We went to various meetings on bikes and scooters and everything else, but that system worked very, very well.

I looked at Buenos Aires, and when we saw the e-scooters and bikes in Melbourne, it was messy. There is no doubt about that. You see them littered anywhere. People would just get off and leave them and move on. If the City of Melbourne or any local government area decided to seriously bring these in – these stations, ports or whatever you want to bring them to – they are a good way to tidy up that process and make the operators responsible for those bikes coming back. It could be as easy as if somebody does not leave a bike at a station and it has been out there for X amount of time, then they cop a fine. It could come automatically off their debit card or credit card that they have logged on with. That is how it is in Buenos Aires. You would have to log on and pay for your time, and when you parked it in a station, you logged off. It is a really good system. If you did not do that, you would get a fine – more money would come off your credit card. It is one way to encourage tourists to abide by the rules.

The other part of this bill which I think is a not a bad thing is it gives PSOs the ability to fine people for not wearing helmets or doing the wrong thing. I am quite curious as to how the PSOs are going to catch them. I am sure there is a solution there somewhere, but I do not know how they are going to catch someone scooting along at 30 k an hour without a helmet on. Maybe they will be praying they will fall off and they can just pick them up. I am sure there will be a solution in this. I am not bagging out the bill; I am just saying I cannot see how they are going to do it. I am sure they will figure it out. They might be fit and run faster than I do. But the PSOs coming in is a good idea, and Victoria Police are on board with that. I think it is a very positive thing.

E-scooters are good for tourism, they really are. If we had e-scooters around here, the tourists could start down at Marvel and work their way up. They could go to Southbank, go to the tennis, go to the MCG. They could ride them up here to Spring Street. Provided we have got the stations for them to park at, I think they are a good idea. As I said earlier, I would love to see these in Baw Baw shire in my electorate. We have a great path that links the two towns, and I could see this being a positive thing.

The only setback that I could see around my area is the fact that we could only have them on roads if our road edges were maintained. The problem once you get into regional Victoria and you get around the roads in my area is obviously with the road verges, the potholes and those types of things. I think if the government did invest more in roads – we know they have cut money on roads –and if they did invest in these regional areas to extend the sides of the roads and fix the potholes, this would be a good

way of bringing active transport into regional Victoria. That is a great idea. I think the government needs to look at that investment to get these roads up to speed so active transport can become more popular. If active transport becomes more popular, we are using less cars and producing less emissions. We are all about a better environment, so I would like to see investment from the government in that.

When we were in Chile, in Santiago, me and the member for Bulleen, he did hop on this scooter. He could not sleep. It was quite funny. He decided to jump on this scooter at 4 o'clock in the morning. It must have been about 2 or 3 degrees, and he rode it around Santiago. To be honest, he probably looked like a bit of a fool because he would have been the only one out there on a scooter at that time of the morning, but he rode it all the way up this mountain and back. I saw him when he got back, and he was frozen like a popsicle. He did not think it was a good idea after he got back at 6 am.

The fact is that in Chile and in Buenos Aires, in the two countries we went to, they actively encourage people to use these appliances and these devices. The member for Bulleen stated earlier that in Santiago traffic congestion dropped by 30 per cent. That is a positive, and I am sure we would all hope that in Melbourne the traffic congestion drops. We have got a bit of work to do there, but if these could take the pressure off our traffic congestion and if people can use them safely – and this is what this bill is about. It is bringing the regulation in so the local government authorities can sort their stuff out. It is bringing the regulation in so whoever is providing the e-scooters or e-bikes has to abide by that. Having GPS systems so that if they are in certain areas they can restrict the speed of the scooter, that is a positive thing too, because at times they cannot always be on the road. At times they do have to go onto a path. If they go onto a path and they have got to be restricted to walking pace – 5, 10 kilometres an hour, something like that – that is a positive thing.

The government had to do something like this. Maybe one criticism is that it could have been done 12 months earlier, but it is here now. We do not oppose the bill. We think it is a good bill. It is a step in the right direction. I think that going forward in Victoria, not just the CBD but regional Victoria as well, we will need these regulations so that the people that are providing these vehicles have to abide by a certain set of rules. Community safety is important in this. We do know from the trials they did in Melbourne that there were a lot of complaints from people saying e-scooters were going too fast here and there, they are left everywhere, and the city is messy because there are green scooters lying all over the place. But this is a step in the right direction. As I said, we do not oppose the bill, and I will leave it up to the next one to have a chat.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (18:32): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. I will start by saying I have not been scooting around the world anywhere.

Kat Theophanous interjected.

Chris COUZENS: No. The last scooter I was on was a manual scooter when I was a kid, so it is all new technology to me. But we know how popular they are, and in a city like Geelong – north facing, with waterfront, probably the most beautiful place to visit –

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Chris COUZENS: apart from Frankston of course –

Members interjecting.

Chris COUZENS: and Tarneit and, okay, everywhere else included. It is really important that we ensure that there is the safety required when we are on these scooters. In Geelong we have so many tourists and so many locals that would really benefit from using whether they be e-bikes or e-scooters or whatever – in this case, e-scooters – when moving around from restaurants and from bars.

A member interjected.

Chris COUZENS: Yes, up Malop Street, obviously not intoxicated because you are not allowed to be. For tourists coming into our city being able to move around easily to the different sites – over to the footy at Kardinia Park when the Cats are playing at home or to the Geelong Arts Centre or down to the waterfront, where we have some fantastic restaurants – on those e-scooters will be a real benefit.

I know that particularly young people enjoy using those e-scooters. I want to make sure that there are the safety aspects in place, because sometimes they are going a bit too fast or they have not got their helmets on. This just reinforces the importance of the safety aspect when we are talking about e-scooters. In parts of Geelong there have been some pretty horrific accidents on e-scooters, unfortunately, mostly to do with young people not wearing helmets and not following the guidelines that you would expect them to follow when riding a bike or riding a scooter, and they have had tragic consequences.

For me it is really important that we reiterate the importance of that safety aspect, but also, around Geelong, for example, there is a real push to build more housing in the CBD. We have about 2500 to 3000 people living in the CBD at the moment and we aim to increase that to about 16,000 over the next 10 years. So with that in mind, the e-scooters will be even more important. People will rely on them to move around the city. From the railway station, for example, with people travelling and commuting into Melbourne for work or whatever it might be, there will be a heavier reliance on them, which is a really positive thing. Environmentally it is much better. It reduces carbon emissions, which is something we have been working towards for a very long time. But as I said, it also enables people, from young people through to older people, to use those e-scooters safely – just like the member for Frankston did for his campaign, I believe. He told me he used an e-scooter to get around.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Chris COUZENS: I will not take your thunder. But it just goes to show how useful they are and that they can be of real benefit to our community right across the different age groups.

The current regulatory framework for e-scooter riding in Victoria is the strongest compared to other jurisdictions, promoting the responsible use of e-scooters on the transport network. These rules are practical, safety focused and aligned with international best practice. We have heard a lot about people scooting around in other countries. While many e-scooters are privately owned, a common way for riders to use e-scooters is through the app-based sharing schemes. Under these schemes devices are available for hire in public places. We see them around. We have got some in Geelong and they are being well and truly utilised. But again, for me it comes back to safety, and that is what this bill is about. Operators who have these schemes have a role to play in ensuring that the road rules are followed and that they do not adversely impact the amenity of the local areas their devices are available in. We often see bikes and scooters lying on the streets, so there needs to be some way of addressing those issues as well.

The bill delivers on the Allan Labor government's commitment to improve e-scooter safety and compliance through amendments to the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 by setting up a prequalification regulatory framework for prospective share scheme operators. Under the framework operators of these e-scooter sharing schemes will be required to comply with safety standards and obtain approval from the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning, in addition to the existing requirement of having an agreement with the local council.

I think the other part to all this is around affordability. Not everyone can afford to have a car, and in fact we are encouraging people not to use cars. We are talking about cycling and active transport. We need better bike paths and that sort of infrastructure to encourage people to do that, and that is something I have been pushing the City of Greater Geelong on for a very long time actually. I think that affordability is really important for my community. I know there are many people that cannot afford cars and they rely on public transport, but if they are living within an area where they can go and do their shopping, whether it is down Pakington Street in Geelong West or in the CBD of Geelong,

they only need an e-scooter or a pushbike to be able to get from place to place to do their shopping or go to appointments or whatever they might be doing. So that affordability issue is really important.

The other thing too is that when we talk about building more housing in the CBD, we are not putting in the number of car parks per apartment, for example, because we expect people to use public transport and to use things like e-scooters and bikes.

This is a really important one for my community. I know that there is a lot of interest in e-scooters and e-bikes, but we absolutely need to have the infrastructure and rules in place to ensure that people are safe when they are using those e-scooters. It was interesting to see the two-year trial that took place in Melbourne. There were 3.7 million people using the e-scooters. My good friends in Ballarat, who are not here at the moment, had 200,000 people. Geelong is twice the size of Ballarat, so you can imagine how much of an interest there will be in the community of Geelong. The community have embraced e-scooters. Because of the shorter travel options, they can move around safely.

As I said, we are really conscious of accidents that occur. Whether it is running into a pedestrian or running into another vehicle on an e-scooter, we need to be really mindful of that and have those rules in place so people actually understand how dangerous it is for them to be irresponsible, firstly, and, secondly, not to wear protective gear such as a helmet if they do impact with a pedestrian or a vehicle while they are riding their scooter. I just think it is great for our communities. It reduces traffic congestion and improves air quality. It is the safe and sustainable transport system that our communities need. I know it fits for Geelong absolutely perfectly, so I do commend this bill to the house.

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (18:42): I rise today to contribute to the debate on this bill concerning e-mobility in Victoria, the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025. Whilst I acknowledge the government's intent to regulate this growing sector, I urge the government to consider futureproofing this legislation to ensure it is effective and practical and does not create unintended risks for or burdens on Victorians. One of the key issues that must be resolved through this legislation is parking and designated storage for e-mobility devices. Let me be clear, being the member for Prahran: we are an inner-city suburb. We are a small, very condensed electorate with lots of people. It is easy to get around, but e-scooters and e-bikes are perfect for our electorate. It is a high-density area of 11 square kilometres.

I do not oppose the amending legislation, but I do believe we need to consider other elements to this as well. Without sufficient infrastructure these devices can cause obstructions and safety concerns. The member for Geelong mentioned the issue with helmets and accidents that she had seen, and that is a concern for me as well. The provision of this infrastructure should not just be a burden for governments. State and local governments should work together with e-mobility providers to solve these challenges. Convenient and orderly parking is also essential to community acceptance and the long-term viability of e-mobility. Around the world we have seen examples of successful collaboration between governments, local councils and providers to introduce designated e-mobility parking zones, and that is something that we should be considering. In addition to that, digital geofencing and initiative-based user compliance, parking zone enforcement, use of GPS technology and photo verification and incentive models like ride credits could also be considered to encourage responsible parking. These are reasonable expectations for providers.

QR code technology has already been proven effective, with Hello Bike, a provider of e-bikes, successfully managing over 15,000 bikes in Singapore using this model, and it is something we should be considering. In addition, the question must be asked: when will the Victorian government follow the lead of London, Paris and more recently New South Wales in supporting on-street parking and infrastructure that enable safe, scalable e-mobility programs? This legislation should not just identify the issues but provide a framework that empowers local councils and providers to work together on practical solutions that benefit the community.

Local government will need to begin to incorporate e-mobility planning into their broader transport and infrastructure strategies, ensuring integration with existing public space and safety considerations.

As electric micromobility becomes even more widespread, battery safety must be part of the legislative conversation, especially as the bill seeks to establish minimum standards for shared vehicle operations. Victoria has an opportunity to lead by initiating a formal discussion on safe charging infrastructure, quality control for lithium batteries and public education for battery recycling. A recent article in the *Age* by Rachel Eddie revealed that almost 90 per cent of Victoria's multistorey apartment buildings do not meet fire safety standards, largely because property owners struggle to maintain increasingly complex systems, leaving residents at risk. Without clear thinking from government this legislation could well add even more risk.

New York City is another example that is proactively addressing this with its Charge Safe, Ride Safe action plan. This includes the introduction of battery safety laws and enforcement mechanisms, a pilot for public battery charging stations for delivery riders and advocacy for coordinated federal regulation and education. Closer to home, NSW Fair Trading declared e-bikes and e-scooters as declared electric articles in 2024, requiring batteries to meet prescribed standards by 1 August 2025. Mandatory labelling will begin on 1 February 2026, and that department is currently reviewing the scope and cost impacts in consultation with industry.

The rise in e-mobility is a global phenomenon, and we should look at best practice from around the world when dealing with critical issues around battery safety. A leading bike sharing service, HelloRide, is demonstrating global leadership in this space through its high battery charging units, which I think are really important. It contains isolated battery fire incidents using fireproof, tamperproof enclosures that exceed current market standards. The company is proposing the rollout of public battery swapping and charging infrastructure at transport hubs, including on university campuses and at local council locations to improve safety and reduce footpath clutter. These are issues that we should be considering – where the bikes are located and where the batteries are located.

We need to look at battery down time as well and efficiencies caused by that. We need to enable off-peak and solar-powered charging to ease grid pressure and cut emissions. The government should work with these types of providers and innovative companies to enhance overall safety rather than impose onerous, unrealistic or expensive regulation in a piecemeal fashion.

E-mobility should be a cost-effective and accessible transport option for all Victorians, yet this bill lacks clear provision to ensure affordability. Cities like Sydney and Brisbane have demonstrated that competitive, well-regulated e-mobility markets can drive down costs and improve user accessibility. If this legislation places excessive costs on operators through unnecessary levies or even rigid compliant measures, it will inevitably be the consumers who bear this burden. This is something we have got to consider. Given the rising cost-of-living pressures that I have already spoken about today in the chamber, we should be ensuring that affordable, sustainable transport options remain viable, not pricing people out of the market with higher taxes and charges.

There are certainly environmental benefits to e-scooters and e-bikes, and I support infrastructure and regulation that will encourage a shift from private car usage to e-mobility. This will deliver important environment benefits, which in my mind and certainly in the people of Prahran's minds is paramount. Areas like Prahran, with its proximity to major employment and entertainment hubs, stand to benefit enormously from a well-supported e-mobility network.

Clause 5 of this bill refers to systems that prevent a person from riding or otherwise using a category A vehicle while intoxicated. While the intention is to promote rider safety – that is understood – mandating providers to provide breathalyser systems is in practice a significant overreach in my view.

This kind of technology introduces complex logistical and privacy issues and may ultimately prove both costly and impractical to implement reliably. The e-mobility providers I have spoken to have emphasised their commitment to enhancing safety through innovation, and many of them support the

targeted deployment of camera-based technology to detect and deter unsafe behaviour, including footpath riding. In high-demand densely populated areas such as inner Melbourne this kind of investment can be justified, and it is already being trialled successfully in other cities around the world. However, the providers have informed me that the current cost of implementing this technology on a per-device basis is prohibitively high for smaller and regional markets such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong or outer metropolitan areas like Casey. Mandating for the universal rollout of this technology without regard to scale or economic feasibility may disincentivise operators from servicing regional or outer metropolitan areas, and we have already heard speakers talk to this bill supporting it who represent areas that are in regional Victoria. The result: communities that stand to benefit significantly from accessible low-emission transport options could miss out entirely due to one-size-fits-all rules that are not affected by local conditions. If this bill aims to support a truly statewide e-mobility network, then flexibility must be built into its safety provisions to ensure both the community protection and service viability of this system. This bill is a step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough to ensure e-mobility is safe, sustainable and accessible for all Victorians.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:52): It gives me pleasure to rise and make a somewhat truncated contribution to the Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025 before we hit adjournments at 7 o'clock this evening. I do so, as I say, with great pleasure because in speaking to e-scooters, we know they are a relatively new technology that many young people in our community especially have been embracing. But yes, look, if the contribution by the member for Narracan is anything to believe, I guess that technology has been embraced by the young at heart as well.

But as we know, with any new technology we must adapt and learn as we become accustomed to them in our everyday lives. People have seen the benefits of e-scooters among commuters, people exploring the city, shift workers who use them alongside other modes of transport – and that type of travel is often known as the first or last kilometre of travel. They are a low-cost, low-emission transport option that can help get cars off our roads and reduce traffic congestion. E-scooters can be privately owned, but a common way for riders to use e-scooters is through app-based sharing schemes, as seen all over the world, including in Vienna, Seoul, Berlin, Buenos Aires, I understand, Santiago and also Memphis and LA.

Given that the member for Narracan spoke about what might have been a state-funded trip, I will talk about a non-state-funded trip to Memphis, where I was able to use scooters getting down from the hotel that I was staying in to Sun Studio, in fact, the home of *That's All Right, Mama* by Elvis Presley, where that was recorded. Getting there the transport options were not terrific, and they did have that e-scooter option. It was really interesting, though, that compared to Melbourne there were no bike lanes. There were certainly no helmet options, and with heavy traffic even though that trip was too long for an Uber ride and there was no public transport available, there was still that e-scooter option to get to where I needed to go. However, there were some safety aspects that went with that, given the amount of traffic and given the non-availability of easy access to helmets.

The Allan Labor government, however, has implemented a comprehensive and robust set of rules to regulate the use of e-scooters through app-based sharing schemes, and these are usually arrangements that are made between councils and operators. The legislation is aimed at the now and at the future, to have rules to ensure the safety of both riders and the public.

The bill will amend the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 to deliver on Victorian government commitments to improve e-scooter amenity and accessibility by introducing a preapproval process requirement for the operators for vehicle-sharing schemes, including e-scooters and other prescribed vehicles. Under the framework operators of e-scooter-sharing schemes will be required to comply with safety standards and obtain approval from the Secretary of the Department of Transport and Planning, in addition to the existing requirement of having an agreement with the local council.

We know that one of the biggest risks with hired e-scooters is their use on footpaths and in spots that block access, especially for people with mobility issues. They can reduce the amenity of public spaces, and the bill enables the government to prescribe safety standards for their operation. As well as doing that, it addresses the issue by requiring operators to implement systems, technologies and other safety measures, and these standards are mandatory. The standards will cover requirements for vehicles and devices available under a sharing scheme. There are standards and requirements for footpath detection, parking of devices, helmet use, use of vehicles outside of a permitted area and the detection and prevention of intoxicated riders.

The bill also amends the Road Safety Act 1986 to provide protective service officers with the power to serve infringement notices for road safety offences that can occur on an e-scooter. This recognises the need for improved compliance with road rules for e-scooters and builds on the penalties the government introduced last year, including fines for riding without a helmet, riding on a footpath or carrying a passenger.

In the previous Parliament I was privileged to be a member of the e-scooter trial oversight panel, working alongside the hardworking member for Eltham. It was terrific to work with her to oversee and to try to envisage what might come out of the e-scooter trial. The panel was set up to provide advice to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety about outcomes of the e-scooter trial while undertaking evaluations to inform the panel's recommendations to the minister. The evaluation criteria included safety considerations, impact on street amenity, tourism and economic and environmental factors, as well as their relation to broader transport objectives.

From that came last year's commitment, when we announced that the trial was successful and would conclude in October 2024, permanently allowing the sharing scheme and private e-scooters to operate across the state. When the trial was completed back in October 2024 and the government introduced permanent regulatory settings it did so for the use of those e-scooters. At that time we also announced that new legislation would be introduced this year setting out new requirements for e-scooter share hire operators applying to councils to operate, with minimum standards to be enforced through a preapproval scheme. This bill fulfils that commitment. It is as a result of all of that work that we were led here today. This government, by introducing this bill, is showing that people in our community can utilise this convenient mode of transport but should do so with an awareness of the safety risks, regulations and associated responsibility that goes with that.

E-scooters will become an ever more important part of our transport network, but there must be strong regulations to avoid injury or risk to the community. I look forward to seeing more e-scooters on our streets and seeing the benefits they bring, with the backing of this government's work to improve regulation, compliance and responsibility. With that I will commend the bill to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Caulfield South Primary School

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:00): (1101) The member's action that I have today is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek from the Minister for Education for Caulfield South Primary School is show me the money. It is \$9 million worth of money, and this school is desperate for that \$9 million. This was an election commitment back in 2022. It was an election commitment that both Labor and we went with to the public, and certainly the Liberal-Nationals had \$11 million on the table. Labor had \$9 million. We all know the result; Labor won the election. Unfortunately the school were \$2 million short, but they have not seen any of that. They are \$9 million

short. In the 2022–23 budget there was some planning money. There are plans there ready to go. All we need now is to pull those plans out of the drawer, open them up and get them sorted.

It was a pleasure to attend with our shadow education minister Jess Wilson and visit with Rohan Cooper and talk to the school and talk to some of the issues, in particular with president Jackie Dzienciol, and have a look around the school and see what the \$9 million will do – a multipurpose basketball court that will double as an assembly area, because at the moment the kids are having their assemblies out in the rain; a STEAM centre to be able to do science, technology and arts and have that all in a new centre; and, importantly, to ensure we get upgrades of the classrooms and everything else that goes with it.

If we keep waiting, the \$9 million will not buy a school upgrade. It will not buy a classroom upgrade let alone a school upgrade, and that is why it is so important for the school for the government to finally get their skates on. I know a member in the upper house, Ryan Batchelor, has been out, been very excited in making announcements, but when he has been called in the moment – nowhere to be seen. I understand there are 20-plus schools also in the same predicament in the state of Victoria, and I know the government is struggling to find money at the moment. But come on – if you make an election commitment, you have to follow through. This school was meant to be built, all done and dusted, by the 2026 election. The way we are going now, who knows when. I would love to be the one that actually cuts the ribbon on the thing when we, hopefully, get to government after 2026, but we are giving you the opportunity to cut the ribbon, provide the money and finally show me the money for Caulfield South Primary School.

Werribee electorate small business

John LISTER (Werribee) (19:03): (1102) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Small Business and Employment, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in Werribee for a small business forum. Small businesses make up a high proportion of the business community in the suburbs of my electorate, whether it be hairdressers or barbers, cafes and restaurants and even small boutique shops. As a Werribee local I utilise many of these services myself.

Last week I took the opportunity to venture down Watton Street in Werribee to introduce myself to shop owners and staff and drop off some information about the various Victorian government services and support available for small business. Some of these services include payroll tax changes or our Small Business Bus service and consulting. It was great to speak to business owners like the owner of the Park Hotel or the family running the Vietnamese restaurant not far from my electorate office and talk to them about these different initiatives. They make our shopping strips in Wyndham vibrant, serve a wide variety of needs and represent our diverse community.

The minister was also out at my electorate last week to meet with the Committee for Wyndham, and I hear it was a successful meeting, with the member for Tarneit and the member for Laverton joining her. I invite her to swing by Werribee again in the near future to host a small business forum with me. The forum will bring together folks from Werribee, Wyndham Vale and Manor Lakes, from established areas and our newer estates, and I thank our small businesses for all the work they do in Werribee and surrounding suburbs.

I would also like to reflect on something that we have noticed too in a lot of our new suburbs, which is something that I will be working closely with the minister on; that is looking at how we support our people working from home and running businesses from home in our new estates. It is increasingly becoming a trend in areas like Wyndham. I think it is really important that we provide those same services that we would for bricks and mortar to people who are working from home and running those businesses from home, because we know that they are really important not just for economic growth but also really important for making it easier for perhaps women or people who are not necessarily able to commute to be able to run their own businesses and have that extra income. I look forward to welcoming the minister to my electorate to have this small business forum, and in concluding I would also like to reiterate my thanks for small businesses for all the hard work they do in my community.

Gippsland East electorate public transport

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (19:05): (1103) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to commit to maintaining direct bus services from Bairnsdale to Melbourne on that Gippsland line when we have train outages. We recently had the train service direct to Southern Cross suspended. There were works being done. The reason as to why it occurred I am not sure, but for whatever reason there was an outage. The replacement bus services, which normally go all the way to Southern Cross, changed over at Pakenham East. Those elderly people in my community and those that were going on holidays and were going to the airport with their luggage were forced to get off the bus, walk over to the metro platform and get on a train. It is very difficult for our elderly train-travelling clients or bus-travelling clients to do that.

There is no reason other than finances not to have the bus services going all the way into Southern Cross. Why this took place I am not sure, but it does beg many questions that need to be answered. Why were we not given the full replacement bus service into Southern Cross? Why were direct coach services only offered on weekends? It would be good to hear from the minister if this was a money-saving exercise or there was another reason. If the direct lines via the buses were going in on the weekends, one wonders why they could not go in during the week. I do believe, and I have been reliably informed, that was a cost-saving measure so that it did not cost the government more money to pay the bus companies, so once again train travellers and bus travellers in the east of the state suffer from a government that is looking to save money at every single corner. The one element I seek from the minister is to, in the future, commit when there are train outages that the bus services will go all the way along the line, picking up at Bairnsdale, Sale and along the way into Southern Cross so we do not have to change over to the metro service at Pakenham.

Creswick crime

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (19:08): (1104) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Police. The action I seek is that the minister joins me in my electorate to meet with Creswick police officers and community leaders to discuss safety in our region. In January I joined over 100 Creswick locals at a public meeting with Victoria Police in the senior citizens hall to talk about the issues impacting community safety. It was an opportunity for locals to voice their concerns and experiences, and a lot of great ideas were shared about how we can better address crime, especially for repeat offenders of theft, property damage and hoon behaviour.

Many residents were keen to see a taskforce set up, bringing together police, local government and support services to make sure Creswick remains a safe place to live and work. This is something I am eager for the minister to further discuss with police and residents, including Acting Sergeant Marley Mookhoek. I am so pleased that our government has since announced tougher bail laws to crack down on reoffending, ban machetes and make families feel safer in their homes. Creswick locals are still keen to talk through options to do more with the minister, and I look forward to providing them with his response.

Country Fire Authority Montrose brigade

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:09): (1105) Montrose CFA fire brigade is an exceptional local fire brigade. Captain Matt Jalowicki, the brigade management team and the volunteer firefighters of the Montrose fire brigade work tirelessly to keep our community safe, and we saw no better example of this than last month when the Montrose community was confronted with a severe and fast-moving bushfire at the Dr Ken Leversha Reserve off Sheffield Road in Montrose. The Montrose CFA brigade worked together as one with more than 30 other CFA brigades, FRV and Forest Fire Management Victoria to fight that fire and protect our community. Now more than ever this brigade needs a new pumper to ensure it can continue to do the important work to fight fires given the complex needs of Montrose and surrounds, so the matter I raise is for the Minister for Emergency Services. The action

I seek is for the minister to allocate funding in the upcoming 2025–26 state budget for a new pumper for the Montrose CFA fire brigade.

While I note a very small fleet of new pumpers was allocated to other brigades last year, which will only really go a small way to replacing the CFA's ageing fleet, unfortunately the Montrose fire brigade missed out despite being at the top of the priority list for replacement, as detailed in the Country Fire Authority's strategic district 13 plan. The government surely can see now, after the major bushfire event only a few weeks ago that highlighted the high-risk profile of Montrose, that Montrose fire brigade needs a new pumper truck. In fact, had the government responded to my adjournment request on this same topic in August last year, more than seven months ago, where I requested this same action, for a new pumper to be supplied to Montrose fire brigade, this would have helped these amazing and dedicated volunteer firefighters in their firefighting effort at the Sheffield Road bushfire last month.

The work of Montrose fire brigade extends far beyond that of last month's bushfire. Based on the latest data available, Montrose fire brigade has had a 30 per cent increase in call volume over the past two financial years, surpassing 300 call-outs last year. Montrose's response area includes a high concentration of industrial sites, a quarry, approximately 3500 residential homes and major state government roadways, all of which contribute to a significantly high operational demand.

Montrose fire brigade services additional critical areas like Mooroolbark, Mount Evelyn, Kalorama, Mount Dandenong, Lilydale and Bayswater, and they have been patient for years, waiting for a much-needed new pumper to address their growing workload and the frequent equipment failures of their existing appliance. So on behalf of the Montrose fire brigade and the entire Montrose community, I seek this action of the minister and hope that the funding and supply of a new pumper for Montrose can be confirmed in the upcoming state budget. I want to again take this opportunity to thank the Montrose CFA fire brigade members for their tremendous, dedicated service to our community.

Country Fire Authority Corio brigade

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:12): (1106) My matter is also for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action that I seek is that the minister visit the Corio CFA and meet their incredible members. I recently met with Jordan Grossman, first lieutenant, and a number of members at the Corio CFA. It was a wonderful visit and so great to meet such a variety of members, including Steven, who has been a volunteer with the CFA for over 40 years and has responded to many fires in his time. There were also a number of new members, and it was great to hear from them about their experiences so far, from getting started with training to responding to a fire for the first time. Importantly, it was a great opportunity to thank the whole brigade for their incredible service and dedication not only to our region in Corio but to our whole state and for the work that they do in fighting fires right across Victoria. These dedicated individuals selflessly give their time and effort to provide essential services, particularly during emergency situations like bushfires, where their expertise and commitment to community service shines brightly. They not only help in responding to emergencies, but they also play a role in preparing our community for potential threats. Their work extends far beyond firefighting. It is about building a safer, more connected Victoria for everyone. It will be great to have the minister visit the Corio CFA, and I look forward to hosting her.

Shepparton electorate roads

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:13): (1107) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is that the minister join me for a tour of the dangerous roads in my electorate with Mr Stewart Edgar from Sutherland Transport Services. Just last week Stewart contacted me requesting that I join him on the road in his truck to see firsthand the dangerous roads and unsafe conditions that he faces on a daily basis. Stewart raised one of the dangerous circumstances: when trucks are passing one another on these roads, there simply is not the clearance to swerve to miss a pothole, and often it is a case of hitting the pothole or ending up in a ditch or a head-on collision. Damage to their vehicles from damaged roads or hitting potholes is costing local truck companies thousands of dollars every month, and it is simply not sustainable. These costs should

not be put on the local trucking businesses for no fault of their own. Being able to drive on safe and well-maintained roads and make it home at the end of a shift is crucial to the livelihoods of our truck drivers. Let us remember roads are their workplace, and this government is failing to keep them safe.

Twenty-five per cent of this state's trucks are registered in my electorate. This a phenomenal number and something that we are incredibly proud of. We are talking about a major transport region that contributes so much to the nation and should have assurance of a safe road network so that they can transport produce to the port or wherever they need to. With so much movement of trucks, you would expect that our roads would be maintained.

It is not just Stewart that is fed up. I am regularly contacted by other truck drivers and other road users who are at their wits' end over the state of our appalling and unsafe roads. It is actually astounding to see the degree of damage that is happening and that road users are expected to navigate. Road maintenance targets are not being met, funding is cut and our roads continue to crumble and are full of potholes. The government continues to prioritise city-centric projects with billions in cost blowouts rather than prioritise our roads and road safety. Stewart has invited me to join him, as I said, in his truck to see what he is experiencing on a daily basis. He also invites the minister to join us so she can also experience and see firsthand the dangerous road network out in the regions due to the neglect of our roads. This is the minister's responsibility, and the level of neglect and the impact need to be seen to be believed. I invite the minister to join me and Stewart to experience firsthand what the neglect of our road network looks like from a truck driver's perspective.

Narre Warren North police station

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (19:15): (1108) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Police, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Narre Warren North to meet the hardworking officers keeping my community safe. Right now the Narre Warren North police station is undergoing a complete overhaul thanks to a \$78 million investment by the Allan Labor government. The station will reopen next year with a new design and major building upgrade to ensure our police have the best facilities possible to serve the community. While the renovation is underway, to ensure the community remains supported by Victoria Police, Endeavour Hills police station will remain open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We are delivering Australia's toughest bail laws and investing a record \$4.9 billion in our police force because we believe in keeping our communities safe and our police supported. This is just one example of how the Allan Labor government is committed to putting community safety first. I am really looking forward to visiting the station with the minister soon.

Victorian Fisheries Authority

Bill TILLEY (Benambra) (19:17): (1109) I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to explain to the constituents of Benambra district and in fact every district and region throughout Victoria how the ongoing security and sustainability of fishing can be guaranteed with the proposed drastic reduction of fisheries officers under the clause 11 proposal put forward by the Victorian Fisheries Authority. The proposal risks national and international codes and agreements and threatens irreversible damage to Victoria's aquatic ecosystems. Has this government even attempted a risk assessment?

The Benambra district has some of the best fisheries in the state, as does my colleague over in Gippsland – I love fishing over in his part of the world as well. World-renowned areas are now in jeopardy of overfishing and poaching occurring due to the lack of enforcement activities. Under the proposal, the Wodonga fisheries officer will be working on his own and reporting to a supervisor at Tatura, over 200 kilometres away, not to mention the significant OH&S risk of working one up. You do not do it to the coppers, so why would you do it to the fisheries officers? Members of the Dartmouth Community Progress Association put it perfectly to me in that they fear for their waterways, such as the Dartmouth Dam, Lake Banimboola and the Mitta Mitta River, which all generate much-needed local economic activity. Their biggest fear is the lack of control of the most dangerous predator on the

planet: greedy humans. Compliance comes from enforcement, pure and simple, and anyone who does not think that that is the case is just deluding themselves.

It has been claimed that fishing compliance is at 90 per cent across the state of Victoria. With over 1 million recreational fishers, this means a staggering 100,000 people are noncompliant with fishing legislation. What future does this hold for sustainable fishing in Victoria? What is proposed for Benambra is no different to what is happening across the state. How is closing fisheries stations at Cowes, Mornington, Altona North, Queenscliff and Braeside going to ensure appropriate enforcement in those areas? To say the Victorian Fisheries Authority is going to create a major fisheries crime unit is misleading at best. It is just renaming six operatives, soon to be reduced to four, who cover the whole state now.

Tim Bull interjected.

Bill TILLEY: You cannot do it. Recently, a crew of poachers were caught red-handed at Altona by fisheries officers, and they were asked by the crooks, ‘What are you guys doing here? We heard you all got the sack.’ This will be a scene that is repeated all over Victoria under this poorly disguised, government-mandated cost-cutting exercise. I have not even mentioned the massive threat to marine national parks and sanctuaries. Victoria is blessed with some of the most spectacular fisheries in the country, and it is incumbent upon the government of the day to protect them. The Victorian government needs to step up and fulfil its obligations through the responsible minister and stop this insane reduction in enforcement capabilities.

Wyndham City Council

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (19:20): (1110) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Local Government, and the action I seek is that the minister inquire of Wyndham City Council whether developer contributions derived in Point Cook are being invested in Point Cook. There are no council-run swimming pools, indoor sporting facilities of significance or substantial community indoor spaces in Point Cook – the largest suburb in the country – and these facilities are the responsibility of council to provide. Even before I was elected I was asking council why these facilities did not exist in Point Cook and why the community had to leave our suburb to access such facilities. The response was consistent: we do not have the money. What they did not tell me, what they did not tell you and what they did not tell members of the Point Cook community is that there was \$36 million sitting in their bank account, seemingly for decades as unspent developer contributions. They decided not to tell anyone about it. Seemingly not even councillors knew about it for much of that period, and then Cr McIntyre, to her credit, told the community. The council went into damage control. Here is what they said publicly:

Recent legal advice confirmed that Council is not limited in the type of infrastructure this money funds but that it must be reinvested in the area in which it was collected.

Later in their budget, which was approved, they said:

Council has received legal advice confirming the availability of \$36.167M in legacy Developer Contributions to be spent on infrastructure projects in the Point Cook area.

How wrong we were to believe what council had to say, because council have now decided that Point Cook developer contributions can be spent anywhere across the municipality, not in line with the legal advice, not in line with their agreed budget and not in line with council practice. If the legal advice was wrong, then was it maladministration or improper conduct to allow this advice to the community to stand for almost a year in a key document to council? When we all voted for a new council at the municipal elections we were under the assurance that these funds would be spent appropriately. I wonder would mayor Mia Shaw have been elected – she represents part of Point Cook – if they had known that she was going to vote for these funds to leave Point Cook.

What is council doing behind closed doors in confidential meetings? Are these decisions being made formally or informally by a majority councillor grouping to carve up these funds? We will not know,

because we will not be told. There are agencies to look into this, and they should – the Local Government Inspectorate, council monitors, the Victorian Ombudsman and more. I will have more to say about this in the future, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Responses

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:23): Regarding the member for Evelyn, who advocated for a new pumper for Montrose CFA, I would advise the member that the CFA's current firefighting appliances consist of 2226 vehicles, including 1963 tankers, 219 pumpers and 44 pumper tankers. I note the member has suggested that getting new appliances in the CFA has been patchy, so I would advise the member that I have recently been to Beaufort and seen their new heavy tanker, to Nar Nar Goon where I saw their new rescue vehicle and to Pakenham to officially hand over the keys to their new breathing apparatus support vehicle. That is just in the last month.

In last year's budget our government committed \$18.6 million to deliver 15 replacement urban response pumpers to the CFA. The CFA is also rolling out 48 heavy tankers and two light tankers, funded as part of our government's \$126 million CFA capability package. The heavy tankers have recently been delivered to Mildura, Ballan, Creswick, Daylesford, Miners Rest, Wendouree and many other brigades. In addition, through the volunteer emergency services equipment program grants, recipients will be sharing in \$15 million for new trucks, appliances and facilities improvements. The CFA will be receiving more than \$11 million to fund 179 initiatives.

I also note that the member did not support the passage of the Fire Services Property Amendment (Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund) Bill 2025, which increases funding to our emergency services, including the CFA, allowing provision for further investment in these services, including new appliances. The CFA base budget for fleet vehicle replacement is around \$13 million per year, and our government will continue to back them, ensuring they have the equipment they need to help them and to keep their communities safe. I will advise the CFA of the member's advocacy on behalf of Montrose CFA.

The member for Lara has invited me to Corio to visit her CFA, and I thank the member for Lara for her very kind and hospitable invitation. I look forward to visiting her CFA in Corio in the near future.

We also had the member for Caulfield, who had an action for the Minister for Education. He sought an upgrade to Caulfield Primary School –

David Southwick: Caulfield South Primary.

Vicki WARD: Caulfield South Primary School. The member for Wendouree sought the Minister for Small Business and Employment to sit down with local businesses in his community for a small business forum. The member for Gippsland East had an action for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, seeking improvements to replacement bus services from Gippsland to Southern Cross, such as having direct services rather than having them stop at Pakenham. The member for Ripon invited the Minister for Police to meet with local police and residents at Creswick to discuss crime in her community.

The member for Shepparton had a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, seeking that the minister to visit her community and further understand local road issues, including potholes. The member for Narre Warren North had an action for the Minister for Police and wanted him to visit Narre Warren North and her hardworking police officers and the substantial investment by the Allan Labor government in overhauling that station. The member for Benambra had a matter for the Minister for Environment regarding the sustainability of Victoria's fisheries. And the member for Point Cook had an action for the Minister for Local Government. He is seeking to work with local government to ensure that local government runs a number of community-based facilities in his community for the benefit of his community.

ADJOURNMENT

Wednesday 2 April 2025

Legislative Assembly – PROOF

123

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:26 pm.

Proof