



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 28 August 2024**



# Members of the Legislative Council

## 60th Parliament

### President

Shaun Leane

### Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

### Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

### Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

### Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

### Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew <sup>1</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaëlle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira <sup>2</sup>	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, David <sup>3</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
			Welch, Richard <sup>4</sup>	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 7 December 2023

<sup>2</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>3</sup> LDP until 26 July 2023

<sup>4</sup> Appointed 7 February 2024

### Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party



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**Wednesday 28 August 2024**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

***Bills*****Youth Justice Bill 2024***Council's amendments*

**The PRESIDENT (09:33):** I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to provide for the reform of the youth justice system, to amend the **Children, Youth and Families Act 2005** and other related Acts and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

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

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Supreme Court Act 1986 – Administration and Probate Act 1958 – No. 79.

Supreme Court Act 1986 – No. 78.

***Business of the house*****Notices****Notices of motion given.*****Committees*****Legal and Social Issues Committee***Membership*

**Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:43):** I move, by leave:

That Nick McGowan be a participating member of the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee.

**Motion agreed to.*****Motions*****Middle East conflict**

**Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:43):** I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since the Legislative Council's resolution on 17 October 2023 concerning Israel and Gaza, which states that this house stands with Israel, according to reports by Human Rights Watch the Israeli government and its forces have:
  - (a) arbitrarily detained at least 310 Palestinian health workers carrying out their duties in Gaza;
  - (b) deported Palestinian health workers to detention facilities in Israel;
  - (c) allegedly tortured and ill-treated detained healthcare workers, including but not limited to prolonged cuffing, denial of medical care and the administration of psychoactive drugs before interrogations;
- (2) recognises the brave healthcare workers who continue to risk their lives to provide care to people in Gaza;
- (3) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza;

- (4) supports calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; and
- (5) calls on Labor to take action, including severing military trade relationships with the state of Israel.

**Leave refused.***Members statements***360biolabs**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:44): I have two matters for today. First, I had the honour to represent the Deputy Premier and Minister for Medical Research to formally open 360biolabs, a brand new lab and offices just a short drive away from my office. I want to thank Dr Alistair Draffan, Angela Luttick and Melinda Pryor from 360biolabs for having me, and of course Associate Professor David Anderson from the Burnet Institute, lead scientist for the Victorian government Dr Amanda Caples and many more who got this done. This is a world-class custom-built facility that will increase Victoria's medical research capabilities and reputation as the biotech capital in the Southern Hemisphere. I am proud to be a member of a Labor government that understands and supports our medical research sector, a sector that is home to 18 independent research institutes and supports more than 30,000 jobs. Well done to all those involved in getting this up and running.

**Planning policy**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:45): On a second matter, I want to acknowledge the work that the Allan Labor government is doing in developing new activity centres right across Victoria, including in my community of Camberwell. Thank you to the Premier and the Minister for Planning for coming to my community of Hawthorn last week – a community that I know dearly misses their former hardworking Labor member of Parliament John Kennedy MP – to talk about all the work they are doing. Watch this space.

**Tim Decker**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (09:46): It is my pleasure to inform the house of an extraordinary achievement by a much-loved member of Bendigo's extended cycling community, Tim Decker. Tim coached the Australian men's team pursuit foursome to gold at the recent Paris Olympics. The riders were Sam Welsford, Kelland O'Brien, Conor Leahy and Oliver Bleddyn. This was Australia's first gold in the event since Athens 2004. It was a major triumph for Tim and his team, who faced some serious hurdles in their journey to gold. In fact the *Bendigo Advertiser* recently reported that Tim's journey to Olympic glory over the past five years had as many twists and turns as a Hollywood thriller. The Australian team was heartbroken in Tokyo 2021 when rider Alex Porter's handlebars snapped right off and the team lost all hope of riding for a gold medal. Welsford and O'Brien were members of the team that night in Tokyo, so the gold medal in Paris was an even sweeter achievement. Tim Decker moved to Bendigo at 21 to pursue his dream of a career in cycling before moving into coaching. Tim required brain surgery in 2019 following a group riding accident and then suffered the Olympic disaster in Tokyo. He took on the head coaching role of the Chinese national cycling program in 2022 before returning to coach in Australia last year. Tim is still an active member of the Bendigo and District Cycling Club. The club and the Bendigo community are understandably thrilled for him, and his persistence has made Australia proud. Congratulations, Tim Decker.

**Horseracing**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:47): After being flogged around a racetrack even when injured, Black Caviar's connections were not content with almost \$8 million in winnings, so they forced her to be a breeding machine. A horse like Black Caviar would naturally live 25 to 30 years, yet she was euthanised the day before her 18th birthday, hours after she gave birth to her ninth foal in 11 years. Given that a horse's gestation is 11 months, she essentially spent her entire so-called retirement in a cycle of constant pregnancy. Her new foal is dead now too. Horses do not just wake up with laminitis and die that day. It was reckless, it was irresponsible, it was greedy and it was



downright cruel to continue her pregnancies when her diagnosis was known and when it was well documented that weight bearing worsens the condition. The racing industry pretend to be sad that Black Caviar is dead, but they are the ones who bred her to death. At the same time they are indiscriminately breeding horses you will never know about in the thousands. They are sending them to knackeries and to abattoirs. They refuse to ban the whip, the state's most public display of animal cruelty, and would prefer to spend more money on rose gardens than retirement plans. They will not even end jumps racing as every other state in this country has done, resulting in the deadliest event in Victorian history on Sunday, killing three horses and injuring two jockeys. The industry claim to love horses – do not believe them.

#### V/Line services

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (09:49): I was delighted to greet one of the first VLocity trains to travel on the Warrnambool line last Saturday morning. As part of the regional rail upgrade on the Warrnambool line V/Line is undertaking track testing and driver training. The train arrived on schedule and was very smooth according to both Lynne Foreman and James Carter, who took the ride to also test out all-abilities access.

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja Terpstra**: On a point of order, President, the noise level coming from those opposite is such that I cannot hear Ms Ermacora, and she should be allowed to continue her contribution without assistance. I ask that her clock be reset.

**The PRESIDENT**: I was distracted by a matter of important chamber business. I will just reset the clock and ask everyone to give Ms Ermacora a clean run at it.

**Jacinta ERMACORA**: I was delighted to greet one of the first VLocity trains to travel to Warrnambool last Saturday morning as part of the regional rail upgrade on the Warrnambool line. V/Line is undertaking track testing and driver training. The train arrived on schedule and was a very smooth ride according to Lynne Foreman and James Carter, who took a ride to test its all-abilities access. Lynne pointed out that as a young person in a wheelchair she had been actually separated from her family and put in the baggage compartment. The Warrnambool station itself has been upgraded, with new automated doors and accessible toilets, and very soon bike racks will be added. A hearing loop has been installed so platform announcements can be transmitted to hearing aids. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who advocated for accessible public transport on the Warrnambool line and for the patience of all those affected by previously inaccessible services. I was delighted and surprised to meet three young boys who were trainspotters – Fraser Kelson, Riley Limbong and Lenny Adams – on the platform when I was there on Saturday. This is a game changer for the south-west region of Victoria and the first time in my living memory that Warrnambool is getting the latest rolling stock rather than what feels like hand-me-downs from other lines. All of this is thanks to the Allan Labor government getting things done.

#### Health services

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): That is a fortuitous segue – getting things done. Things are getting anything but done in the place of Ringwood, anything but done in the place of Nunawading, Mitcham, Donvale, Forest Hill, Vermont, you name it, because the people who live there know only too well the bitter reality. The reality for them has been that for six years this government sadly has failed to live up to its promise to deliver an emergency department for children – that is right. Callously, six years ago this government promised an emergency department for children, and then, guess what, they never, ever, ever delivered. It got worse, because at the last election they promised to rebuild the hospital. Have you rebuilt the hospital? Not only have you not rebuilt the hospital –

*Members interjecting.*

**Nick McGOWAN:** I will take you up on the interjection. Not only have you not rebuilt the hospital, you have actually not provided a single cent in the forward estimates, so that means although you have made the promise, you have not provided a single cent going forward. It is a callous and calculated lie. The people opposite know it. The people of Victoria are starting to understand it all too well. Time and again what we are seeing is this government sadly investing in all the wrong things for all the wrong reasons and with little regard for how it is actually spent. Meanwhile the people in the suburbs, the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, are doing it tough and need medical treatment when they need it most. Guess what happened last night? They actually had to get the paramedics to come into the hospital to administer life-saving support. It is a travesty. It should not be happening in 2024, and it is on your head.

#### **Little River freight terminal**

**David ETTERSANK** (Western Metropolitan) (09:53): On Saturday I had the privilege to join the wonderful residents of Little River to protest against the proposed Pacific National mega-intermodal freight terminal. Little River is a small town of around 1200 people south of Werribee and is the gateway to the You Yangs. The freight terminal is proposed to be built on a 550-hectare site, where it will handle some 2 million containers a year and add around 1500 additional trucks a day to the local road network. Outrageously, its location is in a designated green wedge that consists of rare native grasslands hosting multiple threatened species and immediately adjoins the Little River township. A fire or toxic spill at the terminal would almost inevitably feed into the nearby western Ramsar wetlands, which are recognised as internationally significant and one of the most diverse birdlife reserves in Australia. The proposal has been thumpingly rejected by the Wyndham council and is opposed by a range of conservation organisations and local communities. The logic of developing this site is also now largely non-existent. It was designed to be close to the western intermodal freight terminal at Truganina, which has been deferred indefinitely, and the outer metropolitan ring-road, which is now not even on the development radar. If there is even a skerrick of corporate responsibility in Pacific National, get the hell out of Little River and abandon this disgraceful proposal.

#### **Preston Reservoir Bowls Club**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:55): I have spoken about it a couple of times, but a point of pride in my family is our extraordinary leadership and achievements in lawn bowls. You see, my nan was a national champion, and I am sure it goes without saying that I love lawn bowls. The community atmosphere that is created around this game is unmatched, which is why invites to any of the numerous clubs in my electorate often find themselves on the top of the pile. The one that always hits the top, though, is the Preston Reservoir Bowls Club. Just this Saturday I returned to the club to be greeted by a weekend roast and a full house of players and community members that had all gathered for the esteemed opening of the green. With a raffle, just about bottomless lunch and some birthday cake from someone's 90th, all the bases were covered. I could not think of a better way to spend a Saturday afternoon. It is also worth mentioning the petition to save the bowlo has gotten nearly 1000 signatures, and I am sure we will see some movement from the council on that. It has been a long time and a hard fight, and the community came around the club and they just did not give up. To Steve, Carmen and the rest of the club, I cannot wait to see you all again and good luck for the upcoming season.

#### **Climate change**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (09:56): As the Victorian Greens' first regional MP, I have had the pleasure of cups of tea and farm tours with people who proudly produce the food that we buy from supermarkets and too often take for granted. Farmers who spend hours outdoors are more attuned to the changing climate than we can appreciate. At 7:25 pm when the ABC weather report comes on, there is silence as families tune in to see what the coming forecast will bring. They bear the brunt of damaging winds and storms like we have seen over the past week, and yet their voices often

go unheard when we talk about the great threat to our lives and their livelihood – climate change. Farmers are on the front line of climate change, and they must be given a lead role in our response. Governments must not only do much more to support farmers as they work to reduce agricultural emissions and use agriculture as a source of emissions drawdown but also ensure that they are genuine partners in the renewable energy transition we must urgently make. With many parts of western Victoria in the grips of a green drought, the sooner we give farmers a seat at the table to share these experiences and have these conversations the better for our climate, food security and farming families.

### **Greenwood, Mulgrave**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): Last week I had the privilege of attending the Greenwood early education centre in Mulgrave for their children's yarn performances. The event celebrated the centre's children's talents, creativity and cultural identity, and it was such a joy to be with them on the day and to see their performances. I would like to particularly thank Zunaira Shaheen, the centre manager, for organising the event and for kindly inviting me to enjoy the performances alongside Eden Foster, the member for Mulgrave, and Cr Nicky Luo, the mayor of the City of Monash. The Book Week celebration included dress-ups; a smoking ceremony; a puppet show, which was excellent as well; and most importantly the children's performances. They were wonderful displays of the children's talent but also demonstrated the importance of art in fostering a strong sense of self and community.

### **Ukraine Independence Day**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): On another matter, I also had the honour of attending a dinner to mark Ukraine's Independence Day on Friday night in Essendon alongside my colleague from this place Mr Tarlamis and from the other place Matthew Guy, the member for Bulleen; and Nick Staikos, the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs. We also had Julian Hill, the member for Bruce; Cr Pierce Tyson, the mayor of the City of Moonee Valley; and Cr Ava Adams as well. It was a particular honour to be there with members of the Ukrainian community. Thank you to Tatiana Zachariak and other members of that community for warmly welcoming us on the night. It is a difficult time to commemorate, but we will always stand with Ukraine. Slava Ukraini.

### **Apollo Bay Mechanics Institute Hall**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (09:59): In 1823 Dr George Birkbeck founded the first mechanics institute in Glasgow, Scotland. From the 1850s mechanics institutes quickly spread throughout Victoria wherever a hall, a library or a school was needed. They were the precursors of adult education and libraries in Victoria, and from the beginning mechanics institutes have been run by dedicated volunteers who maintain the venue and facilities and organise community education and events. Mechanics institute halls still prove to be very important social hubs, nurturing community spirit and learning. The Apollo Bay Mechanics Institute Hall is the largest and most historically significant building in Apollo Bay. It stands as a prominent landmark that brings the community together, supporting a strong sense of local identity and pride, and that is why I was so pleased to meet recently with the Apollo Bay mechanics hall committee and thank them for all of their work, particularly Wayne Simmons, Meralyn Stewart and Deb Bradfield, and announce that their application for the Tiny Towns Fund was successful. The Apollo Bay mechanics hall will receive \$40,000 for the purchase and installation of new stage lights along with training for those who will be operating them. With the new state-of-the-art stage lighting and audiovisual facilities Apollo Bay mechanics hall is set to continue to serve its community for a wide range of events long into the future. From hall renovations to sporting club upgrades, the Tiny Towns Fund is all about supporting a whole range of our tiny towns throughout western Victoria and Victoria as a whole.

### **Powerful Owl Park**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:01): I rise to speak about two matters in my members statement today. Firstly, I want to talk about the opening of the Powerful Owl Park in Bulleen. This is a fantastic new sporting facility courtesy of the North East Link Project in my region with three soccer pitches and brand new clubrooms and is for the preservation of the fantastic powerful owl habitat, which is on the banks of the Yarra River. It really is a sight to see; these owls are amazing, majestic creatures. Of course soccer is booming in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, and it is really fantastic to see that many teams who never previously had home grounds will now in fact have a home ground for supporters to see their soccer team play.

### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:02): Secondly, I just want to talk about the fantastic work that is happening on the Suburban Rail Loop, which is also in my region. Not only will this project create 8000 jobs for Victorians, but beyond the rail line the Suburban Rail Loop will also open up a host of new social and economic opportunities. I am really excited to say that expressions of interest are now open for the world's first all-women tunnel-boring machine crew, and it is really exciting to say that Isolde Piet is the first female tunnel-boring machine pilot in the world and will be working on one of Australia's biggest infrastructure projects. So here is a shout-out to all women in Victoria: if you want a really well paid job, go and apply for the Suburban Rail Loop's first all-women tunnel-boring machine crew.

### *Production of documents*

#### **Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:03): I move:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council by 29 August 2024:

- (1) a document outlining the cumulative total expenditure, excluding grant funding, by all departments and state government agencies, covering the period 1 January 2015 to 1 July 2024, on the CFMEU, construction and general (C and G) division, Victoria–Tasmania branch;
- (2) a document outlining the cumulative total of grant funding by all departments and state government agencies, covering the period 1 January 2015 to 1 July 2024, provided to the CFMEU, C and G, Victoria–Tasmania branch; and
- (3) a copy of all state government procurement contracts and project briefs, covering the period 1 January 2015 to 1 July 2024, which specifically name either the CFMEU or CFMMEU.

**Michael Galea:** On a point of order, President, I have concerns about this particular short-form docs motion, particularly that points (1) and (2) of it are not actually asking the government to supply a document but are asking the government to create new documents, which I do not believe is within the remit of standing order 10.01(1), which provides the Council may allow for documents to be requested from government. It does not actually say that the Council can order the government to create a new document. So I ask you to rule this short-form documents motion out of order or at least come back to the chamber if you need time to consider it.

**David Davis:** On the point of order, President, it is clearly possible for the government to provide this information. The essence of a documents order is to seek information from government, and it is certainly wide enough to request the creation of documents and to ensure that documents are provided.

**Michael Galea:** Further to the point of order, President, as Mr Davis I am sure well knows, nowhere in the standing orders does it provide for the creation of new documents, but also nowhere in the standing orders does it refer to the essence of documents.

**The PRESIDENT:** I uphold the point of order. I think the point of order speaks for itself. Mr Mulholland can still pursue point (3), that is pretty clear, 'a copy of all state government

procurement contracts and project briefs'. But to call for a new document I do not think is in line with the standing orders. I call Mr Mulholland, and he can talk on his point (3).

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Anything for this government and this lot across the chamber to hide and cover up the corruption and coercion on construction sites that we have seen over and over and over again. We saw the Premier last year, when I asked her about a lot of coercion and corruption going on on construction sites, say it was all a matter for the federal government and the state government has no jurisdiction over industrial relations law. But when it was exposed on *60 Minutes* – the exact same thing I was asking about – we saw the Premier get up and say she is absolutely disgusted at what is going on; she will not stand for it; she will not stand for Indigenous firms being kicked off construction sites in favour of Mick Gatto linked firms, especially up in Greenvale; she will not stand for the coercion going on on construction sites. But then she got up at a press conference, flanked by the Attorney-General, and said she is absolutely disgusted at what is going on on our construction sites and she is going to do something about it. She said she is going to introduce new bikie laws and said she is going to refer it for a review by Mr Wilson – a review that cannot seek to look into how the government has covered up corruption and coercion in this state by the Labor-linked CFMEU and cannot even look into the government's own issues in covering it up. It had no way for people to submit to the review for over a week, and when they provided an email, the email bounced back and did not actually work. We wait to see the findings of that review.

In terms of the motion itself, we are calling for what the government has funded, because it is really important. Taxpayers money is going to a union the government has now distanced itself from, and we know it will only distance itself temporarily from the criminal enterprise known as the CFMEU. The Premier has claimed she has no responsibility for industrial relations law in the past. Now Premier Allan says that she is disgusted by the actions of the CFMEU and can actually do something about it – there are some things now that are in her remit. We know that she was warned about illegal corruption and coercion to do with the CFMEU but has done absolutely nothing about it, and she should be condemned. We are asking for a copy of all state government procurement contracts and project briefs covering the period of 1 January 2015 to 1 July 2024, and we specifically want to look at a few things, one of them being Incolink, a CFMEU-run workers entitlement fund stacked with union officials, with John Setka until recently a director alongside Elizabeth Doidge, a Labor councillor who accepted CFMEU donations for her council campaign, and Robert Graauwmans, a Victoria–Tasmania branch president of, you guessed it, the CFMEU. Anyone bidding for construction work with the government must show they meet the Department of Treasury and Finance's mandatory guidelines for industrial relations criteria. One requirement is that bidders show where they plan to park workers entitlements, with Incolink being the only option actually highlighted.

This government will go to any lengths to cover up for the CFMEU. We saw Mr Setka on Sunday night reveal that he had a deal with the federal government, with the former federal minister for industrial relations, that they would not go into administration. We know that this government is bought off by the CFMEU. The federal government are as well, which is why they abolished the Australian Building and Construction Commission. The state government are, which is why they abolished the construction code brought in by the Liberals and Nationals.

We know this government is tied to the CFMEU. You only have to look at the Minister for Skills and TAFE's answers to our questions regarding the Skills First training program. If this government are so disgusted by the CFMEU, as the Premier says, why are they giving money still to the CFMEU? Why are they giving money to Incolink, as the government have? Why are they giving money to the Skills First training program? We saw the minister in all sorts claiming they do conduct spot checks, but then she could not claim how many and could not claim, after the revelations had aired, whether there were any spot checks done. We see Minister Shing, quite differently from the Minister for Skills and TAFE, say that she has sought assurances since the revelations aired of corruption and coercion on government housing sites but no such assurances from other ministers. Why would that be? Why would it be that some ministers do and some ministers do not? Could it be their factional allegiances?

We know this government is tied to the corrupt criminal enterprise known as the CFMEU; they go hand in glove. We need to get to the bottom of this scandal, because it is important that taxpayers money is not being wasted. We have \$40 billion of cost blowouts across all major projects across Victoria. That is new hospitals that cannot be built, like in Ringwood; new schools that cannot be built; and roads that cannot be upgraded because this government is tied to the CFMEU.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:11): I do rise to speak on what is left of Mr Mulholland's motion this morning, a short-form documents motion requesting information regarding contracts with the CFMEU, and in doing so note of course from the outset that it is the customary practice of the government not to oppose such motions. Obviously that does apply to where they are properly done within the standing orders. Whether it is just a bit of sloppy work that we have seen again from the opposition or whether they are just being cheeky and wanting the government to do their work for them, I appreciate your earlier ruling, President, on containing this motion to what is appropriate under the standing orders.

I find Mr Mulholland's remarks quite curious as well. Firstly, I note that he did spend a great deal of his contribution reoutlining the strong words that the Premier has said in relation to this issue, and frankly I am grateful to Mr Mulholland for doing so, because it is true that the Premier has been very firm and very clear in speaking out on this. Again, if you want to say that things have not been done, well, that is simply not true. We obviously have the independent inquiry led by Mr Greg Wilson, which was very quickly announced by the Premier in the wake of these events coming to attention. But of course, as has been oft discussed in this place in the past few weeks, I again remind colleagues on the other side that the vast majority of industrial relations powers were actually referred by the state to the federal government, and that occurred of course in the 1990s under Jeff Kennett. I am surprised that you are so keen to so quickly abandon whatever legacy he may have had.

I also find it curious that Mr Mulholland ends by saying that we are not investing in big projects. The very fact that we have such booming construction at the moment is precisely because this government has been investing in projects big and small in inner and outer metropolitan Melbourne and in regional Victoria. We have heard in fact in a members statement just this morning from Ms Ermacora that the Warrnambool line is reopening, which is fantastic to see, with soon-to-come VLocity trains. A big part of that in fact is the rail duplication through South Geelong and to Waurn Ponds so that we can actually provide more services to that very fast growing part of Geelong and also improve the reliability of the line. We have seen similar V/Line track duplications across the state – there is a project right now going on in Mr McIntosh's region in Bunyip – add to which the 110 level crossings that either have already been removed or are in the process of being removed and add to which the hundred new schools that this government is building. Indeed, we have already opened three new primary schools just in the suburb of Clyde North alone, with a further two under construction at the moment and a further high school being opened next year as well.

So to the point of construction works being done: whether it is roads, whether it is hospitals or whether it is other healthcare services like priority primary care centres, whether it is education facilities – whatever service it is that Victorians need, this is a government that has a track record of absolute delivery, and that is what we continue to do. That is why we have seen such strong jobs in these sectors, whether it is construction, whether it is sparkies working on the Metro Tunnel or indeed whether it is the Suburban Rail Loop, which of course those opposite want to cut. They want to cut those construction jobs. They want to take us back, and they will not provide working people in this state with the opportunities that this government has been providing them across the board.

When it comes to inappropriate behaviour in any union, that is something that this government takes very seriously, and it is something that I take very seriously as a long-serving former union official as well, because we are there to represent working people. It is a distinct honour to be in that role, and there is absolutely no place in the union movement for those who seek to profit for themselves or seek to bring other nefarious factors or figures into it. There is absolutely no place for that.

What the Liberals are always about is using any particular example they can find to attack unions as a whole. We saw it indeed under the last federal government with the outrageous royal commission, which found probably more things against the royal commissioner than it found actually against any of the union officials. But we know from that side what their real agenda is when it comes to this matter. This is a government that is taking firm, serious action through the Wilson review, and I will leave my remarks there.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:16): Here we are again on a short-form documents motion with no substance and with little time. This time it is actually above – well, would you say above or below expectations of what the Liberals will serve up?

**A member** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH**: Yes, set expectations low and you will not be disappointed by that side. Point (1) and point (2) have already been knocked out of this debate, so we are left with point (3). We know with those opposite, from what we see in question time and what we see in their motions, there is very little of substance. They have no plan and they have no values, and there is nothing they believe in. It is what their think tanks serve up. Today what their think tanks have served up does not even sit within the guidelines of what we should be debating here.

Anyway, we will move past the laziness of the fishing exercise that has been brought and the fact that they will not put the work in so that we can actually debate something of substance. When I talk about those opposite and their conservative values, I say they have no values, no plan and no policies. But I should put a point there that there is one value that conservatives opposite hold deep, and that is seeing the wages and conditions of workers across Victoria and Australia driven down. We have seen for decades they are absolutely committed to it. Whenever they have the opportunity to be in government, whether it is federally or whether it is state, they go after the pay and conditions of workers. In Victoria, when we made legislation around anti-wage theft laws, where were the conservatives? They were nowhere to be seen. When we were talking about accountability for industrial manslaughter, where were the conservatives? Absolutely nowhere to be seen. When we were talking about dodgy labour hire companies, where were the conservatives? Nowhere to be seen.

I lose track of the number of leaders on that side. The leader who had lobster with a mobster – I think that was Mr Guy. I forget whether that was on his first or his second time, and maybe he will be back for a third attempt. I almost feel some sympathy or pity for Mr Pesutto at times, the way that those on his own side line up behind him not to support him but to try and stick knives into him. We know this lack of values and this lack of, at times, decency from those opposite saw Dr Bach go to the other side of the world.

Coming back to those values, as I have stated before in this place, when we were having a discussion or debate on the minimum wage in Australia – one dollar more for our lowest paid workers in this country – the Liberals could not even bring themselves to make a submission to the Fair Work Commission to support this. The last time the conservatives in this state were in power we know that not one infrastructure project for our roads or for our trains was started. They sat on their hands. There is a reason why those names ring out – Nap Time and Dolittle. They did nothing. This state sat still. And it all comes back to what I started this with: there are no values and no plan that informs policies to get on and do things, which is exactly what the Victorian Labor state government has done. We are investing in the infrastructure that supports jobs right now – tens of thousands of jobs – and will support our economic productivity for decades to come, because we need to be able to get our people from A to B and we need to be able to get our freight from A to B. It is about ensuring the productivity of our state. It is about ensuring the social fabric of our communities. It is about ensuring that our economy is strong for generations to come.

So yet again the conservatives have wasted our time on a short-form documents motion that was poorly thought out and was poorly written. As my colleague said before, we should not be surprised.

The low expectations that we and indeed the majority of Victorians have of the conservatives in this state mean that we should not be surprised. While they do that – while they play games – we will get on with investing for Victorians in Victoria and ensuring that we are absolutely set up not just right now but for generations to come.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:21): I rise not to oppose the motion but to bring attention to this place, as my colleagues speaking before me have stated –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sheena WATT**: There are clearly some interruptions that are going to happen on this. This motion came to us at the very last minute. I would say that if it was so important to those opposite, can they perhaps explain to this chamber, as was not done by the opening remarks by Mr Mulholland, why that was in fact the case. I do need a moment to say that this was very much –

**Evan Mulholland**: It has been tabled for two weeks.

**Sheena WATT**: Well, why wasn't it done last week? That is the question. Wishing the documents into existence, as was raised by the point of order by Mr Galea earlier, is just another crusade against workers. This motion has clear signs that it was rushed and it was hastily chucked together, and it serves to do nothing more than some pointscore against the government. If it was such a quality document, then perhaps it should have been written in accordance with the standing orders. It was in fact poorly drafted, and I thank the President for his ruling this morning.

Those opposite now attempt to grasp at straws and hope that through this motion we can do their work for them, but the truth is the government is getting on with the business of managing the issues which this motion alludes to. In response to the allegations of unacceptable behaviour from a small cohort of members of one division of the CFMEU, the government has acted swiftly to ensure that the behaviour is put to a stop. We have referred the matter to the state's anti-corruption watchdog, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. We have requested that the federal government exercise its powers to ensure that construction workers remain protected by legitimate enterprise bargaining agreements. In addition, we have established the independent review, which will complement the investigations conducted by our own state integrity bodies. I spoke to that last week in the bill that is before us and will be debated later today. These steps will ultimately protect construction workers as they ensure that our Big Build projects operate smoothly, ensuring that workers are able to do their jobs in an environment which is free from bullying and free from corruption.

Victorian workers need a government that will protect their interests, and that is what we are doing. We are taking appropriate steps to curb the criminality within the unions. As I have outlined both last sitting week and right now, we will not do so at the expense of Victorian workers, those that are being targeted by those opposite in the motion before us. Targeting hardworking Victorians is just not the way to go. Unions are the cornerstone of our state. I will just finish off by reminding Mr Mulholland and those opposite that Mr Setka was first appointed to a Victorian government board, which was the Building Industry Consultative Council, in 2013 by the Attorney-General Robert Clark. That was not during our time in government – that was during the brief time of those opposite. But I will say that some years later he was in fact kicked off that body, in June of 2019, by our government. I will finish off by saying we are not going to break with our convention and oppose these documents motions, but I implore those opposite to wake up to themselves.

**The PRESIDENT**: I put the question:

That this house requires the Leader of the Government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council by 29 August 2024 a copy of all state government procurement contracts and project briefs, covering the period 1 January 2015 to 1 July 2024, which specifically name either the CFMEU or CFMMEU.

**Question agreed to.**



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

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (10:26): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, 546, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees***Environment and Planning Committee***Reference*

**Sarah Mansfield** (Western Victoria) (10:26): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) extensive systems of ageing and retired oil and gas infrastructure exists across Victoria and its coast, risking significant methane leakage;
  - (b) the financial liability for decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure may fall to the Victorian taxpayer;
- (2) requires that the Environment and Planning Committee inquire into, consider and report, by June 2026, on:
  - (a) the scale and legal ownership structure of Victoria's oil and gas infrastructure, including offshore wells, pipelines, high-pressure transmission and low-pressure distribution systems, and relevant projects in Commonwealth waters;
  - (b) the scale and nature of oil and gas infrastructure requiring decommissioning over the coming decades, including onshore works and works in Commonwealth and Victorian waters;
  - (c) the regulatory powers of the Victorian government to ensure oil and gas companies deliver planned and timely infrastructure decommissioning;
  - (d) any actions the Victorian government can take to ensure oil and gas companies provide sufficiently to cover decommissioning costs;
  - (e) opportunities for employment in decommissioning;
  - (f) opportunities for traditional owner acknowledgement, consultation and employment where oil and gas infrastructure exists on their ancestral lands and/or sea country;
  - (g) identifying current and potential leaked greenhouse gases from Victoria's existing and retired oil and gas infrastructure, including relevant projects in Commonwealth waters and the quantity of leaks; and
  - (h) any actions the Victorian government can take to cap and otherwise protect the population from leaked greenhouse gases across Victoria's existing and retired oil and gas infrastructure.

In recent months in this chamber we have debated Victoria's transition to a renewable energy future at length. We have discussed ambitious renewables targets and the Greens' bill to ban all new oil and gas projects, we have heard from the government about their commitment to a just transition for the coal industry and we have considered a number of the opposition's amendments that seek to delay Victoria's progress towards a cleaner, cheaper energy future. However, there has been one thing missing from these debates, and it is: what do we do with the fossil fuel industry's ageing infrastructure set to be left behind? As Victoria transitions away from oil and gas towards renewable energy sources, the need for proper rehabilitation must be at the forefront of our planning. Extensive systems of ageing oil and gas infrastructure can be found all across Victoria. The state is scarred with old fossil fuel pipelines and wells, some of which are in use but most of which are approaching the end of their life. Governments across Australia are not fully across how many old oil and gas pipelines exist, let alone the condition that they are in or what short- and long-term dangers they pose. Some commentators

have estimated that across Australia there are over 8000 kilometres of pipelines – enough to encircle Tasmania five times.

Abandoned old infrastructure of this scale, without a proper decommissioning process, is polluting in and of itself. However, whilst kilometres of these pipes are left to languish, they also leak oil and methane gas, wreaking havoc on the local environment and contributing to climate change. This leaking infrastructure poses a significant risk to our marine life. Earlier this year a pipeline linking two ageing ExxonMobil oil platforms off the Gippsland coast was investigated as the source of an oil leak in Bass Strait. In the hours before the leak was shut off 200 litres of hydrocarbons spilled into the sea. The pipeline was in the process of being decommissioned. While the marine environment faces immediate threats from sudden rushes and spills, faulty fossil fuel infrastructure is also slowly leaking gas into the atmosphere, amounting to a significant proportion of Victoria's carbon emissions. It is unknown just how much these ageing pipelines contribute to emissions in Victoria; however, a recent investigation by the clean air taskforce in New South Wales estimated that just a handful of sites surveyed across the state were contributing around 150,000 tons of methane gas into the atmosphere every year.

Importantly, we also need to acknowledge the risk of financial liability for decommissioning falling onto the Victorian taxpayer should the owners of oil and gas infrastructure be unable to meet their obligations. This risk is not as abstract as you might think. In 2016 Woodside Petroleum sold its floating oil rig the Northern Endeavour to the company Northern Oil & Gas Australia, or NOGA. Three years later when the rig was shut down over safety concerns, NOGA went into administration and was unable to front for the costs of the decommissioning. The federal government was left with a massive decommissioning bill. Woodside, who had profited from operating the rig for 20 years, denied that they had sold the rig to NOGA in an attempt to avoid the cost of the clean-up. Since then the federal government has introduced trailing liability to their decommissioning framework to avoid this happening again.

The picture of ageing gas infrastructure across Australia is representative of the legacy that the fossil fuel industry is leaving behind: a history of outdated environmental destruction. It is an industry which has overstayed its welcome but is unwilling to clean up its own mess. In Victoria we need to heed these lessons and implement stronger laws that govern how oil and gas companies clean up infrastructure at the end of its life. A trailing liability scheme is currently in place for the Latrobe Valley's three coalmines. While we understand the possibility of expanding these schemes is being investigated, the Greens urge that these be fast-tracked.

Lastly, I want to note that while proper decommissioning of this infrastructure is important both from a stewardship and environmental perspective, it actually provides Victoria with an opportunity. There is no doubt that the transition away from coalmining has left many communities worried about their future, but there are so many opportunities for the skills of this workforce to be at the forefront of our transition to clean energy, and there are strong employment opportunities in the decommissioning process, from mapping to cleaning up and ultimately shutting down old pipelines and wells. The Maritime Union of Australia, for example, is spearheading a lot of the long-term employment and environmental discussions in this space, including around the logistics of removing and safely dismantling offshore rigs onshore and countering gas giants' arguments that it is simply, if coincidentally, better for marine life to leave wells where they are to rust than for companies to pay for the clean-up.

What is clear is that it is important that this government has a full and detailed picture of the scale of decommissioning that is required. We already have experts in this state who are ready to lend their knowledge to this cause. There is much that we can learn from them, and the Greens believe that an inquiry would provide a transparent platform and one from which other states and territories could learn. It should not be up to the taxpayer to pay for the mistakes of the fossil fuel giants. The industry must be held accountable for its actions, and Labor should ensure that they have to clean up after themselves. Abandoned, leaky, corrosive gas infrastructure in our oceans is a threat to our climate and

to marine life. The oceans are the lungs of our earth, not a dumping ground for the destructive legacy of the fossil fuel industry.

Taking action to end coal and gas in Victoria is a pivotal objective of this generation as stewards for a climate-safe future. I commend this motion to the house, and I would really urge that all members get behind it and support an inquiry into gas decommissioning in Victoria.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (10:33): I am pleased to speak on motion 462, which calls for a gas decommissioning inquiry, and I wish to thank Dr Mansfield for bringing forward this motion today. From the outset I will say that the government will be supporting this motion. The task of decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure is important and reflects the principle of ‘leave it as you found it’ or doing no harm to the environment.

Oil and gas are natural phenomena. They are created by nature and created by geological processes over millennia. I remember a property my parents had in the Otways. The oil was so close to the surface that it was not uncommon to see very small slicks of oil going down waterways in the middle of the most natural and undisturbed forest in the Otways. So it is not as if oil and gas have not always been a part of the environment. There is a similar dynamic with the Dilwyn aquifer in south-west Victoria. It is a deepwater aquifer and is extracted for water supply in south-west Victoria, but it also naturally comes up and releases into the environment at several locations. One of them is a place called the ‘bubbling sands’, just across the border in South Australia. If you go there, you can see freshwater coming up through the beach sand, and if you taste it, although it can make you a bit sick, it is actually freshwater. It is the same, I believe, in some parts of Portland Bay, where naturally occurring freshwater will come up into the bay. However, the establishment of the oil and gas industry in Australia and in Victoria has brought oil and gas into our environment in a much more concerning way than nature. Decommissioning of old or no longer used oil and gas assets ought to be considered a cost of production in any responsible energy company. It is vital that industry does this work in a safe and timely manner.

There is a reason why decommissioning of fossil fuel infrastructure is worth investigating, and that is because here in Victoria we are on track to reach 95 per cent renewable energy in the next few decades. As with every challenge we face, there are upsides and opportunities that can be taken. The decommissioning of this infrastructure does open up some great opportunities in employment and in the recycling of steel and similar materials from these systems.

Historically, Victoria’s energy system has been built around coal and gas, which at the time was inexpensive and plentiful. That is now no longer the case. We have an aged, unreliable coal-fired generator system. Oil and gas are now the most expensive energies. Of course we now have awareness of climate change and the role that the burning of fossil fuels plays in global warming, and gas wells that once produced large amounts of gas are now depleted or nearly depleted. Victoria’s once cheap and plentiful fossil gas supplies are now running out and are getting increasingly expensive.

Australian gas and oil exploration was founded right here in Victoria in the Gippsland Basin in 1924. Victoria’s gas reserves were the backbone of powered manufacturing industries, but the Gippsland Basin fields are depleting rapidly. Infrastructure such as offshore platforms, wellheads and pipelines will no longer be required and will need to be safely decommissioned or removed. Federal legislation under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006 makes it clear that a titleholder must remove any equipment, structures and other property they have used in connection with petroleum operations. In the case of offshore rigs, damage caused to the seabed and subsoil must be rectified. In Victorian waters the rules requiring decommissioning of offshore oil and gas rigs are set out in the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2010 and the Petroleum Act 1998. These acts set out the minister’s powers for requiring the removal of offshore rigs and related materials as well as the roles of the court system. Along with the responsibilities of removing their own infrastructure, the cost of removal and remediation of the environment should be borne by the operator, by the actual industry.

Decommissioning is viewed as an ordinary cost of business, as is reinstatement, and this responsibility is not unique to the oil and gas industry. This is fair. Operators and industry have had many years of bringing millions of dollars into their coffers as a result of oil and gas production. In the Department of Industry, Science and Resources *Roadmap to Establish an Australian Decommissioning Industry*, the Commonwealth government has considered a cost of around \$60 billion will be required to decommission infrastructure in Australian waters. Other infrastructure in Victorian waters and offshore also requires decommissioning, which will incur additional cost. The Centre of Decommissioning Australia, CODA, have estimated some 5.7 million tonnes of decommissioned material will need to be removed. A small percentage of this, 6 per cent of material, sits offshore in Victoria. Sixty per cent of material Australia-wide is steel and can be recycled, 25 per cent is concrete that forms offshore structures and pipeline coatings and 67 per cent is related to pipelines.

There is a limited quantity of gas infrastructure in Victorian waters and on Victorian land. Most of the infrastructure is located within Commonwealth waters and is subject to Commonwealth regulatory jurisdiction. Decommissioning of this infrastructure is being considered worldwide. A report on 6 March 2024 by science journal *Nature* indicated that the majority of the world's 12,000 oil rigs are nearing end of life. The article indicates that worldwide review of decommissioned rigs is sorely needed, with considerations that are both political and scientific. In the North Sea there is strict legislation that requires this infrastructure to be completely removed. In comparison, in the Gulf of Mexico a study is underway into how best to turn the old infrastructure into artificial reefs.

The Allan Labor government is well underway in development of sound environmental strategies. The decommissioning of many oil and gas rigs, pipelines and other infrastructure looming in the near future is not just a challenge, it is also an opportunity. It adds a positive for our workforce and economy. This is no small task and with it will come a new industry and many job opportunities for Victorians.

As we speak, the Commonwealth government is developing road maps to establish the Australian decommissioning industry for offshore oil and gas. With much of the decommissioned material being steel and other components able to be recycled, there is an opportunity for this material to be reused for critical components in renewable energy transition. These materials would go towards the building of wind turbines, towers and other critical components. This is a fantastic example of what can be found in a progressive, thoughtful and evidence-based approach to the decommissioning industry in Victoria.

I compliment the Greens for bringing forward this motion. I think it is going to be a really interesting investigation, and I look forward to understanding and learning how this process can be best achieved for the advantage of the Victorian environment and community.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:43): I am pleased to rise and speak on this motion brought forward by Dr Mansfield regarding an inquiry into decommissioning gas infrastructure, and I will start by saying that the Libertarian Party will not be opposing this motion. I always like the opportunity to look at fossil fuel infrastructure. We hear much in this place on the demonisation of fossil fuels, especially from the Greens, but let us have a look at some of the history of energy throughout humanity's history and how it has actually benefited humanity and brought wealth and many of the things that we see before us today.

The very first energy forms that humanity managed to harness were renewable energy in the form of biomass in wood and sun, and for much of human history we managed to get by with these very low density energy forms. Later on we managed to harness the power of wind through windmills, and in fact the colonisation of Australia was powered by renewable energy – the First Fleet came here with renewable energy. So renewable energy is certainly a colonial energy source. Throughout much of history humans lived in dire poverty because we did not have high-density energy sources, and then all of a sudden we had the discovery of coal. At the time, before the discovery of coal, before the discovery of how to use coal, much of the cities of the world were let us say disgusting. If you read reports about New York at the time, the entire city was of course covered with manure and dead horses,

because horses were the main form of transport throughout the city. Disease was rampant. The city was covered in flies and stank to high heaven. It was an absolute nightmare. Melbourne itself originally used to be called 'Smellbourne'. We had terrible infrastructure for managing sewage. Like New York, it was covered in horse manure. It was covered in all sorts of awful stuff. The reason that that was the case was because we did not have fossil fuels. Also, because wood was their primary source, deforestation was a massive issue in the United Kingdom and throughout much of the world. They were chopping down their forests at a great rate of knots in order to power and heat their homes and do whatever they needed to do.

Then we discovered coal. Coal had the benefit of massive energy density in a very small space. Coal, many would argue, stopped the deforestation of the United Kingdom. Coal managed to produce electricity. Steam powered industry and in fact powered the entire Industrial Revolution, which brought millions, in fact billions, of people out of poverty and brought forward an entire technological revolution – and this state in many ways. When we developed our coal resources in the Latrobe Valley – we still depend on it to this day – we had massive amounts of electricity that we could produce, which powered aluminium smelters and powered all sorts of industries of this state. It saddens me to know that in many ways we are deindustrialising.

We talk about gas. The largest consumer of gas in this state up until recently – and probably soon they will not be the largest consumer – was the production of paper out at the paper mill in Maryvale. Due to environmentalist campaigns and many other issues, we can no longer supply the white paper mill with the materials that they need, and the owner of that mill has decided that they will no longer produce white paper. Australia is one of the few developed countries in the world that cannot produce white paper. But that will also reduce our gas consumption because we are deindustrialising the state. Now one of the greatest requirements for gas is for backing up renewable energy infrastructure. Many have been promoting these technologies, but of course they do not work all the time, and to back them up we need gas – we need lots of gas to do that in fact. There are many gas resources, but unfortunately we have made this ridiculous decision to place a ban on fracking technology in our constitution. I have spoken to many people who are far more learned about the constitution than I and who believe that it would not actually pass a constitutional challenge, because it is not about the powers and procedures of Parliament. Nevertheless we still require fossil fuels.

But the journey of humanity and its relationship with energy went even further. We discovered a new energy source even more powerful than coal and even more powerful than petroleum that got rid of all the horses off the street and the manure and the dead bodies of animals that were lying all over the street. We discovered uranium. This is one of the highest density energy sources known to man. As we follow the prosperity of humanity throughout history, it is directly related to our relationship with energy sources of higher density energy. Again we are making the stupid decision, in my view, to say we do not want this high-density energy source, even though it does not emit carbon, which everyone seems so concerned about – it does not do any of these things. We have an opportunity to harness a technology of unfathomable energy density and we again tie our hands behind our backs. This state has legislation to prohibit the use of this technology in the state. The federal Parliament also has prohibitions on this technology. We are one of the few developed nations in the world that has made this crazy decision to keep using these colonial energy sources rather than moving forward into the future with higher density energy sources that we know will improve the prosperity of humanity.

I hope that when we look at what we have done in the past with the gas infrastructure that we are going to be looking at here and decommissioning, we at least think about what we are going to need in the future. We are going to need gas, and I know that the government knows this. That is why they are worried about gas supplies. The government knows that they need the gas backup. They know that batteries are not going to cut it. They know that we are not going to be building pumped hydro dams all over the state and flooding forests. They know that that is not politically feasible. They know that they need gas. The government knows this. Anyone that knows anything about the electricity market knows this. We need gas, so we need more gas production in this state, otherwise we are going to be

dependent on other states or, even worse, importing it from the Middle East or somewhere else. Lord knows what sort of potential horrific consequences and dependencies that would cause for us.

I would urge anyone involved in this inquiry to think very carefully about the future of this state and our relationship with energy and not tie our hands behind our back but harness every energy source that is available and every energy technology that is available and do whatever we can to use this energy to further the prosperity of Victorians and humanity in general.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:52): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this debate on motion 462 brought to the chamber by Dr Mansfield. I want to begin by making some general points, and then I will indicate our amendment and where we are intending to proceed. This motion on the surface has much to commend it and has got many reasonable aspects to it. There are obviously challenges for retiring oil and gas infrastructure across Victoria. There are obviously greenhouse gas emissions with fugitive methane and so forth – different opportunities and issues there – and there are obviously financial issues with respect to the decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure.

However, I would make this broader point: we need an even playing field, a neutral playing field, where energy infrastructure of all types has a clear road for decommissioning. I understand there are historical points that Dr Mansfield has made – and also, I might add, Mr Limbrick – but the challenges of decommissioning do not just relate to gas and electricity and other infrastructure and petroleum infrastructure. The problem with this motion is it specifically targets them. It is simply too narrow and does not put this in a broader context and effectively impose the same burdens, the same requirements and the same expectations on other energy provision.

We have got a number of lower energy generation options that are there at the moment. We see more wind and we see more industrial-scale solar production. All of these have an important contribution to make and are generally supported in their essence by the community if not in their implementation. The state government has a lot of issues with the way it implements these points. But I should just be very clear here: there is wind infrastructure out there that is very near the end of its life, and there is no clear path to decommission those facilities. That is a safety issue. It is also an issue of cost. I should state that on Tuesday last week – so just eight days ago – I was at a location, a farm just north of Ararat, talking to a group of farmers there, two farmers in particular, about the wind farm that they have on their property. That wind farm is almost at the end of its life, and the contracts that have been signed make no provision, none at all, for the removal of that infrastructure at the end of the contract. So this decommissioning challenge is not a theoretical point with much of this lower emission generation, it is actually a practical one that is coming to the fore right now. Wind farms 20 years in, 25 years in, are actually at the point where they will be decommissioned. What will replace them? That is a question. What will they do with the large infrastructure? What will they do with the concrete pad? What will they do with the damage to the roads? What will they do with the –

**Tom McIntosh:** Build a nuclear reactor on it.

**David DAVIS:** Well, Mr McIntosh, I am being quite serious here. I do not think that north of Ararat that is a likely option that you have proposed, but it is an issue for these farmers as to what will happen with the wind infrastructure on their properties that is near the end of its life. Who will remove it? It has been on sold, I understand, three or four times, so different groups now own it than the ones that built it. And who will remove it? Who will pay for this?

With the assistance of the clerks, we might circulate the amendment that is proposed. It seeks to ensure that this motion is not just about gas and oil infrastructure, it is also about lower emission energy generation and ensuring that there is a level playing field here when we actually start to look at these

points at committee. If this is to go to a committee, it should go to a committee to examine all of these points. I move:

1. In paragraphs (1)(a), (1)(b), (2)(a) and (2)(b), omit the words 'oil and gas infrastructure' and replace them with 'oil, gas, wind farm, solar and other renewable energy infrastructure'.
2. In paragraphs (2)(c) and (2)(d), omit the words 'oil and gas companies' and replace them with 'oil, gas, wind farm, solar and other renewable energy companies'.

This would make it a fairer motion which would look at all of these technologies and would put to the fore the decommissioning issues that exist with all of the technologies.

One of the problems that we have with the costings of a number of the technologies at the moment is that the decommissioning is not examined. In a sense it is an externality, if it is left to the environment or left to be carried by others. Obviously it is a deeper principle that those who are causing the intervention, doing the work, whether it is drilling or whether it is erecting a large wind facility, ought to be responsible in a full-life stewardship role for the decommissioning, removal and restoration of that land back to a close approximation of what it was earlier.

I want to pick up a number of points that Mr Limbrick made. He did make some genuine points about high-density energy and how it actually played a key role in the development of our civilisation and the development of our standard of living, and he is absolutely right. He is absolutely right in particular about the role of gas. Gas is going to have a very central role, and not just in homes and businesses and in the hard-to-abate areas where gas has obviously got a continuing role. With steel manufacturing, with bricks and with all of those hard-to-abate areas, gas is going to have a significant role there. But it is also going to have a role in supporting low-emission technologies and generation, which often are in the form of intermittent technologies. Wind, solar and even hydro are inherently intermittent. You cannot rely on the volume coming from a solar farm in the night. This is clear. You cannot rely on the same level of wind –

*Members interjecting.*

**David DAVIS:** I am just stepping you through this because it is not clear to your minister, Lily D'Ambrosio, whose war on gas does not focus on the fact that to support renewables you actually need gas. She is at odds with your federal colleagues, the federal Labor Party, which has actually recognised that gas has got a significant role in supporting renewables, and obviously the federal Liberals. They actually understand that there is a role for gas in supporting low-emission generation and helping with the intermittency issue and ensuring there is a clear supply going forward.

Our concern with this motion is that it is uneven. It singles out several technologies and does that in a way that does not, in a sense, understand the competitive neutrality challenges that are there. If we are to have several technologies coming forward to be used, including gas, we obviously need to see proper decommissioning of all of those, and if you are not prepared to look at the issues with respect to the low-emission technologies, that leaves an unbalanced and uneven arrangement. My time has concluded. We will support the amendment, obviously, and see how that proceeds.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:02): I am going to take my time going into this debate on this motion, which, as Ms Ermacora has pointed out, the government is supporting. Mr Davis wants to talk about imbalanced debate, and what we heard from him was absolutely that, but I will come back to that in time.

The decommissioning of our gas and oil infrastructure is a really important conversation to have. There is a lot of it. We know there are environmental implications, and we know that there are opportunities for a huge workforce to not only remove but reclaim these materials, whether it is steel or other items, to recycle and to repurpose these materials and not to have them (a) not being used but (b) also creating environmental and other risks.

There has been a lot of conversation about history from the conservatives during this debate so far, and I am sure there will be a lot more of it. We have heard about horses pooing in streets and people using wood to heat their homes and this sort of thing. That was a wonderful contribution and one that I was not surprised at from the conservatives, who generally like to keep at least a hundred years in the rear-view mirror when they think about policy for the future of this state and this nation.

As I always do, I want to acknowledge the coal and gas industries that have supported this state for the last century and the workers that have taken those abundant resources and supplied, from a coal perspective, the electricity that our state, our homes, our businesses and our industry have used. That cheap, abundant energy has been critical in the economics of our state. It has been critical for things like the automotive industry. But when the Australian dollar was buying US\$1.10 the conservatives while in Parliament thought they would get rid of tens of thousands of jobs. We now know the Aussie dollar is back under 70 cents – 65, 66, 67 – but of course they did not want to see workers in well-paid jobs; they did not want to see those capacities and skill sets in our country. It was much the same with gas. It was found 100 years ago in Gippsland, in eastern Victoria. We have had for the last 60 years large quantities of gas, with Victoria being a major supplier of gas within the nation. But we know that coal is not compatible for use from an emissions perspective, and we know that from a gas perspective our wells and our supplies are depleting or are depleted, which is why we have to have this important conversation about the management and treatment of that infrastructure and the responsibility that industry must take in cleaning that up and ensuring that we do it in a safe way. At ports like Barry Beach, they are ready to make massive investment to be able to handle these materials. It is really important that when workers handle those materials they are able to do it safely and of course that for the local environment near Wilsons Prom it is done in a way that does not have negative impacts on the waters, the marine life and the local towns.

That is the history that the conservatives like to talk about. What I am really concerned about and what Labor governments are really concerned about is looking forward. That is exactly why we have set plans that see us at the moment with 40 per cent of electricity in this state being generated from renewable sources. We have consistently set and smashed renewable energy targets. And we have set, in terms of other jurisdictions around the world, a really strong, ambitious, leading target of net zero emissions by 2045. Our 600-megawatt auctions that we have put out over the years to get that investment in renewables have been crucial in setting clear expectations and understanding to industry, which industry do not get from the conservatives.

With Solar Homes, we know that one in three Victorian households see the economic sense of putting solar panels on their roofs. Mr Davis was talking down solar panels before, but one in three Victorian households acknowledge them and more and more are putting them on every day. Over 2 gigawatts of capacity has been installed in Victoria – more than a large coal generator and more than a nuclear generator indeed. We have big batteries being installed around the state. They are being installed around the world at breakneck pace, and we are seeing costs coming down. I will come to renewables and storage and those sorts of things later.

We are leading in electrification with businesses, with homes and with heat pumps. We are ensuring that our emissions are reducing, whether it is in energy, manufacturing or transport. But a lot of these are conversations the opposition do not want to have – things like electric cars and ensuring our transport security by having our energy made here and by having Aussie farmers generate energy, receive income and power our cars right here rather than paying foreign nations to have the oil shipped around the world. So where is that money going? We are risking a blockade to get the oil here. Let us have Aussie jobs and Aussie farmers generating that energy right here to power our transport industry.

Offshore wind is going to be a massive player in how we generate our electricity for this state. We know there is tens of billions of dollars of investment coming, and this is not an accident. While the conservatives federally left it sitting in the drawer, this state has pushed on and this state is the first in the nation to get an offshore wind industry going. And by God, I hope we get it going, because tens of thousands of jobs depend on it. The muck going on opposite around nuclear is putting that at risk. It is



industry who are looking to invest in renewables and particularly offshore wind, not nuclear, because we know the economics of nuclear do not stack up. We are putting the training pipelines in to make sure that workers who are transitioning out of coal, out of gas, have generations of work to come. But those opposite want to put it at risk, and they are lying to workers about the timeframes in which those jobs will come. We know it is a lie. We have heard about small modular nuclear reactors. They no longer exist. That is off the conservatives' policy positions, and now they are talking about large scale.

We heard Mr Davis say before that we need deeper principles, that those causing issues for the community need to lean in and engage on them. Well, Mr Davis, I ask again: when it comes to nuclear, what does it mean for farmers' water supplies? What does it mean for earthquakes? We have had two earthquakes near proposed nuclear reactor sites in recent weeks. What of the waste? What of terrorism threats? We know that if you put a nuclear reactor somewhere, it is a pretty good target for someone. What about energy supply when they are down for maintenance? What are the full costs going to be? Industry does not want to invest in it. Industry does not want them on their land. You lot sold our generators to private industry. They do not want the nuclear reactors there. You will not answer any of these questions, and you go around scaremongering about gas.

We have a plan that 11 years from now it will be 95 per cent renewable energy in this state, and yes, there is a gas component as we get it to 100 per cent. You sit there and you smirk and you laugh with your ideology, but we have a plan. My criticism of the Greens is they want to play politics with gas. We have to get to net zero emissions. We are getting there, but we have to acknowledge – and we do acknowledge on this side, but other parties need to acknowledge – that renewables will have a key role in the bulk of our generation, but we need gas to make sure that we can make the full transition in an orderly manner.

As I have said, we have tens of thousands of jobs in renewables. Particularly when we look at Gippsland and the industries that have been there and have supported this state for a century, decommissioning of this infrastructure is a really important part of this conversation, ensuring the workers that are in those jobs are well trained and well paid and that when they do the work it is done safely. I support this motion and look forward to further debate.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:12): I am pleased to rise to make a contribution on motion 462 standing in the name of Dr Mansfield and outline that the Nationals firmly support the expansion of this inquiry to include renewable energy technologies – to include solar plants and wind turbines – in the mix. Today Dr Mansfield made a very nice contribution in her members statement. She spoke about farmers, and she endorsed farmers for being in the forefront of many technologies about adapting to the current climate, and she supported their continuity of course but also their importance. What Dr Mansfield I believe misses in this motion is an understanding of the impact on farmers and the broader community of where these renewable technologies will land, the impact on our farms and potentially food and fibre in Victoria and the very real need to have a balanced debate and to include wind farm, solar and renewable technologies.

This government continues to drive a wedge between the city – 75 per cent of the population, metropolitan Melbourne – and the regions, 25 per cent of the population. All of the action, whether it be onshore gas or whether it be renewables, including offshore – and I will speak to that in a moment – happens on land, and often it is going to be acquired farming land. This Allan Labor government is taking away regional voices by removing farmers' and landholders' rights to third-party appeal through VCAT if they feel aggrieved about solar plants being put up on a large scale on their farms or beside them. They are aggrieved about this, and transmission lines into the bargain are a very big cause of division. But this government is taking away those rights. That is not fair, and we saw last week in Bendigo the outrage of farmers at their doing that. Whilst I endorse wholeheartedly the Greens' comments this morning in their debate on the motion, I say to the Greens: you must expand this motion to look at the whole of renewable energy and oil and gas.

The very first oilfield was actually off Lakes Entrance in my electorate a hundred years ago, and since that time we know that oil has been powering our state, driving our economy and providing prosperity to our communities, homes and towns, as has of course gas. Indeed the Gippsland Basin is – and it has been shown – a perfect location. It is a natural gas trap that has been tapped and used. Indeed the Longford gas plant in my electorate in Sale et cetera has been an enormous hub of industry and a very important aspect of our local economy. Those oil and gas fields – particularly the oil – are nearing the end of their timeframe. They are in federal waters, in Commonwealth waters, and indeed it is very clear that much of the jurisdiction and impact are actually captured in federal law and federal jurisdiction. For us to interrogate that I think is somewhat to the side of the actual implications of that.

I heard Dr Mansfield make comments about decommissioning, and this is a very important issue, without a doubt, because it needs to be done safely. There need to be environmental considerations, and again there are multiple layers in terms of state and federal legislation and regulation that cover this. But the costs of offshore oil and gas decommissioning liability lie firmly as the responsibility of the petroleum title holder through, as I spoke about, federal law. It is important, there is no doubt about it, but it is also important that we look at the holistic issues.

In 2022 – and I know there was a Greens representative on it – an upper house inquiry of the Environment and Planning Committee, which I am on, investigated renewables. But what they failed to do in that report – and indeed we put out a minority report – was to look first at the cradle-to-grave effect and impact of renewable energies, because often what is said is that they are zero in terms of emissions, but you need to actually look at that whole cradle-to-grave analysis. What the majority report failed to do was to accept a consideration from the Liberals and Nationals about introducing bonds, similar to retiring coal-fired power stations and others, for large-scale solar energy facilities and for wind turbines as part of that decommissioning and rehabilitation. This will come, and we are in a state of transition.

I take up very much the point of my colleague Mr Davis, who spoke to the government's hatred of gas and the need for gas to be a peaking source of energy. Indeed only this week I think we saw that Lakes Blue Energy is applying for a drilling project for onshore conventional gas exploration, and indeed the Australian Energy Market Operator has noted that Victoria will experience a shortfall in gas supplies, forecasting an urgent need to secure additional gas supplies. There we have industry seeking onshore exploration to tap into, particularly in Gippsland but also in the Otways, our gas reserves and to be a very important part of this peaking fuel supply in the transition. Also, I note that the government and indeed the Greens have not said anything about clean hydrogen and carbon capture and storage, which is another important element in this, and that certainly can be used in our offshore geological formations out to sea. So in effect we have a government who just wants to tell us the good stories. We have them shooting barbs or little arrows over here about what is and is not going to be the policy of the Liberals and Nationals in this state, but the important thing for people in communities is the need for reliable energy supply.

What is important also in relation to this inquiry is having a holistic investigation. It is a bit obtuse, in my opinion, that the Greens are putting up something that says, 'Just look over here, but let's not take.' If we are going to take resources of this Parliament to investigate, why not have a thorough and forensic investigation and look at the impact of decommissioning renewables? Indeed in my electorate of Eastern Victoria we have had the Toora wind farm for 20-odd years. It will be coming to the end of its natural life cycle. What is going to happen there? Mr Davis spoke about the environmental impacts. What will happen? Will it just be left as a scar on the landscape, not producing anything, or will it be decommissioned? This is an opportunity for this house to investigate those very positive and scientific steps, and I endorse that inclusion.

I feel that this is again, as always, a war on the oil and gas industries by the Greens – that is their bent – but we want a measured and positive outcome, if this is to get up. Otherwise I support the amendment. But I have grave concerns about the narrow vision of the Greens for this inquiry.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:22): I rise today to speak to the motion put forward by a member for Western Victoria, and in that I reaffirm my colleague's position who spoke earlier that we will support this motion. The continued decommissioning of infrastructure is an important task and instrumental to the continued life of energy transition, and it must be completed by experts in the industry in a safe and timely manner. It also presents opportunities for retraining, recycling and reusing of large volumes of material like copper wiring and steel.

We have to move away from this outdated thinking that energy transition projects are impossible and unaffordable; it is simply untrue. It is of the utmost importance that we look at the transition not as a burden but as an opportunity. There is no more time for inaction. The glory days of the two pillars of gas and coal are over, and we are getting on with what must be done: transitioning away from out-of-date ideas about energy. This presents an opportunity to move away from end-of-life, outdated coal-fired power stations and towards clean, cheap renewable energy sources.

The rest of the world is already doing this. Countries like Iceland, Germany, Kenya, Norway and our neighbours in New Zealand have seen that renewable energy projects are the future and have gotten on with the transition projects needed. Sweden reached their 50 per cent renewable energy target eight years early because they took the transition seriously and took advantage of the natural resources that they have in abundance, like wind, solar and geothermal energy. Change is inevitable, as with anything in this life, and we are committed to providing that change for everyone. We need the change now, and we need to be thinking of transitioning energy away from end-of-life coal-fired and gas turbines to creating sustainable renewable energy to capitalise on what Victoria has in droves, and that is our sunlight and wind. This is something that Victoria can capitalise on. We have ample wind and sun; we are the sunburnt country – it is in the title – although last night I think that we proved that we can be a windy city too.

If we do not move forward with this transition, we are going to be left behind the rest of the world. We cannot continue to go on with the ancient pillars of coal-fired power and gas reserves, because these things have changed. The fact is that gas is no longer cheap, it is no longer plentiful and, funnily enough, I have got to tell you, the finite resources for these power systems are in fact finite. I am proud that Victoria is doing the hard work to address our heavy reliance on fossil gas through the *Gas Substitution Roadmap* and its updates.

We know that getting thousands of households off gas will save Victorians thousands on their energy bills every single year. In a time when it feels like the cost of everything is going up a falling power bill can make the difference to Victorian families and businesses. Our government is committed to tackling the pressures that Victorians are feeling on their energy bills. The evidence is clear: the best way to reduce energy bills is to go all electric. A typical all-electric Victorian home built today can save \$1000 a year compared to a new dual-fuel home. If the new home has solar, these savings can climb to \$2200 per year. For the typical existing Victorian home, going all electric saves around \$1700 and up to \$2700 with solar. Of course we recognise that going all electric in one hit is not feasible for everyone. That is why through the Victorian energy upgrades and Solar Homes programs the Allan Labor government delivers thousands of up-front discounts and incentives for specific appliances – like an efficient electric reverse-cycle aircon or a hot-water heat pump – so that Victorians can get their electrification journey started step by step.

We know that the Australian oil and gas exploration industry was born right here in Victoria, with the globally significant gas reserves being discovered almost 60 years ago. We are not shying away from the history that billions of dollars in investment and fossil fuels were produced, but we know that these legacy fields are depleting rapidly. These large historical gas wells of the past are just that – they are of the past. They are soon to be no longer producing gas. The legacy infrastructure, like offshore platforms, wellheads and pipelines, will no longer be required and will need to be safely decommissioned and removed in accordance with petroleum resources legislation, which states that all infrastructure brought to site by the titleholder must be removed and it is the responsibility of the operator and the industry to remove them. You see, in our state any proposal to decommission

infrastructure must be detailed in environmental plans that describe the risks and impacts posed to the environment, the control measures to reduce the risks as low as reasonably practicable and the consultation carried out in accordance with reporting obligations. This government will not accept a plan if the environmental risks and the impacts are unacceptable. Decommissioning must not and will not come at the expense of Victoria's precious marine environment.

These decommissioning projects pose opportunities. One industry's trash really is another industry's treasure. The decommissioning of the old oil and gas infrastructure is a big task, and it will require a major workforce. This means more direct opportunities for regional Victorians. Beyond that, these workers will need homes to live in, places to shop, tourist sites to visit, local sports clubs to send their kids to and all the other things that drive regional Victoria. The existing workforce in the offshore oil and gas industries are well placed to secure work in decommissioning, given their experience operating in the sector already. The Commonwealth government is developing a road map to establish an Australian decommissioning industry for offshore oil and gas and just last year released an issues paper which sought feedback from industry, unions, state and territory governments, First Nations people and local communities. This government looks forward to the release of the final road map and working with regional Victorians and industry professionals to create more jobs, decommission outdated infrastructure and recycle these materials, such as the steel and the concrete, for critical components of the renewable energy transition. This will create wind turbine towers, transmission lines, solar panels and other critical infrastructure. This will slash the environmental impact and continue to develop Victoria's circular economy, which I spoke about only last night in my adjournment. It forms a key component for Labor's approach in our state: maximising job growth and minimising the environmental impacts.

Just on decommissioning, I do know that there is quite a thriving decommissioning industry operating in other states, particularly in mining. I do have some folks that I know that work in that industry, and they too are looking for other opportunities in major regional centres away from remote outposts, and the jobs that will be created right here with the decommissioning industry in Victoria will be very attractive to interstate workers. So not only are there opportunities for Victorians already here, those Victorians already working in the oil and gas sector, but I tell you this is going to be an almighty attractive opportunity for interstate workers to find a home here in Victoria, and certainly we will welcome them. We have said in this place that the transition is not a nice-to-have, it is a must-have. The decommissioning of these projects is a must-have, and this government will ensure that Victoria goes forward in a way that not only provides cheap energy to Victorians but is also clean and is renewable. With that, can I just reaffirm my and the government's support for this inquiry. As a member of the Environment and Planning Committee, it is one that I certainly look forward to with eager anticipation.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (11:32): I rise to speak on Dr Mansfield's motion. It is no surprise that those opposite – Ms Watt, Mr McIntosh and the rest of them – prosecute a very narrow vision of what constitutes energy supply. Wind and solar only is how you approach the world. This state once had the most abundant sources of energy and the cheapest sources of energy. Contrary to Ms Watt's suggestion that we have got this cheap energy, we have got the most expensive form of energy possible. Those living inside the tram tracks probably do not realise that you actually need gas. You need gas to manufacture a whole lot of goods; electricity does not cut it. You cannot kiln-dry timber, you cannot dry milk and you cannot produce steel without a powerful source of energy. Wind and solar just do not cut it.

I have got an agnostic approach to energy. I am totally supportive of all forms of energy, because we need to increase supply in this state. You have managed to reduce the supply by demonising coal, and so now we have got a shortage of supply. We have to increase supply, so I am very happy to have all forms of energy in the mix. But you have total misinformation on gas supplies. There is plenty of natural onshore conventional gas.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Where? It has been tapped, and it is in the Otway area and it is down in Ms Bath's electorate as well. There is plenty of gas. You have had a moratorium for over 10 years on the exploration for gas. That was appalling, and so now you do need to explore for gas and actually produce it. Mr McIntosh is clearly part of the cancelling history cult. He cannot recognise the progress we have made in this country, and as Mr Limbrick pointed out, it largely was fuelled by oil –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** And by what, Mr Galea? What form of energy did you say it was provided by? You live with this Cold War mentality of being antinuclear, yet the rest of the world embraces nuclear. We export it. And guess what, your Labor federal government have embraced nuclear submarines. You are going to have to dispose of the waste, so how about that? Has anyone in this chamber not had an X-ray? Do you not know that we have had a nuclear power plant at Lucas Heights since 1958? You are totally opposed to it. You live in the Dark Ages, you lot over there. You will be rubbing sticks together and getting around on your bike if you are not careful.

It is the policies of the Greens and their allies which are poisoning the investment in oil and gas, which would bring home more efficient and cleaner technology. This complete distortion of the market is the same reason that we are now paying to keep coal-fired power stations open. If the market had not been pressured by these climate demands, then newer investment in gas and clean coal would have come forward and replaced older assets. This is what happens whenever you intervene with legislated targets rather than incentivising progress.

Reductions in carbon emissions to date have been significant, but the truth is the first cuts are the low-hanging fruit. As we move towards net zero, further reductions will become technically more difficult and exponentially more expensive. Achieving net zero is an ideological, extremist and damaging position. Instead a pragmatic approach could achieve substantial emission reductions at a fraction of the financial and environmental cost a renewable-only solution would inflict. But as the motion demonstrates, the Greens are not interested in pragmatism. We are – we have suggested that you amend the motion so that we include the decommissioning of wind and solar projects. What could be wrong with that? If you are really concerned about the environment, you will happily support the amendment.

**Sarah Mansfield** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** No, no, it is not. It is the same. We are decommissioning energy infrastructure. That is what this is about, but you only want to selectively decommission some of it.

The consequence of the attack on gas is deindustrialising our state and getting rid of our manufacturing industry. It is just offshoring the problem – we will still need the projects, but the carbon emissions will go on China's tally, not ours. It is completely dishonest and massively damaging to our economy and national security at the same time. It is the same short-sighted approach we see with the timber ban: destroying Victorian jobs, business and tax revenue and requiring us instead to import environmentally dishonest, worse products from thousands of kilometres away, with no concern about what the environmental impact might be in the country where we are denuding the landscape just to meet an unchanging essential requirement. The Greens' attack on gas is counterproductive environmentally. Their lack of pragmatism means they make the perfect the enemy of the good. As we heard from Mr Limbrick, it is the same motive which causes them to dismiss nuclear power. The carbon emission argument for nuclear is even stronger than gas of course, but gas still represents enormous progress.

The *Australian National Greenhouse Accounts Factors 2023* was published by the federal government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. Let us look at their calculation of emissions from stationary energy sources. The Victorian electricity grid has 220 kilograms of carbon dioxide emitted per gigajoule of energy versus natural gas distributed via pipeline, with 51.4 kilograms of carbon dioxide emitted per gigajoule. That is 220 kilograms versus

51.4, so what is more environmentally friendly? For the same amount of energy provided our gas network produces less than one-quarter of the carbon emissions. That is the reality, and the ideological charge towards all-electric homes, heating and transport before we have a completely rebuilt generation and transmission network means that greenhouse gas emissions will be higher. It is as simple as that. That is the real-life consequence of the Greens and the Labor Minister for Energy and Resources and their dislike of gas.

Ms Watt has talked about powering all-electric homes. Let me tell you, if you want to build a new home out in the country it will cost you up to \$100,000 to upgrade the power to the connection with Powercor to make it all electric, and that does not include powering your EV. So it is out of the question for people in the country to build an all-electric home, but that is now the rule under this show. Then what about the running costs? Despite all the media releases and government-sponsored initiatives the cost of gas per kilowatt hour of energy use in the home is still less than half of the cost of electricity in Victoria. That is before we even get onto the cost of installation. Sure, electrical appliances are cheaper than gas, but when transformed into all-electric homes with potential for electrical vehicle charging then new electrical infrastructure is required too, and it will not be cheap. We just cannot afford this nonsense of having all-electric homes. As I have talked about in this house, in Avoca a \$380,000 build had \$100,000 to spend on upgrading to be able to get power from the connection down the end of the street.

**John Berger:** They need a three-phase one.

**Bev McARTHUR:** That is before you even go to three phase. Of course this is just to power the home. But we have got a situation out in Victoria where at the moment there is no three-phase power for many dairy farms; they are operating on diesel generators.

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (11:43): I rise to speak on this motion by the Greens, and I really do want to give credit where credit is due. The environment is important and we are transitioning our energy infrastructure, so it is important to think about and plan for the future. But to me this motion does appear to be, like much of the debate around energy and policy in this country, lopsided, and that is why I do agree with the Liberal Party amendments, because even our current wind and solar energy production is facing enormous and unanswered challenges when it comes to the environmental impacts, the recyclability and in fact the economic viability of those types of energy generation.

We know that there are significant environmental and social impacts associated with the mining and processing of metals required for wind and solar energy infrastructure. Take cobalt: heavy metal contamination of air, water and soil has led to severe health impacts for miners and surrounding communities, and the cobalt mining area in the Congo is one of the top 10 most polluted places in the world. Around 20 per cent of cobalt from the Democratic Republic of the Congo is from artisanal and small-scale miners who work in dangerous conditions in hand-dug mines, and there is extensive child labour. New coal work mines are proposed in Congo and in Australia and in Canada, and I hope that we will be managing those better. Copper: copper mining can lead to heavy metal contamination as seen in Chile, China, India and Brazil. It has led to environmental pollution from a major tailings dam spill in the US, and there are health impacts for workers in China and Zambia. Lithium: the major concerns over lithium mining are water contamination, shortages in the lithium triangle of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile and inadequate compensation for affected local communities. Nickel: damage to freshwater and marine ecosystems has been observed in Canada, Russia, Australia, the Philippines, Indonesia and New Caledonia. Rare earth: rare-earth metal processing requires large amounts of harmful chemicals and produces large volumes of solid waste, gas and wastewater. There have been huge impacts in China, Malaysia and historically in the US, and new mines are proposed for Canada, Greenland, Malawi, South Africa and Uganda. I do not know if the workers rights over in those countries are up to scratch for us over here. Silver: there have been heavy-metal contamination of soil and water from recent and historical mines in the US, Mexico, Peru and Bolivia and social conflicts in Guatemala.

Although recycling is generally environmentally preferable to mining, it also faces environmental and ethical challenges. The recycling of e-waste in many parts of the world is done in hazardous working conditions and only ends up recovering a fraction of what would otherwise be recovered, and it emits dangerous toxins, heavy metals and acid fumes into the surrounding environment, leading to severe illnesses.

I agree industrial growth should be strongly tied to environmental values, with environmental policy integrating the two currently opposed sectors. We should acknowledge that both are essential to our future and that success can only exist where we balance the two appropriately. As Australia moves to a circular system, policy and the focus of our parliamentarians need to be squarely placed on integrating prosperous industry with environmental values, where circularity, efficient resource use and responsible environmental management become the benchmarks of success. But the fact is we will always need a strong industrial and energy sector for a healthy Australian economy. So this should be seen as an opportunity to build a model or a map for the future on how we can have sustainable industries that generate jobs and that grow our economy but that also play a role in protecting the Australian environment and people.

I do believe that we should not be getting rid of gas entirely. In Europe they are transitioning using the existing infrastructure to other forms of gas, and coal is still a major player in every single industry in the world. We have to get better at modernising these things and not just throw them in the bin or become ideological; we need to stick to the science, manage what we can, use practical timelines and actually remember that this is all about humans flourishing, not ideology.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:48): I rise to speak very briefly, for a little over 3 minutes, on Dr Mansfield's motion referring issues surrounding oil and gas infrastructure decommissioning to the Environment and Planning Committee. Just briefly, as the chair of that committee, I look forward to this inquiry. It is obviously one that we will get to after we complete the next inquiry that we are doing. Having just finished a very good, I think, inquiry into the October 2022 flooding event, we are about to commence an inquiry into the resilience of the built environment to climate change. Then we will move on to an inquiry that was referred to us by the chamber a couple of weeks ago with respect to community consultation practices, and this inquiry will come after that. These matters are obviously very significant and very important and are in the queue for consideration. There are a lot of inquiries being given to the parliamentary committees here in the Legislative Council, and we are diligently working our way through them.

The other thing I will just say briefly, by way of context, is it was really pleasing in the last half hour to see the latest monthly consumer price index data released by the Austrian Bureau of Statistics showing that electricity prices –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, this is a very important debate, but CPI figures are a little bit distant from the substance of the debate.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think Mr Batchelor was getting to the energy part of where he was going.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I am sorry that Mr Davis is not excited by the fact that electricity prices in the CPI are falling in this country due to the efforts of the federal Labor government, but that is a fact, and we would like facts inserted into a debate about energy, because they are conspicuously absent from the contributions that those opposite make, whether it is this debate about energy or any debate about energy. I am sorry that Mr Davis does not like the fact that the electricity prices in the CPI are coming down because Labor governments are providing energy bill relief to consumers in this country. Labor takes action on the cost of living even if the Liberals do not care.

This inquiry will get to an important question about how the energy infrastructure in this state is dealt with as part of our energy transition. We on this side of the chamber, this Labor government, know that we do need to make an energy transition in this state away from our historical reliance on coal and gas and towards a renewable future. That is absolutely the policy framework that this Labor

government is advocating for – a renewable future. We are not going to take steps backwards like the Liberals and the Nationals want us to. We do not support fossil fuels being a cornerstone of our energy sector and do not support a disastrous step down a nuclear path. If you want to have an inquiry into the most dangerous and deadly forms of energy when it comes to decommissioning, let us have a chat about nuclear energy. I am not sure that we want to put the concrete casing that we see in places like Chernobyl over the proposed nuclear power plants that the Liberals want to build in the Latrobe Valley. I am sure we will get into that in another debate, but unfortunately the clock has beaten me on my contribution today.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (11:51): I want to thank members for their contributions to this debate. There have been some interesting contributions, but I particularly want to thank members of the government for their support and their recognition of the importance of dealing with this issue.

We certainly appreciate some of the concerns that have been raised by the coalition in suggesting their amendment. We absolutely should be thinking about the full life cycle of renewables and indeed all infrastructure. It is worth noting that offshore wind is required to pay a bond from the get-go; it is something we should consider for other forms of energy. But the issue of renewables' life cycles is really different to what we are talking about here. The risks are totally different. Right now we have decades-old pipelines that are no longer in use or approaching the end of their life that are leaking methane into the atmosphere in a climate crisis. We have old pipelines that have already leaked oil into the ocean. As I mentioned in my contribution, that happened recently off the coast of Gippsland. Those communities are lucky that it was not a bigger leak. A catastrophic oil leak and methane pouring into the atmosphere are huge risks, and we need a focused inquiry to deal with these risks. All those MPs here who represent regional areas that have coastal communities should be getting behind this motion. Imagine if there was a larger oil leak. It would be devastating for those coastal communities.

Some of the other contributions from the coalition do make me wonder if they actually read the inquiry motion that is before us, because they really went off on some interesting tangents around energy supply. The term 'competitive neutrality' was introduced to justify why we should consider all forms of energy in this motion. That is a concept that really does not make any sense in the context of this debate if you read the motion. This is about dealing with old infrastructure that has been left behind by the gas industry. This debate has been used as a platform for some to argue for more gas and against renewables, and that says everything about the coalition when it comes to climate action.

If you do want to talk about competitive neutrality, why not start with the whopping subsidies handed out to the fossil fuel industry, which are of such a magnitude that they would pay for the whole renewable energy transition with plenty of change left over. Despite decades of taxpayer handouts, we are now facing the risk of having to pay for the fossil fuel giants to clean up their mess. And it is not only financial risks; we face enormous risks to our environment and to our climate as well.

This is a really important inquiry. It will deal with these financial, environmental and climate risks, and I would urge everyone in this place to get behind it.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (16):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

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

**Amendment negatived.**



**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (24):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Greyhound racing**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:04): (637) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Racing. Greyhound breeder Kenneth Buxton was recently disqualified after dogs in his care were found in trailers covered in six inches of faeces without access to food or to water. One of his dogs was so severely malnourished that he had to be euthanised immediately upon inspection. Wynburn Skye was bred in Tasmania and last raced in 2022 before she was transferred to Victoria under the ownership of Buxton. She never raced under him, and it is unknown whether she was at his property when the investigation took place. What we do know is that she is now listed as deceased after being considered not suitable to rehome. Can the minister confirm why Wynburn Skye was euthanised?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:05): I thank Ms Purcell for her question and her passion on these matters. I will make sure that that question is referred to the Minister for Racing in the other place and that I get a response in line with the standing orders.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:05): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. We know that the government accept loopholes in tracking because they know the industry could not survive without the ability to make dogs simply disappear. The newly committed whole-of-life tracking system is a good start for Victoria, but the exact reasons dogs are dying must also be disclosed. Will the minister support calls to include euthanasia data in Greyhound Racing Victoria's annual report?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:06): In line with the standing orders I will also make sure that that supplementary question is referred to the Minister for Racing in the other place and that Ms Purcell gets a response in line with the standing orders.

**Medically supervised injecting facilities**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06): (638) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, the Ontario health minister Sylvia Jones recently announced that no injecting room would be located within 200 metres of a school or a childcare facility. She stated:

In Toronto, there's been numerous stories of altercations, stabbings, shootings and even a homicide in the vicinity of these sites ...

Our first priority must always be protecting our communities, especially when it comes to some of our most innocent and vulnerable – our children.

Minister, when will the Allan Labor government make children who attend Richmond West Primary School their first priority and introduce a similar ban on injecting rooms operating within 200 metres of schools and childcare facilities?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:07): I thank Ms Crozier for that question. As I have said a number of times in the house, the Allan Labor government remains committed to the North Richmond medically supervised injecting room. It is an important part of our response to drug harm across the community. We have a very strong working relationship between the health service there at North Richmond and other agencies and partners on that housing estate, including of course the primary school. They are part of the multi-agency committee that meets regularly to talk about matters to do with the amenity and safety across that precinct.

The Victorian government has a very strong view that this is at the heart of our response to opioid addiction – the medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond. It remains an important part of our response to opioid addiction, ensuring that people who are injecting intravenous drugs have somewhere that they can go where they are medically supervised. That service, as we know, has prevented 63 Victorians from dying from a heroin overdose and it has safely managed more than 8700 overdoses. All of the data suggests to us that it is preventing ambulance call-outs in that area and taking pressure off St Vincent’s, which has the nearest emergency department. I can reassure everyone that this will continue to be a really important part of our response to drug harm in the state, and Ms Crozier knows my views on this matter pretty clearly.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): Yes, I do know the minister’s views, and she is not supporting many within the community who have got concerns around their children’s safety and others’. Minister, my supplementary goes to the point that last year you voted against a ban on injecting rooms operating within 250 metres of schools and childcare centres and two weeks ago a young girl walking past the North Richmond injecting room was physically assaulted by a drug-affected woman. Minister, given the ongoing threat to our most innocent and vulnerable, our children, why won’t the Allan Labor government introduce a ban on injecting rooms operating next door to a primary school and keep these children safe?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:09): I thank the member for her supplementary question, and of course I am aware of the incident. I think that it would have been incredibly distressing for that young girl, and I hope that she is recovering well. My advice is that the woman who was involved in the alleged assault is not a client of the North Richmond medically supervised injecting service. I am further advised that these issues are being actively investigated by Victoria Police, and we should all let them do their job.

#### **Ministers statements: emergency services**

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:10): I am sure that everyone has paid some attention and noticed there have been some pretty wild and windy weather conditions over the past few days. On Sunday Victorians were alerted to strong wind and storms across the state, and many of us would have seen photos of the golf ball sized hail in Bendigo – Mrs Broad might have seen that in person. Since then VICSES has received and responded to over 500 requests for assistance. The past few days are just another example of our emergency services – VICSES, FRV, CFA, Victoria Police and Forest Fire Management Victoria – working together to keep Victorians safe. I want to thank all of the volunteers and staff who have been at the state control centre, on the ground cutting down trees or sending out the emergency warning alerts to our phones.

A testament to the strength of our emergency services is that we have crews on deployment in Canada supporting the emergency services with wildfire season. At the height of their season they had 800 out-of-control blazes. The emergency services sector across the world works as one in a crisis, and I

am extremely proud of the nine CFA personnel who were deployed to North America and the 72 staff and volunteers who have been deployed since mid-August. Each year of course climate change creates new risks, extending the length of seasons and potentially elevating the severity of when fire, flood or storms occur. It means we need to plan carefully but also support our neighbours when needed, and they return the favour.

I know that there will be a lot of interest around the preparedness of our emergency services in anticipation of the summer season. I want to reassure the house that I will be updating this place on our summer preparedness measures as well as providing members with a briefing with the emergency management commissioner Rick Nugent over the coming weeks. For now I want to say thank you to all of our emergency services staff and volunteers for their work so far, and of course that continues today until the weather eases tonight.

### University tuition

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:12): (639) My question today is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE. Can the minister please confirm that it is this Labor government's expectation that every university student in Victoria will have quality in-person tuition available to them for their tertiary studies?

**The PRESIDENT:** I am not too sure if that is in the minister's remit.

**Gayle Tierney:** On a point of order, President, in terms of the actual application of that program, that is not within my remit. It would sit more with Minister Jason Clare; that would be my understanding.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Puglielli, do you want to try and rephrase?

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** I raise the question because the minister, as I understand it, oversees the acts under which universities in Victoria operate and are administered. That is why the question has been posed. I understand there is obviously an overlap with the federal jurisdiction, but again I would appreciate it if my question stands.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will put the question, and the minister will answer as she sees fit.

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:13): This sort of issue has been raised in the house a number of times in terms of the state minister who has responsibility for higher education and where those boundaries essentially are. In terms of funding, it is the federal government that is the prime provider for funding. In terms of operational matters, they are for the universities themselves; they are independent organisations. In terms of commentary in relation to international students, I share that with the Treasurer, and indeed of course the federal higher education minister has responsibility, ultimately, for international students. In respect to some property aspects, I have some responsibilities. In terms of specific programs that are undertaken at a university, again, depending on whether it is a question about funding, it would be the federal government. If it is actually about the application of it, it would be for the university as well as the federal government. Leaving that to one side, I also of course have views on a number of things, and I am sure that you will take an opportunity to ask what those views might be.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:15): Thank you, Minister. My office has heard quite a bit from Federation University regarding issues that they are experiencing. Federation University staff have indicated to me that they are dedicated to providing the best possible tuition to their students across regional Victoria, and they want to see investment in quality in-person classes delivered in their local communities for those local communities. Yet they have spoken of increased reliance on hybrid connected classrooms, which is seriously undermining the quality of student experiences at these universities – students are spread across three different campuses in a single lesson, they may never meet their teacher in person and they struggle to engage with their coursework

and their fellow students and teachers. How do these conditions meet, under your remit as minister, best practice, quality, in-person tuition being made available to Victorian students?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:16): Again, this is an issue that would not fall within my remit, because it is very much an operational issue of Federation University. But having said that, I have conversations with Federation University on a range of things, and I am more than happy for you to come and talk to me more about the issues that your constituents might have in respect to this.

#### International students

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): (640) My question is for the Minister for Skills and TAFE, and it relates to a similar zone. Will the minister outline the impact on Victorian universities of the Commonwealth's decision to massively slash the numbers of overseas students it will allow in coming years? And in particular, what will be the impact on the financial position of our universities?

**The PRESIDENT:** Similar to the previous question, I would question whether that comes under the responsibility of this minister. But, Mr Davis, I will put the question to the minister.

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:17): There is no need for any points of order. I share responsibilities in terms of having a view with the Treasurer on this. I absolutely amplify the views that the Treasurer conveyed publicly today and yesterday, and I also have made my views known that we do not support the federal government's position in relation to the capping of international student numbers. This, we believe, is not just a cap on student numbers but a cap on economic growth in this state. But it is not just an issue of economic growth, which is very important; it is also a recognition that not only do international students provide economic growth but they also are involved in our labour market, and they of course make a massive contribution to our social and cultural cohesion in this state. They are very close to our hearts, and as the Premier said as recently as last Saturday night at the multicultural gala dinner at the Pier, international students are very much part and parcel of our community, and we consider them to be as much Victorians as anyone else when they are living and studying in our state. We are very supportive of our international students.

In terms of the impact on universities, we do understand that in terms of the cap itself it will vary, and there have been public statements, and my office has been in constant contact with universities in respect to knowing more about the impact that it might mean. And it does vary; it is not across the board in terms of the severity of the impact, but we know that there are some universities that have said that the cap they will receive will be within their business plan and they will be able to cope reasonably well. But some will be hurt significantly, and then there are others that have had fairly substantial increases in international students that are in metropolitan Melbourne that will also be impacted. The University of Melbourne and Monash in particular have indicated that that will be the case for them.

In terms of those that believe that they can work through the issues, Deakin are saying that they can and that it is within their business plan, and La Trobe University, who have, as you know, quite a few regional campuses, are saying that they will be able to deal with it as well. But we know that Fed Uni has had some significant issues not just in relation to this issue but other issues that have come to the fore in recent times, and those of course will be exacerbated.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): I thank the minister for her answer and her obvious concern that is shared by many across the community about what the economic impact will be on Victoria. I accept the point that she has made that the impact will be different in different universities and will vary significantly across the state. But nonetheless it is clear that some universities will really be hit for a six or smashed, and I ask: will the minister convene a crisis meeting of our universities given the economic impact and the thousands of job losses that will occur?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:21): I wonder whether the member would have asked me that question in the middle of COVID – whether I would convene a crisis meeting of the universities – given that the federal government at the time refused to offer JobKeeper to the university sector. So let us get a bit real about all of this. My office and the department are in constant contact with the universities. We have made a submission to the federal government in relation to this issue. We will continue to advocate in terms of this issue, today, tomorrow and for the years to come, because we do believe that this will provide a significant impact on the livelihoods of many people but also in terms of the ongoing availability of those that are heavily involved in this sector. I meet with the vice-chancellors on a regular basis, and I have a vice-chancellors meeting soon as well as a meeting of chancellors, and this is absolutely on the agenda.

#### **Ministers statements: water policy**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:23): Last Friday the Premier and I joined more than 70 community and industry leaders from across Victoria’s basin communities in Bendigo to talk about a future for northern Victoria – Mrs Broad, Mrs Tyrrell and others. It was really wonderful to see a whole-of-Parliament representation from both houses, so thank you so much to the Goulburn–Murray irrigation district leadership group and to David McKenzie and Suzanna Sheed in particular for inviting me to join such an important conversation.

To be really clear, the Allan Labor government stands with rural and regional communities in northern Victoria as the Murray–Darling Basin plan implementation continues, and the Premier joining me on Friday at the summit is really testament to this. We understand how important it is to achieve environmental outcomes for our rivers, and nobody knows better about the importance of environmental outcomes than the communities who live in them, but we also know that open-tender buybacks will have a socio-economic impact in our basin communities. At the summit we heard from community leaders on the impact of non-strategic water recovery, and I want to thank all of the speakers – David, Charmaine, Paul, Carl, Jason and especially Ross Stanton, mayor of Gannawarra shire and chair of the Murray River Group of Councils, for his emotional and passionate speech about what the impact of this will be for basin communities.

We are incredibly disappointed that open-tender buybacks have recommenced, and we recognise how difficult this period will be for northern Victoria and the implications for the whole of the Victorian government and not just for the water portfolio. We have established an interdepartmental committee across government on the Murray–Darling Basin, and this will work across portfolios, including the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions. I am looking forward to this work continuing so that we can achieve the objectives of the basin plan whilst also supporting our communities and healthy rivers and waterways now and into the future.

#### **Water policy**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:25): (641) My question is for the Minister for Water. At the water leadership forum held in Bendigo last Friday both you and the Premier told the forum you did not support Commonwealth buybacks of water. The Premier also told the forum that this government will always put Victoria first and stand up to the Commonwealth no matter what the colour of government in power. In the weeks leading up to the 2019 federal election the state Labor government ran a million-dollar campaign criticising the Morrison government over health funding. Then in the lead-up to the 2022 federal election the state Labor government ran the \$1.7 million Our Fair Share campaign. Minister, will you support Victorian irrigation communities by launching an advertising campaign criticising the Albanese Labor government’s water buybacks?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:26): Thank you, Ms Lovell. I had actually forgotten that you were there, but it was good

to see that you were in attendance at the summit last Friday. We have been really clear about our opposition to buybacks in Victoria. We are absolutely determined to make sure that we support northern Victorian communities. I have continued to advocate for Victorian communities as have so many others. When you talk to – and obviously, Ms Lovell, you heard last Friday – stakeholders, including the chair of the Murray River Group of Councils and those members of the Goulburn–Murray irrigation district leadership group, it is clear to them and it is clear to regional communities that we continue to advocate on their behalf.

It is also really important to note that in negotiations with the Commonwealth the operation of Commonwealth law is one of the things that we are working within. This includes a toolkit, of which buybacks are a part, but it is also then something that can and should be guided by the work of our prospectus – those projects which have been identified as opportunities to recover water for the environment and better environmental outcomes without actually doing the sort of volume of damage that we know open-tender buybacks can result in. We know from the work of a number of studies that socio-economic impact is felt as a result of buybacks. We know, for example, that where 100 gigalitres of water is removed from the system, not only does it reduce the volume available in the consumptive pool, it also costs around \$140 million a year. We know also – and Ms Lovell, you heard this on Friday last week – that we do see that with the impact of buybacks we have to take into consideration work on the impact of dairy and on the impact of permanent plantings in the event of drought. We know that with negotiations and achieving the funding which we have achieved through negotiation with the Commonwealth for stage 1 of the Victorian Murray Floodplain Restoration Project, we will be able to see environmental benefit without the cost and the detriment of buybacks.

Ms Lovell, I would like to think that the work that we do through advocacy directly with communities, directly with the Commonwealth and directly with the local government authorities and those people on whom this will have a significant and immediate impact is part of a joined-up effort to make sure that our interests are fairly represented and our advocacy is part of a collective effort. If you are asking whether our efforts are being directed in the right direction to achieve results, I would say that the decision by the Commonwealth to fund the stage 1 VMFRP project is evidence of the fact that what we are doing is working. I would encourage you, Ms Lovell, to read the prospectus and to see the work that communities are putting in.

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:29): Minister, given that you have just told us that you are not willing to publicly campaign against the Albanese government, how are you going to stop the Commonwealth buybacks, given that you have no legislative power to do so?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:29): Ms Lovell, you may well have been there last week, but you certainly were not here in the chamber when I just spent 2½ minutes answering that question. We are working alongside the Commonwealth within the legislative framework that was passed last December to amend the work of the Murray–Darling Basin plan through the restoring our rivers bill. That legislation, as you are obviously very well aware, includes a range of factors that must be taken into consideration in the delivery of environmental outcomes. We have worked within those parameters to make sure that the impact of water returned for environmental purposes balances socio-economic impacts and also provides a measure of support for affected communities. When you are inviting the conclusion that we have not taken a public position in opposition to this work, I would invite you, Ms Lovell, to perhaps pick up any one of a number of different newspapers that are published in your region and to listen to any number of public discussions where I have been absolutely unambiguous in our opposition to buybacks and our support for communities.

**Wendy Lovell**: On a point of order, President, I am just concerned that at the beginning of the minister's answer she actually accused me of not being in the chamber for the last 2½ minutes. I am concerned that people listening would think that I had left the chamber during question time, and I ask the minister to withdraw.

**The PRESIDENT:** Minister, please withdraw.

**Harriet SHING:** You were physically in the chamber, Ms Lovell.

**The PRESIDENT:** Just withdraw the comment, please.

**Harriet SHING:** I withdraw.

### Electricity infrastructure

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:31): (642) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, who will bear the legal risk for preventative preparatory burning under or adjacent to VNI West and the Western Renewables Link – the electricity distribution company, the government or the landowner?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:32): Mr Davis, you are jumping slightly ahead of yourself in relation to drawing a hypothetical conclusion for something that is highly unlikely. In terms of transmission lines and their connectedness to fire, there have not been cases of fires that have been attributed to transmission lines –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Distribution lines, sorry.

**David Davis:** There have been.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** No. In terms of the transmission lines that you are referring to, there is no evidence to suggest that they have started or have indeed been responsible for fires in the past.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The problem with your question is that you are stating a hypothetical result that is unlikely to occur, so therefore it is ridiculous to phrase your question in that way.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): I think there are legitimate risks, and the minister appears to be unaware of them. The emergency services organisations that she administers actually have a critical lead role in preparatory and back burning of various types. I therefore ask: have you sought or received advice from your department or fire agencies about how this risk should be apportioned, and if so, will you release it?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:34): I can only infer, Mr Davis, that you are drawing a conclusion in relation to transmission lines. The VNI is transmission not distribution, so I reaffirm my statement that there is no evidence that fires have been attributed to transmission lines. Therefore in relation to the question that you have asked, you are trying to create fear in a community with a result that is not going to eventuate. I reject the premise of your question, and therefore my answer stands.

### Ministers statements: Aboriginal Children's Forum

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:34): I rise to update the house on the recent Aboriginal Children's Forum and to acknowledge the much-deserved recognition of a long-time advocate for Aboriginal voice and self-determination. Earlier this month I met with the Aboriginal Children's Forum, which had been hosted by the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative on the lands of the Wathaurong people. I was able to update the forum on the implementation of the statement of recognition, which came into effect on 1 July this year. The statement of recognition does many things. It ensures that the Aboriginal child placement principle is applied to all decision-making regarding Aboriginal children. It broadens the authorisations for Aboriginal agencies under the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program. Through these amendments to the act, we now have more opportunity to reduce the number of

Aboriginal children entering care by providing an Aboriginal response to child protection reports delivered by Aboriginal agencies.

I was also able to announce the recipients for the latest round of the Aboriginal children and families innovation and learning grants program. In this seventh round of the program the Allan Labor government has invested \$2.3 million in Aboriginal community controlled organisations to deliver culturally safe services and to develop new and improved service models to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families. The program builds on the largest ever single investment from the 2023–24 budget to continue to expand the Aboriginal-led service system – \$140 million over four years.

Aunty Muriel Bamblett is one of the co-chairs of the Aboriginal Children’s Forum with Jason Kanoa, the CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People’s Alliance. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank Aunty Muriel Bamblett, who was awarded Person of the Year at this year’s NAIDOC awards. This award is due recognition for Aunty Muriel’s long-time advocacy for Aboriginal children and families, work which over the years has had a positive impact on so many Aboriginal children and families right across Victoria and in fact nationally. Aunty Muriel has spent decades fighting for recognition of the importance and value of family, kinship networks, culture and community in raising Aboriginal children. Under her leadership since 1999 the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency has grown significantly, with the organisation now employing over 1000 people and delivering over 80 programs. I could not think of a more fitting recipient for this award.

### Floods

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:36): (643) My question is to the Minister for Water. The devastating floods of October 2022 saw more than 600 homes and businesses flooded in the Maribyrnong township as well as around 47 units in the Rivervue Retirement Village. Over the coming decades rainfall intensity is predicted to increase by 7 per cent per degree of global warming due to the effects of climate change. Increased heavy rainfalls will result in these types of flood events occurring more frequently. The recently revised flood modelling by Melbourne Water confirms that these residences and businesses will be subject to devastating floods more often in the future. In light of this new modelling, residents find themselves unable to insure their homes against inevitable future flooding events, nor are they able to sell them in many cases. So I ask the minister: how is the government proposing to address the invidious flooding threat faced by people living along the Maribyrnong River?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:37): Thanks, Mr Ettershank, for your question, which is entirely consistent with the really strident advocacy that you have delivered on behalf of the community or part of the communities that you represent across your region. The floods were devastating, and the impact of the floods in 2022 continues to be felt. Before I get into the substantive detail of the Maribyrnong catchment in particular, I just want to note that that impact continues to be felt all the way around the state, and this is something which is not unique to just Victoria. In New South Wales and in Queensland this has been an issue of longstanding anguish and grief and uncertainty for many, many communities. It is something which has also really activated governments of all levels and water authorities and communities to understand better as far as impact is concerned.

As you would be aware, Mr Ettershank and colleagues here, the recent inquiry into the floods has produced a range of findings and recommendations, including as they relate to the resilient homes program and to the work that can be done according to the recommendations and findings in that report to understand, to manage and to mitigate risk in areas that are increasingly susceptible to flooding. Melbourne Water has undertaken the recent revised modelling, which is what you have referred to in your question. This is part of the response to the Pagone review, and Melbourne Water has indicated as a consequence it will provide a review of flood modelling every five years and it will undertake new modelling every decade to understand what the risks look like. This is really necessary, and it



requires a significant level of expertise. There is a tender out to process at the moment to make sure we can get an expert assessment of those mitigation options. One of the recommendations on resilient homes calls upon the government to fund what that resilience looks like, and that will have obviously a consequence for what it is that home owners wish to do and are able to do. That might include divestment; it might include being able to see and realise appreciating value of their homes over time.

I am really determined to make sure that we are also seeing our water authorities providing people with good, accurate information that evolves over time, including as we develop and deliver infrastructure in these growing parts of the world as our population increases. We know that the impact of more infrastructure and of changes means that water flows differently across a landscape. When you add to that the greater risk of inundation because of coastal erosion, climate change and rising sea levels, it is a collective series of challenges.

Mr Ettershank, what I would say is that government is continuing to assess the report which has been provided, along with recommendations from this Parliament. We will provide a response to that report, and we will continue alongside Melbourne Water and authorities to provide that support to communities, whether that is early warning systems, emergency management or the sort of things that can give potentially sellers or purchasers of properties a greater measure of confidence about managing that risk.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:41): I thank the minister for her response. Perhaps to get a little more specific, as I mentioned in my substantive question, there were around 47 units in the Rivervue Retirement Village flooded in October 2022. We know that Melbourne Water approved the lowering of the flood overlay for these homes and that had the overlay remained in place, two-thirds of those residences would not have been allowed to be built without significant modifications. A large number of these homes are now subject to flood inundation or will become subject to a revised flood inundation overlay. The elderly residents who bought them in good faith, believing that they would not be subject to flooding, now find that their homes are literally unsellable. Given the role Melbourne Water played in lowering the flood overlay on the site, essentially providing incorrect information, and the vicarious liability the government faces due to Melbourne Water's actions, has the government considered its moral obligations to buy back these units?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:42): Thanks, Mr Ettershank, for that supplementary. There are a couple of things in the preamble to that that I would not agree with, including as they relate to a legal question of vicarious liability and the way in which council has approved the overlay and changes to that as it relates to those 47 properties and in accordance with standard practice. I have met with and continue to engage with the Insurance Council of Australia and with Melbourne Water and with councils around what the impact of changed flood modelling is. It is also important to note that this modelling does not change the reality of water moving in and through the landscape; it involves an assessment of what that risk looks like by reference to updated information – hundreds of thousands of data points which are now able to be used to deploy a better understanding of risk. In talking with the insurance council I am also keen to make sure we can understand what actuarial advice and support looks like – again to provide hopefully a better measure of confidence to people, including those 47. I am very happy to continue to talk with you about that work as it progresses.

#### **Electricity infrastructure**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:43): (644) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, with shadow minister for energy Mr Davis I recently visited communities across regional western Victoria, who explained their concerns about what they call the Victorian government's reckless renewables expansion. We met CFA brigade volunteers from the areas which will pay for your government's rush to an inflexible 95 per cent generation target, a target decreed without consideration of the environmental or social cost new transmission lines will impose on regional Victoria. Adding insult to injury, this year's budget hit farmers with a 59 per cent rise in the

fire services levy. The CFA volunteer brigades we spoke to have decided that except in the case of threat to life they will not fight fires on land hosting high-voltage transmission lines. Minister, will you instruct the taxpayer-funded Fire Rescue Victoria to take their place?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:44): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. There is a little bit in that. At the outset, I have limited capacity to direct an agency such as FRV, and again it does scare me, the fact that you continually ask me on that side of the chamber to do things that I think are probably inappropriate. But putting that to one side, Mrs McArthur, just recently I have corresponded with you on similar issues. Obviously it is your region and you are speaking to people. I want to assure you that, like you, I acknowledge the hard work of our CFA volunteers. They make an invaluable contribution to their communities. Their safety is something that is of utmost importance to the government and indeed the CFA as an organisation. A comprehensive, safe system of work is something that they always undertake, including training, organisational equipment briefings and the like. We have CFA participating in the key stakeholder planning phase of any of these renewable projects, as you have referred to.

But also importantly, I want to reiterate this myth about transmission lines. There are over 6500 kilometres of transmission lines in Australia. I can confirm that Andrew Dyer, the former Australian energy infrastructure commissioner, reported that the risk of a 220-kilovolt or higher transmission line causing a bushfire was virtually zero. When we continue to talk about transmission lines, I do not mind if people have objections – that is fine – but conflating that and causing fear that this infrastructure results in fire is not only inappropriate, it is dangerous and it is beneath elected officials to run that type of commentary.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:46): Thank you, Attorney. Minister, the brigades we met with have explained how abandoned they feel by the state government’s decrees on transmission lines and the failure of your colleagues, the Premier and the Minister for Environment, to address their communities. Peter Knights, captain of the Gre Gre brigade, wrote to me:

Our volunteerism is not a commodity for sale or exploitation, especially when it is being promised to a greedy industry of largely foreign investors by cash strapped governments through ill-considered policy and idealism ...

The CFA was born out of a commonality of its members, to defend our communities in our regions. This imposition of renewables infrastructure across farming regions breaks that commonality ... creating deep division.

Minister, will you commit to meeting with the brigades Mr Davis and I visited to explain how the life-changing impact of your energy policy is fair to these volunteers and safe for their communities?

**Jaelyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:47): Mrs McArthur, I certainly went through my concerns about your linkage of your opposition to an energy project with my role as the Minister for Emergency Services. I want to debunk that myth that transmission lines are in the words of experts ‘likely to cause no fires’. When it comes to CFA firefighters – time and time again – my ministers statement today was about commending and thanking volunteers. They do a tremendous job. They are highly trained to manage a range of hazards and risks and respond to emergency situations. They are always there to respond to their community. When it comes to CFA volunteers that are concerned about particular projects – particularly in relation to the energy sector – they are looped into planning decisions and guidelines. The CFA are at the table making sure that their voices are heard.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, the minister may have inadvertently misled the house. I am aware of the New South Wales fire service blaming the Black Summer bushfires of 2019–20 in part on fires caused by faulty transmission infrastructure. So I just think it is important that the minister, if she has made a mistake, correct the matter.

**The PRESIDENT:** Do you want to respond?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** No. I am not wrong.

**Ministers statements: multicultural communities**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:49): I recently had the pleasure of attending a graduation event hosted by Federation University – further to the theme of universities – to celebrate and recognise the important work of the inaugural 10 community fellows involved in delivering the *Roads to Reconciliation: Activating Multicultural Victoria* project. This innovative project engages Victorian multicultural communities on reconciliation, truth-telling and justice through a series of workshops and projects delivered by community fellowship recipients representing a diverse cross-section of our vibrant multicultural community. The event was a testament to the university’s enduring commitment to fostering connections among Victoria’s diverse ethnic, faith and cultural groups, particularly in recognising the contributions and significance of First Peoples. Victoria is proudly home to one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world. Our country is also home to the oldest living culture on earth, with First Nations history dating back over 65,000 years, and this history is also one of our greatest strengths and sources of pride. I would like to thank Federation University Australia and in particular Professor Andrew Gunstone, Maria Dimopoulos and Shankar Kasynathan for hosting me last week and everyone involved in delivering this project. Ensuring Victoria remains an inclusive state where all Victorians, including First Peoples and multicultural communities, feel safe and supported to practise their culture, faiths and traditions remains a key priority for the Allan Labor government.

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:51): That ends question time and ministers statements. Mr Erdogan will get answers for Ms Purcell from the Minister for Racing under standing orders.

**Constituency questions**

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1062) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, Minister Williams. I was recently at Beaconsfield station and very delighted to see works already underway on new platform shelters and platform improvements. These accessibility upgrades are part of a broader package of works right across the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines, including new shelters, seating, raised boarding pads – otherwise known as Harrington humps – tactile ground surface indicators and hearing loops. It was very good to see the work progressing at this station, particularly with the new shelter at the eastern end of the island platform, which means those wheelchair users taking an outbound train towards Pakenham can wait at the designated boarding area under full shelter. Minister, how will these accessibility upgrades along the Cranbourne and Pakenham lines benefit commuters in my region, particularly those who use Beaconsfield station?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:52): (1063) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. Will the minister increase the number of car parks at the Shepparton train station? I was recently contacted by a constituent who expressed their frustration at the lack of car parking available at the Shepparton train station. The extremely small car park, which only has 45 car parks, including two disabled parks, is often completely full, and with additional train services due to commence on the Shepparton line there will only be increased demand for parking. There is land available just south of the station on Purcell Street that I am informed is railway land that could be paved and used to provide additional parking spaces. I urge the minister to consider using this land to expand the number of car parking spaces before the new services commence.

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:53): (1064) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. My constituent Allyssa is a student at Swinburne University of Technology. Earlier this month on 7 August she and fellow students were handing out leaflets and a petition calling for a student general meeting of the student union to discuss Palestine. University management sent security to tell the students not to do so, and after that they actually called Victoria Police onto campus. The decision to call the police onto campus to intervene in peaceful actions by students appears to be in contravention of the university's own free speech codes. No arrests were made, but students should not be punished or threatened with police action just for peacefully standing up for human rights – in this case, peacefully talking about human rights. Minister, have you written to Swinburne University about their obligations to uphold rights protected by Victoria's human rights charter, including rights to freedom of expression, thought, conscience, religion or belief, alongside the rights to peaceful assembly and association?

**Western Victoria Region**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (12:54): (1065) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, Minister Gabrielle Williams. The question is: how will the Allan Labor government's upgrade of the Warrnambool train line benefit regional Victorians in south-west Victoria? The much-anticipated upgrades to the Warrnambool train line are nearing completion. More than 50 public rail crossings have been upgraded to enable compatibility with VLocity trains. Indeed VLocity trains are currently being tested along the entirety of the Warrnambool line. Constituents in my area are looking forward to the upgraded station facilities and modern trains on the Warrnambool line.

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (1066) My question is to the Minister for Environment. I recently raised concerns with the Minister for Agriculture about the future of the wild dog program, on behalf of farmers in the north-west and north-east of my electorate, at Tallangatta. Agriculture Victoria recently conducted a very brief survey, just open for two weeks, regarding the impacts of predation on livestock and its production, and I understand that the program is currently under review and that the Minister for Environment will soon determine if the program continues. Victoria is Australia's largest sheep meat producer, and by value we account for over 50 per cent of Australia's wool exports. Farmers are concerned that if the wild dog program is discontinued there will soon be an explosion in numbers. The state government has already indicated that wild dogs are now protected dingos and rejected authority-to-control-wildlife permits in the north-west of the state. I ask the minister to commit to continuing the wild dog program for another five years and provide clarity for farmers by outlining how the Allan Labor government will ensure that farmers can protect their livestock from wild dogs.

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (1067) My question today is to the Minister for Housing, and it relates to services to support existing and planned social housing residents in the West Heidelberg area. As the minister would be aware, Banyule council have proposed that the state government owned land at 155 Oriel Road, Heidelberg West, be developed into a new expanded purpose-built community hub with integrated services to support social housing residents and all in the area. This hub could provide a range of services, including allied and mental health, family support, employment services, material aid and many other possibilities and would provide a great benefit to new and existing residents in this area. Given the upcoming development of the Bell-Bardia site as well as existing social housing at the Tarakan estate and the Unison site on Bell Street, social housing tenants would benefit greatly from such a hub. Will you commit to investing in a new purpose-built integrated Oriel Road community hub as part of the social housing development of this area?

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:57): (1068) Some of Melbourne's most famous and favourite roads are in my electorate – backbones of brilliance that bring suburbs together and sustain our local community. Eighty-eight-year-old long-time resident Tommaso, who recently visited the electorate office, knows the importance of some of our most famous roads and how important their upkeep is. He was elated when he heard that Nicholson Street, just 1 minute from his house, would be getting a \$1.27 million upgrade from the Allan Labor government. These upgrades will see electronic variable speed warning signs, dragon's teeth and coloured pedestrian crossings installed, making the road more pedestrian friendly in the stretch between Bell Street and Albion Street. So my question today on behalf of Tommaso is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place: when will the upgrades on Nicholson Street commence?

**Western Metropolitan Region**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (12:58): (1069) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education regarding the pressing issue in our public secondary schools, which is a significant rise in student absentees. Recent data shows that secondary students in Victoria missed an average of 5.6 weeks of school last year compared with 3.5 weeks in 2018, indicating a troubling trend well above pre-COVID levels. Over the last four years there has been a rapid 30 per cent increase in students aged 15 to 19 saying school is the biggest challenge of their lives and it places a heavy toll on their mental health. Could the minister please inform my constituents which specific measures the government is implementing to address the rise of absentees, particularly among year 9s, and support families and schools in managing this growing issue effectively? A federal inquiry has tackled chronic absenteeism and demonstrated absenteeism disproportionately impacts the poorest families, many of those in core western suburbs homes.

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:59): (1070) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Local Government and concerns the Moira Shire Council in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. On 10 March 2023 the Moira Shire Council was dismissed and administrators were put in. While my constituents can understand why this was done, what they cannot understand is why the administrators have been put in place until 2028 and why the ratepayers of the shire have lost their democratic right to vote for their councillors. Moira shire residents have already suffered through having their rights taken away from them during the COVID pandemic and feel rather aggrieved that yet again their rights have been taken away from them. Constituents have reported failures of the administrators managing the council, such as rates notices still not being sent out. Will the minister reinstate the democratic process for my constituents who reside in the Moira shire and allow them to vote and elect their local council representatives?

**Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.**

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:02): (1071) My constituency question is to the Minister for Children. How is the state government ensuring that our early learning centres flourish in the Southern Metropolitan Region? I recently attended the open day of the Elwood Children's Centre and really quickly saw why both the parents and the children absolutely love this facility. The Elwood Children's Centre was one of six early learning centres in the City of Port Phillip that were threatened with closure a few years ago. But thanks to the council and state and federal governments working together we have managed to keep these centres open, and now these centres are about to embark on an exciting period of refurbishment and renovation thanks to the state Labor government providing more than \$12 million to the City of Port Phillip through a Building Blocks partnership to redevelop all six of these local early learning centres. This Labor government is committed to supporting Victorian families. Our Best Start, Best Life agenda is giving more early learning to three- and four-

year-olds, supporting Victorian families to meet cost-of-living pressures and ensuring our youngest Victorians get the best start in life.

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:04): (1072) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing. My Bass Coast constituent has copped yet another rental increase and is highly concerned about her ability to keep a roof over her family's heads. Bass Coast rental and mortgage stress rates are the highest in regional Victoria. Over 83 per cent of very low income households are suffering from rental stress, which is exacerbated on the Bass Coast by falling residential approvals and availability. In 2023 only 409 houses were approved for construction, 270 less than in 2022. Labor has a housing crisis, and the target to build 80,000 homes per year is a farce as the cost of living is hitting home with people. My constituent is fearful that she will end up homeless and unable to hold on to her private rental. Minister, how many social and affordable houses will be built and delivered under your program in Bass Coast in 2024?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:05): (1073) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The Upfield line has the fewest services and longest wait times and is one of the least reliable train lines in Melbourne. It serves a rapidly growing region and connects people to work, school and their community. Constant delays to the already infrequent services mean many more people cannot rely on the train and are forced to use cars, which clog up the roads and produce unnecessary carbon emissions. Recently your government postponed the level crossing removals in Brunswick you promised at the last election. Now northern councils are asking you to unclog the line by duplicating a section of single track between Gowrie and Upfield, a position supported by the Rail Futures Institute and Public Transport Users Association. Minister, will you listen to the communities and public transport experts who are asking you to improve the frequency and reliability of Melbourne's forgotten train line by committing to these recommendations?

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:06): (1074) My question is for the Minister for Environment and concerns the dingo unprotection order 2023, which is due to expire next month. Minister, with just weeks remaining on the inadequate one-year extension you granted previously, it is incredible that you are leaving farmers and landowners in regional Victoria in limbo. The order is an essential part of Victoria's wild dog and dingo control program, and it will expire in one month's time. We are still waiting for the 'substantial and informed consultation' and further research, including population surveys, which you promised in last year's order. But we can live without that now. What is desperately, urgently required from the minister is an extension to the unprotection order and for a duration which will not cause this level of angst for regional Victorians this time next year.

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:07): (1075) My question is to the Minister for Police, and I ask: with the recent Operation Trinity conducted over the past six months by Dandenong police in the Greater Dandenong, Cardinia and Casey areas, which saw the recovery of 1005 stolen vehicles at an estimated worth of \$30.6 million, what is being done to provide police with resources to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place rather than providing the enormous resources needed to arrest the offenders? I applaud Victoria Police for resourcing 70 additional members to be rostered each night on top of the existing patrols, including frontline officers from highway patrol members, the dog squad, the public order response team and the air wing, to conduct Operation Trinity. The operation was obviously a resoundingly positive success, resulting in 1400 arrests for burglaries and car thefts. But what is particularly staggering in these figures is that 83 per cent of arrests involved youth below the age of 25 and 64.5 per cent below the age of 18.

Premier Allan's tired Labor government needs to look at the youth crime crisis in the south-east of Melbourne.

### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:08): (1076) Last week I met with the Lang Lang District Business & Community Group, who have been advocating for a Lang Lang bypass for years now. Five years ago one truck would drive through the main street every 4 to 5 minutes, and that number has now increased to one per minute. This town is being destroyed by heavy vehicles, and locals are nervous, especially at times when there are lots of schoolkids around, like after school. They feel completely abandoned by this government. Their taxpayer dollars are going to projects that will not benefit them, like the Suburban Rail Loop, while their safety goes ignored. On 6 August they met with the Minister for Planning about the bypass, and tragically that meeting had to start late because participants who were coming to the meeting were stuck behind a horrible accident where the brakes of a truck failed, resulting in a man losing his legs. This is something that is absolutely overdue and needed. So my question for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure is: why won't you build the bypass?

### ***Business of the house***

#### **Orders of the day**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:09): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day, general business, 1, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### ***Motions***

#### **Suburban Rail Loop**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:09): I rise to speak to my motion regarding the Suburban Rail Loop and the significant issue that the state is facing in relation to the debt and the impact that the Suburban Rail Loop is going to have, or the debt that future generations will carry. I move:

That this house:

- (1) expresses serious concern over the Allan Labor government's decision to prioritise the Suburban Rail Loop over the essential services and projects Victorians need, despite a serious warning from S&P Global, including:
  - (a) the threat of a credit rating downgrade from AA to AA-minus if the Allan Labor government proceeds with the Suburban Rail Loop without further funding from the federal government;
  - (b) the financial strain any downgrade in credit rating would impose on Victorians through increased debt repayments;
- (2) notes with concern that the Premier, Jacinta Allan, has neglected the real priorities of Victorians, such as better health care, safer roads, and cost-of-living relief, in favour of a large-scale project with no credible business case;
- (3) calls on the Allan Labor government to:
  - (a) immediately halt the Suburban Rail Loop to protect Victoria's credit rating and shield Victorians from further debt; and
  - (b) deliver the infrastructure and services that Victorians actually need, rather than pursuing projects that do not address the immediate needs of the community.

There are significant needs that communities right across the state are crying out for, and I will speak to those during the course of the debate on this motion.

The Suburban Rail Loop can only be described as a financial and political fiasco. The motion I have just read in to the house calls for a serious reckoning with the Allan Labor government. This is a

government that has recklessly prioritised the Suburban Rail Loop, a \$216 billion project without a credible business case, over delivering the essential services and cost-of-living relief that actually matter. The warning from Standard & Poor's is clear: if the Allan government continues to push ahead, our state's fiscal outlook will weaken and our credit standing will be further eroded.

What does that actually mean for Victorians? Well, what it means is that there will be higher debt repayments, less money for critical services and an even deeper financial hole for our state. We are paying \$18 million a day in interest repayments today. In just two years time, in 2026, those interest repayments are going to surge to \$26 million a day; that is over a million dollars an hour each day. It is an extraordinary amount of money that seems to just wash over the government. They have no regard for the amount of money and how that impacts on the delivery of services to communities right across Victoria.

Anthony Walker from Standard & Poor's did not mince his words when he said:

... there's a real risk the SRL may cost more ... given the size and complexities of the undertaking and the state's recent history of major projects going well over budget ...

**Evan Mulholland:** He knows.

**Georgie CROZIER:** He knows.

If Victoria pushes ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop without additional federal government funding, the state's fiscal outlook may weaken, further eroding its credit standing ...

This is somebody who actually knows what they are talking about. You would think that the Treasurer, who has been reported as flying all over the world to meet with these credit agencies, would be listening to them and listening to these words about the dire situation that Victoria is in – a dire situation of his own making and the Premier's own making. They are responsible for this dire financial situation that Victoria is facing.

Anthony Walker's professional assessment is based on the grim reality of Victoria's infrastructure mismanagement under Labor, a reality that the Premier, as I said, is ignoring. This is not just a debate about infrastructure that we are having today; it is a debate about the future of our state, our financial stability and the very fabric of our society. The motion before us highlights the critical issue of the threat of a credit rating downgrade from AA to AA-minus if the Allan government continues to push ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop without securing additional federal funding. There is a lot of conjecture around this, a lot of speculation about what the Premier will do, and I know that the government is divided over this. The Deputy Premier himself does not agree with the Suburban Rail Loop; he is more in favour of the airport rail link. There is a lot of tension in the backbenches of Labor with those western suburbs and northern suburbs seats, who are very testy – as they should be, because their communities have been ignored for years. Labor have taken them for granted. It is quite disgraceful how certain parts of the community have been so abandoned by Labor.

Premier Allan has repeatedly claimed that the Suburban Rail Loop 'stacks up' – her words – but the facts tell a very different story. From the very beginning the Suburban Rail Loop has been plagued by secrecy, poor planning and financial mismanagement. There has been no consultation with local communities that are going to be affected. It was Premier Allan –

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I take up the interjection to say that no, you just missed the words, Mr Galea – the secrecy, poor planning and financial mismanagement and also the lack of consultation with affected communities. They have not been consulted and nor were the Victorian public around the debt of \$216 billion. Did you take that to the election and say, 'Victorians, the debt will be \$216 billion and our interest payments are going to be surging to \$26 million a day'? No, you did not. So do not say you took it to the community – you did not.



From the very beginning the Suburban Rail Loop has been plagued, as I said, by the secret notion of the government. The Premier has got form on this. She has been the minister for infrastructure, she has been the minister for Commonwealth Games – she actually failed both of those portfolio areas, and she is failing as Premier. She was the responsible minister at the time who pushed ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop and did not tell the Victorian community of the enormous cost it would have nor of the impacts to the financial situation of Victoria nor of the services that would need to be cut. Health is being cut, other areas are being cut – community safety, which is out of control, and the crime issue around the state is out of control. This is a government that has lost control of keeping Victorians safe and providing their services. So this is not just incompetence; it is a blatant disregard for the financial wellbeing of our state. The wellbeing of our state goes to the issues that I have just spoken on, whether it is community safety or looking after other assets and infrastructure around the state. Roads in regional Victoria – potholes galore – have been ignored by this government.

The Victorian Auditor-General has also exposed a cost blowout of up to \$6.9 billion on the Suburban Rail Loop East alone – that part alone. But that is just the tip of the iceberg, as we know, because this government has form on blowouts – the tens of billions of dollars that have been wasted on projects where money has just been thrown away with no regard that it is hardworking Victorians and their families who are paying the price of this gross mismanagement and gross waste of taxpayers money. A report the opposition commissioned from the Parliamentary Budget Office reveals that the total cost of the Suburban Rail Loop East and Suburban Rail Loop North could skyrocket to more than \$216 billion, as I have mentioned – more than four times the initial estimate. It is just figures that they pluck out. We have seen the blowouts in other projects where they have told the community, ‘It’s going to cost this,’ and then they have ended up with billions of dollars overrun. We partly know why – because of the CFMEU and their shocking standover tactics – and I will come back to that. We cannot allow the government to continue to go down this path where there is a reckless abandonment of taxpayers money. It is going to lead to a financial disaster for the state.

Those of us who have been around for a long time and have seen this government behave with broken promises understand that that is not in the best interests of Victorians either. When you look back decades ago at Labor’s records in financial management, they certainly have a record there. You go back to the Cain–Kirner years and the appalling situation Victoria was in at that point, and here we are again. But I think it is worse this time, and that is a concern. There are many Victorians that do not understand what happened in the 1990s – they were not here, or they were not born. But it took a long time for Victoria to get back on track. It was really a reckless government in the Cain–Kirner years, with Tricontinental and the State Bank and the appalling issues that were floating around over those few years at a national and state level. It was really very significant. As I said, the fiasco of the Cain–Kirner years really set Victoria back, and it took a long time for us to get back on track. We cannot afford to be going down that path again.

It is interesting to note that even the federal government has distanced itself from this train wreck. The infrastructure minister Catherine King made it crystal clear that no additional federal funding would be forthcoming without a credible business case. Infrastructure Australia is still waiting for critical information to properly assess the project’s merit, yet Victoria’s top transport bureaucrat Paul Younis had the audacity to declare that they have provided all the information that they have been asked for. This farcical situation was revealed just days after the Allan government’s desperate pleas for more federal funding were flatly rejected by the federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers. There is nothing forthcoming for this project because they know it is a dud, they know it does not stack up and they cannot see that there is a credible business case. It is quite disgraceful that the state Labor government is pursuing this.

It is clear that the project itself is being driven by pure political vanity rather than sound financial management or public need. It is clear that the Premier, who has spoken about this project, saying it will deliver jobs for years to come, is only concerned about her political masters, the CFMEU, a union that the Premier is extremely closely linked to. We know that. Victorians know that. They have seen

it play out over the last few weeks, the disgraceful uncovering of what many people had known, which has cost Victorian taxpayers dearly and is going to cost Victorian taxpayers dearly into the future. Yet the Premier just turns a blind eye. The saga of the CFMEU and the bullish, intimidating standover tactics that have been employed are a sordid tale in this state's history. To be now known as the 'gangster state' is an indictment on those who have overseen what has occurred on taxpayer-funded infrastructure construction sites, and that is Premier Jacinta Allan, who for 10 years as the responsible minister did nothing and now as Premier has been an ineffective and weak leader on an extremely serious issue – weak and beholden to the CFMEU.

Let us not forget the communities that are being left behind in this mad rush to build the Premier's pet project. The project's supposed benefits have been grossly overstated, and the financial underpinnings are questionable at best. The KPMG business case that was supposed to justify the project has been thoroughly discredited, with the Auditor-General criticising its overly optimistic assumptions and failure to adhere to Treasury guidelines. While Premier Allan continues to pour billions of dollars into the Suburban Rail Loop, essential infrastructure projects across Melbourne's northern and western suburbs are being delayed, shelved or cancelled altogether. The *Western Rail Plan* has been quietly abandoned and the Geelong fast rail project has been scrapped – projects that would have delivered immediate and significant benefits to thousands of Victorians. The airport rail link, a project that has divided the cabinet and the Premier's own party room – what a mess. These are not just missed opportunities, they are failures of governance that have real consequences for the people of this state.

The Suburban Rail Loop's funding model also relies heavily on value capture taxes on property, and did the government take that to the election? No, they did not, and that is why there is so much community uproar in my area and other areas. Mr Welch knows that, I know that and many others know that, because the government did not even speak about this. That is going to gouge residents in the south and the south-east of Melbourne with new taxes. We are known as the highest taxing state in the country. For goodness sake, you cannot tax your way out of this. That is not the way to prosperity. But that is what this Allan Labor government think they can do, and it is going to set generations of Victorians behind the rest of the country. That is a very sad indictment on the Allan Labor government. Those people who are being affected are already burdened by the 30 new or increased taxes that I have mentioned – fees and charges on property that the Labor government has introduced over the past decade. This is a government that is squeezing every last dollar out of its citizens to fund a project that was never properly planned or justified.

The Suburban Rail Loop is not just a bad project, it is a driver of intergenerational debt. This house must act to protect our state's financial future. The Allan Labor government must immediately halt the Suburban Rail Loop to protect Victoria's credit rating and shield Victorians from further debt. We must direct those billions of dollars into the infrastructure and services that truly matter – our crumbling health system, public transport, roads, schools and community facilities in rapidly growing areas across Melbourne and in our regional centres. Victoria needs a government that puts the needs of its people above political calculations, that invests in projects with real benefits and that manages public funds with integrity and transparency.

I know that the government is incredibly sensitive about this project. It is a project that is sucking Victorians dry in terms of their financial security and, as I have mentioned, the intergenerational debt that is going to be laid upon our children and our grandchildren. This is what this government is setting up. It is setting us up to fail, and none of us want that. We must address the issues at hand now.

I have mentioned the crumbling health system. We saw that today. When you have got MICA paramedics having to go into a hospital to look after a critical care cardiac patient because there is no capacity in the emergency room, you know you have got a problem. When you have got potholes across your countryside where speed limits are reduced to 40 kilometres on large stretches of road because nothing has been done, you know you have got a problem. When your educational standards are falling and your children are falling behind, you know you have got a problem. When you have got a crime wave that is sweeping your state and is out of control, you know you have got a problem.

Victorians know these issues are affecting them day in, day out – and their financial security, their personal security, is something that they are very, very conscious of, as they should be, because it is this debt, it is the financial situation that this government has put Victorians in, which is not fair. It is not fair and it is not right.

The Suburban Rail Loop is, as I have said, a vanity project of the Premier's. She has mismanaged so much. She must put a halt to this and reprioritise the funding that she is putting towards this into the areas that matter, those areas that I have spoken of, because every Victorian deserves to have a better quality of life, not a declining one, which is what they will have when these taxes and debts increase further and drive business out of the state and drive households into further decline. I urge all members of the house to support my motion.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:29): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Ms Crozier's name, motion 550, on the Suburban Rail Loop. It is really disappointing to hear the contribution of those opposite on a project like this, because one of the things that we recognise over here on the government benches is that we need to invest in really important and critical infrastructure. The Suburban Rail Loop is really a project that is going to futureproof suburban Melbourne, but further than that we know with our population growth we are going to need to have proper public transport infrastructure to help decongest our roads. We need to get cars off the roads and make sure that we have a world-class public transport system that can get people to where they need to be.

The Suburban Rail Loop is a project we have taken to two elections, and people voted on it. If people did not want that project, they would not have returned us with an increased majority. I know those opposite do not want to admit it, but they just cannot handle the truth. A lot of what was said in the previous contribution was really disinformation. I am looking forward to dispelling a lot of those myths for those opposite. Maybe if they listen, they might actually learn something.

Let us start with the costs and federal funding. Why don't we start there? We have been absolutely clear on the cost of Suburban Rail Loop and Suburban Rail Loop East, which is the first tranche of the project. It was costed at \$30 billion to \$34.5 billion, and we are on track to hit that target. I know that is something you do not want to hear, because you want to rely on what the *Herald Sun* runs and they write your lines, but again it is irrelevant because what we know is we are on track to hit that target – and you hate it. We have been transparent about it, and our recent budget figures continue to show those estimates. Despite what those opposite say, it is disinformation to come in here every day or to stand at the door and talk about blowouts. We are on track to hit our estimated target.

We have worked with the Commonwealth government and welcomed their \$2.2 billion initial investment. You see, that is what they do not understand: the Commonwealth has just given us an initial \$2.2 billion investment. As the Prime Minister said when he announced the funding –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** They want to try and verbal me, but I will repeat the facts of the situation so those opposite might actually learn something. As the Prime Minister said when he announced the funding commitment:

I can't think of a more exciting infrastructure project in the entire nation and that's why federal Labor will contribute an initial contribution of \$2.2 billion to this project.

Let me say that again: initial contribution. They do not listen to what is being said, but that is okay because what they want to do is run such a negative agenda when what we are doing is getting on with the job of delivering on the important infrastructure projects that Victorians will need for the future. As the Prime Minister said, it will do what great cities do. If you think about great cities of the world, whether it is London, Paris or New York, you do not have to get into the centre of those cities by car. You can get around by public transport infrastructure. We have been really clear that we will continue to seek funding from the Commonwealth government and from value capture to help fund the project,

and we are continuing to work with the Commonwealth government on additional funds. To date we have secured \$14 billion of state and federal funding for design and development, initial and early works and main works for Suburban Rail Loop East. This is the tranche that is being done first. We are underway with the first stage of SRL East, which is fully costed. The works are happening on the ground now.

As I said, we have gone to two elections with this project, and we have been returned with an increased majority. If Victorians were worried about it, we would have been chucked out of office – but no. Do not let that be lost on those opposite.

Let me continue, and this is a really important point: Victoria does not receive its fair share of Commonwealth infrastructure funding, and in fact if you look, there has been a shortfall in terms of its population share over the last 10 years. We know who was in government over the previous years in the federal jurisdiction – it was the Morrison Liberal government, and our population share fell short over the last 10 years. From 2014–15 to 2022–23 Victoria received around \$8.3 billion less than its population share of infrastructure funding – \$9 billion instead of \$17.3 billion.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** I will take up Mr Galea's interjection there. Why would the Commonwealth under the Morrison Liberal government short-change Victorians? Because they wanted to constrain us. They wanted to constrict us so we could not get on with doing anything. They wanted to make it difficult for our government to continue to build the important infrastructure projects that Victorians not only need but voted on and want. They wanted to make it difficult. But do not worry, we have been keeping receipts over here. We have got our receipt book out and we have been noting all of the shortfalls. What we are going to do now that we have got a willing partner in the Commonwealth government is ask for that money. Let me repeat: our shortfall over that period was \$9 billion instead of \$17.3 billion. The receipt book is coming out and we are going to ask for those additional funds. Yet over the same period New South Wales received about \$2.7 billion more than its population share of infrastructure funding, which is almost triple what Victoria received. And of course we will continue to fight for our fair share of funding.

Let me now turn to Victoria's credit rating, because of course Ms Crozier spent a bit of time talking about that. I want to talk about the facts in regard to our credit rating, because it is very important to set the record straight. When we came to government our economy was worth \$400 billion. It is now worth around \$600 billion, so it is growing. That is a good thing. It is projected to be worth nearly three-quarters of a trillion dollars by the end of the estimates. And we will be able to manage debt because we are making investments in productive infrastructure and because the 2024–25 budget demonstrates that debt will reduce as a share of the economy for the first time since 2017.

It would be a little bit scary if those opposite were ever in government and they became economic managers, because what they actually cannot figure out is when you build infrastructure projects, you generate improvements and growth in the economy, like jobs. When you generate improvements your economy grows because you spend money and it generates improvements in the economy. But those opposite do not get that. They do not understand how things work.

We have also created more than 850,000 new jobs since November 2014 through our investments to support the economy. Of course the more jobs you create, the more that helps the economy grow as well, and when people have money in their pockets then they also spend money, which helps to grow the economy. Not only that, they spend money in local economies, whether it is the local cafes or coffee shops or whether they are buying lunch or whatever locally, supporting local businesses. You have only got to look to projects like the North East Link or the Suburban Rail Loop and even the level crossing removal authority – when workers come and work on those projects, the local coffee shops love it. They absolutely love it, because traders are so thankful for the increased income that comes through their doors as a consequence of all of those workers –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** That is why they are freaking out over there, because they do not like to hear the truth. I will just talk about the level crossing removal project in Croydon. The coffee shops there loved the fact that they had a steady increased flow of people coming through the doors to buy their lunch, to buy their coffees and the rest of it. That is income for local traders, and they love it. They absolutely love it. Again, those opposite do not want to talk about that. By making sure there are local projects in local communities, local economies are thriving as well. As I said, by contrast those opposite managed to create only 39,000 full-time jobs in the entire four years when they were in government. They did absolutely nothing.

Ratings agencies assessments remain stable and positive, and there is no change to credit ratings at this time. But again we have heard a lot of disinformation from those opposite. That is all they have got. They rinse and repeat the negative lines that they have got – rinse, repeat, rinse, repeat. We hear the same old standard, tired lines.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Sonja TERPSTRA:** Central casting – we hear the same old standard, tired lines.

So again, S&P's and Moody's commentary around the budget indicates that they consider that the ratings are stable. Interest rates have changed materially regardless of credit ratings – and that is equally true for the Commonwealth and other states – and the Victorian and New South Wales 10-year bond rates are on par. This shows credit ratings are not the only or even the major factor in determining interest rates and that demand for Victorian bonds is strong. Victoria remains the engine room of the Australian economy.

Economic indicators show our plan is working. Our economy is now almost 11 per cent larger in real terms than before the pandemic, and business investment in Victoria is strong. It grew by more than 13 per cent last calendar year, the largest increase of all of the states. So we are on track with our fiscal strategy and already addressing many of the issues raised in S&P's report, stabilising net debt as a percentage of gross state product for the first time since the pandemic. So let us not forget, these investments that we are making – (*Time expired*)

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:39): I also rise to speak on this motion put forward by Ms Crozier. I have mixed views on this. It talks about needing to put an immediate halt to this project. I am concerned about putting immediate halts to other projects and what the termination penalties might actually result in. I know that when the opposition were in government, they signed a contract that was later terminated by the current government. It cost us a billion dollars to get out of that contract, and I have got no idea how much it would cost to get out of these Suburban Rail Loop contracts. But my problem is not so much with the SRL idea itself; it actually sounds like a grand idea, connecting these different areas into a hub around the city. My problem is around the way the government is going about financing it and managing it and the idea that they are creating jobs. I will point out yet again that government does not create jobs. Everything that they create is derived from taxes, which destroys jobs in the process. Government itself does not create jobs; it only creates jobs when it gets out of the way of things.

I will point out that funding public transport infrastructure through value capture is a very interesting idea. Might I point to what many consider to be the best public transport system in the world, which is in Japan, particularly around Tokyo. They fund their systems through value capture – except it is not the taxpayers that take the risk on the value capture, it is the private sector. The private sector takes the risk in building these things. If they develop an area and turn it into apartments and commercial real estate thrives, then they take the risk, not taxpayers. In fact the taxpayers do not pay a cent for any of this stuff, because the value capture is handled by the private sector. The private sector takes the risks, the private sector manages the train lines, and they have some of the best in the world. The idea that the current Labor government in Victoria is going to somehow manage that through government

and do a better job than the Japanese private sector does is fanciful at best. I have got lots to say about privatisation of public transport, but we will save that for another day.

We are in a very serious situation in Victoria. This motion mentions credit ratings. There has been lots of back and forth about credit ratings, but I would point out how dire the situation will be if we do get a credit downgrade. I am certain that the Treasurer is very well aware of this, and the government must cut back spending. They must get our balance sheet in a better order. This motion talks about spending money on other things. The government has got to stop spending so much money, because if we get into a situation where our credit rating is downgraded, that means that the Treasury Corporation of Victoria will have to issue bonds with higher coupon rates, because they will be downgraded, and eventually we will get to a point which I dread. People buy these bonds primarily for superannuation funds; last time I checked there were about 17, 20 per cent of foreign investors that were investing in these bonds. But primarily it is for superannuation funds, and they have very strict limitations on the types of things that they can invest in in their fixed interest portfolios. Once a credit rating slips below a certain level – it is different for each super fund; they have their own governance guidelines – they are no longer allowed to buy those bonds. If we in Victoria manage to somehow get ourselves into that state – and I am sure the Treasurer is very aware of this risk – then we will have institutional investors that will no longer buy Victorian bonds. We will be in a very, very dire situation. We cannot allow the state to get into that situation.

I note that the opposition has been attacking the government for talking about privatisation and things like this. I encourage the government to look at everything it is possible to privatise, because we are in a situation where we need to get the balance sheet in order. If there are services that can be privatised by the government to get our balance sheet in a better situation, then I urge the government to go ahead with it and do it, because we cannot allow our credit ratings to fall any further than they have. Look, I know that the government is very aware of this, I am certain that the Treasury is aware of it, but we absolutely must pay close attention to it. We know from looking at other government projects they have gone over budget; we have seen all sorts of problems with this. Credit ratings agencies clearly are going to be looking at this because it has been a significant part of government expenditure over a very long period of time. The government talks about creating jobs – well, I have not seen a lot of action on what we are doing to make sure that organised crime stays out of the construction sector yet. I have seen people talk about inquiries and things like this, but how are we going to make sure that organised crime stays out of these construction projects? Because I do not see much action yet. I see a lot of people saying, ‘Well, we’ve got administrators taking over unions, and we’re going to have these inquiries and stuff like this,’ but we are still rushing ahead with these construction projects. I would like to see the government at the very least tap the brakes on some of these things and get these things in order so that Victorians – Victorian taxpayers – can be absolutely certain when these projects go ahead, when they are undergoing their construction phases, that we are not going to be infiltrated by organised crime, that we are not going to be using these projects for money laundering and God knows what and that the money is being spent prudently, because ultimately it is the Victorian taxpayers that are taking the risk here. As I said, I would prefer the private sector to be taking the risk, but that is not the case; that is not what the government is doing.

I will not be opposing this motion. The Libertarian Party policy was to not go ahead with this project, not because we do not think that infrastructure is a good idea, but because we think that the method the government has chosen of funding this infrastructure is very flawed, and I think that the idea that the government is going to be somehow able to better manage value capture than the private sector is fanciful. Nevertheless, the government has already entered into some contracts. Calling for the immediate cancellation of the project – I do not know what the consequences of that are, and I am not sure that people in the opposition know what the consequences of that are, and maybe most MPs in the government do not know what the consequences of that are, but I am certain that there are termination penalties, and I do not know how serious that would be. Maybe we need to tap the brakes on this at the very least, so at the very least I urge the government to slow this down, maybe pause it for a bit until we get things under control, until we understand what has actually been going on in

corruption in the construction sector and maybe get a better idea of what the long-term financial viability of this is.

That said, I am not enthusiastically supporting this motion, but I will not be opposing it. I urge all members of this chamber to seriously consider the consequences. If the state's credit rating is downgraded, it has the potential to be catastrophic.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:48): I rise to speak on Ms Crozier's excellent motion regarding the Suburban Rail Loop and regarding the state's credit rating agencies. We saw Ms Terpstra give quite the spray, and she spoke about – what was it? – rinse and repeat and Liberal talking points over and over again. They were running exactly the same talking points as the last Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) motion, which keep mentioning a quote from Prime Minister Anthony Albanese saying this is one of the most exciting infrastructure projects going around in Australia. They have all got it on their talking points, the quote from the Prime Minister. There is one problem with those quotes from the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese: he never actually said it as Prime Minister of Australia. Anthony Albanese has not had one good word about the Suburban Rail Loop since he became Prime Minister, and we all know why: because this project does not stack up. Ms Terpstra also spoke about cost blowouts – 'Oh, we don't have any cost blowouts.' The feds had to sink \$3.5 billion into the North East Link because of the state government's \$10 billion blowout on it, so you do actually have blowouts.

The motion before us highlights a critical issue – the threat of a credit rating downgrade from AA to AA-minus – and the Allan government continues to push ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop without securing additional funding. It does not have the funding from the federal government. Standard & Poor's is one of the most revered and listened to credit rating agencies in the world, and there was a stark warning from Anthony Walker from Standard & Poor's. I know Ms Terpstra said we do not need to talk about cost blowouts – 'There's not going to be any cost blowouts.' She also said it was completely within the estimated budget. Well, Standard & Poor's disagrees. They said:

... there's a real risk the SRL may cost more ... given the size and complexities ... and the state's recent history of major projects going well over budget ...

I know who I would rather trust: Anthony Walker from Standard & Poor's over Ms Terpstra every single day of the week. The Suburban Rail Loop means plunging Victoria into a deeper financial hole than the one Labor has already tried to bury us in. This is about Victoria's financial future.

The Suburban Rail Loop was not on any Public Transport Victoria development plan. You know those plans that experts and cross-agency departments come up with to map out the future of Melbourne? Instead of looking at those and looking at the next project in the queue, where it is most needed in our growth areas of Melbourne that are going to be attracting population growth, the SRL was conducted in secret, we know, down at PwC – tax-evasion city – in a locked room. The department secretary did not even know about it. This is scandalous behaviour from this government. The Premier was the minister responsible at the time and pushed ahead with this project without even releasing a business case.

We know that Infrastructure Australia is still after information from the government. They have been asking back and forth, they have been contacting the Suburban Rail Loop Authority and they have been contacting Minister Pearson. The *Age* has confirmed Infrastructure Australia has not received any further information since September 2022, preventing it from progressing to a full analysis:

Infrastructure Australia is ready to assess the Suburban Rail Loop Authority's next submission in line with our assessment framework once it is received ...

They have not even done their homework. They sent through a sloppy business case to start with that did not have the detailed figures and analysis that they actually expected. And the Auditor-General has already exposed a cost blowout of up to \$6.9 billion on the Suburban Rail Loop East alone. I trust the Auditor-General much more than this government.

They talk about how Victorians have voted for it twice – Victorians did not vote for 60-storey towers. Victorians are now receiving the detail of what the SRL means, and they do not like it. But I will tell you what, member for North-Eastern Metropolitan, and I am sure they will all say the same things: there are a lot of things that have been voted on twice that this government has not delivered, like the *Western Rail Plan*, providing electrified rail services to the good people of Melton and Wyndham Vale; like the Geelong fast rail – where is that going? There are a lot of things happening, but trusting this government, for the *Western Rail Plan* they will probably just put a fence up around Melton station like they did with the Melton Hospital and say ‘Coming soon’ right before the election. You cannot trust this government with election promises. We need to prioritise the immediate needs of Victorians in our growth areas, like the Upfield line duplication, which was put to the back of the queue. Connecting the Upfield line to the Craigieburn line was put to the back of the queue. Fixing potholes was put to the back of the queue; Broadmeadows railway station upgrade, back of the queue; duplication of Donnybrook Road, back of the queue; rail line to Wollert, also to the back of the queue.

Last week we saw a comrade known to many on that side – Kos Samaras, their former deputy secretary and the other half of Minister Spence – speak about the SRL. He was all over the media desperately trying to warn his comrades how poorly this vanity project is now being received by Victorians. ‘It’s not a must-have,’ Mr Samaras told the *Herald Sun*. He went on to add that voters in the western suburbs genuinely feel abandoned by Victorian Labor, and I tell you what, having gone around the west a lot and the outer north, they certainly feel that way. They are not getting the same amount of infrastructure that other suburbs are getting. It is not just voters concerns that Mr Samaras has warned his comrades about, he has even sounded the alarm bell on Victoria’s exploding debt. He said:

We’re almost dealing with two different planets ...

This is not the world it was in 2018, I would agree with that. And it was not just Mr Samaras contributing in the media, it was also Labor MPs:

One senior government source said there was now no doubt the project would be rephased.

Another said the move was not partisan, but a win for Victoria because it would keep credit agencies at bay ...

I tell you what, Mr Galea and those on that side: I cannot wait. Once you actually have come to your senses and ‘rephased’ this project, or cancelled it, I cannot wait to come back in here and read every single receipt of every single talking point you have said talking this scandalous project up that was dreamt up at PwC without any experts supporting it and that you have plunged onto the Victorian people, putting our credit rating at risk and neglecting our growth areas, which are not getting the infrastructure they deserve.

People in Kororoit cannot even get a bus. You are building in new estates and not funding bus services. You are not funding public transport connections, but you are building a gold-plated Cheltenham to Box Hill train line between two existing train lines – and you think there will not be any electoral consequences for that? I tell you what, Mr Galea, there will be electoral consequences for that, because every day I am going out into the growth areas and people hate the SRL. I am in the seat of Kalkallo quite a bit. I was at the Wallan markets a few weeks ago, and the SRL is not well liked up there, I tell you what. It elicits some very, very strong reactions, some of which I cannot say in this chamber. Going into Kalkallo and talking up the SRL is like me over the weekend going into a pub full of Carlton supporters with my St Kilda jumper on. People hate the SRL, because the good people of Wallan, of Craigieburn, of Melton and of Wyndham Vale deserve the infrastructure everyone else gets. You have set a 300 per cent housing target – mandatory, compulsory housing target – for areas like Wallan and Beveridge and provided no additional money for infrastructure. People in Yan Yean cannot even get Yan Yean Road stage 2; it is not funded. Yet the government wants to continue with a \$35 billion – it will be more – rail line between Cheltenham and Box Hill. It is absolutely ridiculous. It is scandalous, and it is plunging Victoria into a deeper state of debt.

In another area, the second half of Mickleham Road, the government has approved the *Craigieburn West Precinct Structure Plan* against the advice of Hume City Council and the local community –



10,000 more homes along a road that is single lane with no additional infrastructure. It is going to end up like another Kalkallo, where they have built tens of thousands of homes along an old farm track and thought, 'Ah, we don't need to spend any money.' You do. You need to fund our growth areas. You are not. Instead you are spending all this money on a vanity project of the Premier's making and of PwC's making that no expert ever authorised and no expert ever supported. So we do need to take serious consideration of this motion, of our credit rating and of the disastrous consequences a credit rating downgrade will bring.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:58): Once again I am delighted to speak about the terrific Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) project – indeed a visionary project that governments of many stripes before have failed to see the vision of. I will just start with one point: I find it quite bizarre that Mr Mulholland thinks that the role of government is to blindly follow whatever the departments tell you. The role of government is actually to bring up ideas, to take them to the people with something called a mandate and then to implement them. I know that you referenced the Public Transport Victoria development plan, but your suggestion that governments should only be there to do whatever the bureaucracy tells them to do betrays quite a striking attitude which you would take to government. In fact it was the attitude that your side took to government last time, which one wit in the *Age* last week described as 'ruling in a state of inertia'.

Victorians know that this is a government that is delivering. Whether it is the schools, the hospitals, the new roads, the new bus routes, the public transport projects or the level crossing removals, this is a government that is delivering for Victorians, especially in the outer suburbs. I enjoy my debates with Mr Mulholland in this place about the outer suburbs. There is probably not a great deal that we agree on, but the one thing that we are both passionate about is our growing outer suburbs of Melbourne, and I do respect him for that.

We are doing all sorts of things, and we can go tit for tat and example by example. I can run you through all the new schools that we are building right now in Clyde North. I will admit I am not quite across the detail in other electorates, but I know that there are new schools, new projects and new roads going in, and in Clyde North, for example, where we are building new school after new school after new school, three have already opened and three are opening next year. One of those existing schools opened a few years ago with 400 students – a big number – and this year it reached over 1300 enrolments. They can manage it – just – but without this new school coming online next year, which we are delivering, they will not be able to cope. We are doing those investments.

It goes to a fundamental principle, a fundamental point, that whoever is in government at whatever time we are talking about, must take a long-term view. We cannot sustainably or economically afford to continue growing our suburbs out and out and out and out; we have to be more sensible, and that is exactly where the housing statement, for example, comes in in redressing the burden that outer suburbs will have to take on. We need to continue investing in the outer suburbs – and we are; this government is doing that – but we cannot keep going at this pace, because to use that school as an example, for all the investment that is going in we are barely keeping pace. We are doing everything we can, but we need to think better.

The Suburban Rail Loop is a terrific opportunity for us to refocus the way we do planning in this state, and that is exactly why it is a good project. The benefits for people I have spoken extensively about. For those in the outer south-east they include accessing Monash University, Deakin University and all the job centres across the south-east region – not just on those Pakenham and Cranbourne line corridors. That is why the project is so important.

It is so important too for the appropriate, sensible infill development that we can be doing along the Suburban Rail Loop corridors. We know that the Liberal Party is the party of nimbyism writ large. We have seen it in contributions from Mr Welch, and Mr Davis yesterday in fact was complaining about development in Camberwell Junction of all places, a place that is served by three train lines and three tram routes – the 70, the 72 and the 75. What the Suburban Rail Loop is going to do –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** in your place, please – is provide that cross-grid connection with heavy rail connections at Box Hill, at Clayton, at Cheltenham and at other major points along the way as well, providing those transport services and providing the capacity to build more sensible infill development, because that is the future for Melbourne.

The future for Melbourne that the Liberals would see is more and more pressure on the outer suburbs. When you come into this place, Mr Mulholland, and say that you are opposed to the SRL, what you are saying is that you want more housing pressure to be placed on the outer suburbs of Melbourne and you want more of those issues to come up. That is what you are ultimately saying by opposing what are very important and very transformational projects.

I will draw a quick comparison. We know they opposed the Metro Tunnel, they opposed North East Link, they opposed this project and they opposed level crossing removals.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** I will take your point on that, Mr Mulholland – maybe not North East Link. In New South Wales we had bipartisanship where the Liberal government actually invested and actually believed in railway infrastructure and delivered the Sydney Metro, which has now been opened under the Labor government. We have seen both sides actually acknowledging that, yes, this was a Liberal project and is now a Labor project, and it has received broad support. Unfortunately, we cannot say that in Victoria, because the Metro Tunnel – you do not support it. You would have sent it around some weird little loop around Fishermans Bend that was nowhere near Fishermans Bend, that would have sent it back, that would not have actually served all those new areas and that would not have actually benefitted the main corridors that the Metro Tunnel will benefit. Victorians know that this is a government that gets on with delivering.

I have spoken to many of the terrific MPs that we have right along the corridor, including Mr Hamer, who speaks to lots of constituents in his area about the SRL and the broad support there is for it. I gave you the example of the school in my electorate before; there is actually at least one or two schools in the Box Hill electorate where they are significantly under their capacity with enrolments, and they are actually trying to get students from elsewhere. This is exactly why we should be doing more appropriate, more sensible infill development in places like this. Again, Mr Hamer is a terrific local member. Keep bringing these motions on, Mr Mulholland, and we will indeed welcome him back to the Parliament in the next term and then three or four after that as well if you continue to oppose this project. Locals in Box Hill know, and that is because Mr Hamer actually does speak to them. I know, Mr Welch, you know that because you have a penchant for screenshotting Mr Hamer's posts when he is out there talking to the community. He is actually talking to real people, which is really great. It is different to perhaps getting a photo with supposed community campaigners opposed to the SRL who just happen to be former Liberal Party candidates. Mr Hamer is actually out there talking to real people.

Most importantly, we know that we need it because Monash City Council have spoken out very much in favour of this project. They will be at the heart of this project in the heart of the south-eastern suburbs. And indeed at Monash University, Australia's largest university campus, there is incredible medical research that is going on in and around the Monash University precinct that is supported by that university, our largest university. I know this will be of interest to you, Mr Davis. It is in your region, although it services my region as well in the south-east. They are desperate for this project. They say they have so many grand plans that they cannot do unless they have a proper fixed rail connection. Monash University sees the benefit, and the Liberals would hold them back. I am actually quite passionate about supporting our university sector, and I may have something else to say on that later this day, but when it comes to this project –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Just like I said, I will come back to it. But on this project, this would be the same as putting that cap on Monash University. I want to see Monash and Deakin too for that matter – and when it comes time for it down the track La Trobe University as well – supported to continue their potential. Again, with the work that Monash does – and I note their advocacy on this issue amongst others – it is a very, very important thing.

We know when it comes to projects this is a government that comes in – and as I said, those opposite do not understand what the word mandate means. For example, it does not mean coming into office in 2010 and basically doing not much at all but the one thing that you do do after telling people in 2010 that you are going to put a moratorium on new freeway projects is then locking the state into a massive multibillion-dollar freeway project just weeks out from a state election. That is not a mandate. That is not a mandate at all, and you know it. So when you come in here and say that people do not want the Suburban Rail Loop, well, they have voted not once but twice on that project and Victorians have emphatically endorsed that. Indeed they have endorsed it in the electorates which will be most affected, such as Glen Waverley and Box Hill, and despite whatever you want to say, you know that to be true. We even had former Prime Minister Tony Abbott try to call the federal election in 2013 a referendum. Never mind that though he formed the government federally he certainly did not win the majority of seats in Victoria. He did not win the majority of votes in Victoria on a two-party preferred basis. I am sure people in rural Queensland were not making their vote centred around Victorian infrastructure projects, but it had been rejected. Yet the Victorian Liberal Party proceeded to lock the state into a project that it had not taken to the previous election in a deliberate political attempt to try to cause a political issue for the incoming Labor government, irrespective of whatever damage it did to the state's budget.

But this is a government that is not interested in playing stupid games like that. This is a government that is interested in delivering, and that is why we have got 110 level crossing removal projects underway, with 80 already done. They said it would not be possible. We are getting on and we are doing it. Metro Tunnel is opening next year, a year ahead of schedule. With the Suburban Rail Loop we will be unlocking –

**Georgie Crozier:** What? No, it's not.

**Michael GALEA:** It is. It was 2026, it is now 2025. You know that to be true as well.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:08): It is my pleasure to rise and speak on the motion in Ms Crozier's name, motion 550. Honestly, I do not think I have heard a more unhinged debate in my short time in here. We have had Ms Terpstra talking about how the state debt will be addressed by the ability of tradies to buy coffees. We have got incredible business disruption, but do not worry, tradies are buying coffees, so our \$187 billion of debt will be okay! That is productive capital, apparently. The question I would ask across the chamber is: where do you think this is going to end? Because there is only one way this is going to end: either the project is going to be paused or it is going to implode. You have got the choice. Either it is going to implode or you pause it. Make your choice now, because every day that you delay that choice you are going to cost this state and the next generation more and more and more money. This project has been absurd from the start. It starts with their reckless funding model: 30 per cent from the state, 30 per cent from the federal government and 30 per cent from property speculation, aka value capture. Now we know that the federal government is not going to provide that 30 per cent. That money is not coming. Even the \$2 billion set aside has not been delivered and will not be delivered. Infrastructure minister King has said they are not giving them money into they have seen the business plan. Is the business plan coming? I do not think it is.

Most absurd is this value capture model. The whole purpose of value capture is that you get property before it has gone up in value then tax the hell out of it once it has gone up in value. Well, within Box Hill the single largest development in the entire Suburban Rail Loop precinct, the Vicinity project, has already been contracted in and priced in and is underway. So at what point does the value capture kick

in? Does it kick in now? No. Does it kick in in 10 years? No. Does it kick in ever? We do not know, because there is no formula. The minister has not been able to explain what value capture means, and the horse has already bolted, because how much of the value of the properties along the route of the line, including the precincts, has already been priced in? You only got two choices at this point: you either intensify the development or add further taxes. The government have already got form on intensifying the development, because when they went to the election, twice, there was no mention of high-rise – none. By December last year it was 20 storeys. ‘Oh, we don’t have enough money.’ In March this year it was 40 storeys. In June this year it was 50 storeys. So they have clearly aimed to intensify the level of development to make up the shortfall in value capture that they have no other means of funding – none.

The community, including Whitehorse council, were deliberately and purposely shut out of the entire negotiation process and told from on high that in a council area where they have 74,000 properties they are required to add 79,000 more within the same footprint. Just consider that. That is not providing people choice in accommodation, because the only way you can actually achieve that is to build tower blocks. They are not aiming for home ownership for young Australians; they are aiming for flat ownership. That is all you are aiming for. You want people in dog boxes so you can fund this fantasy project. And the questions arise: when does the value capture kick in? Does it kick in now? Does it kick in in 10 years? How are you going to fund this project until it does? How can you? You have got no explanation. There is \$10 billion not available from the feds, \$10 billion not available from value capture. There is your own money that you have put us all on the line for, and you continue to sign contracts.

There is a certain level of deceit in all of this, because why in the budgets is the total cost of this listed as ‘To be confirmed’? Why in Infrastructure Australia is it listed as ‘To be confirmed’? \$34 billion alone is 10 per cent of the entire Infrastructure Australia budget for the next 10 years. That is 10 per cent for the whole nation – extraordinary. There is no business case, and I have got a suspicion why there is no business case: because if they were to present a business case to Infrastructure Australia, they would have to actually come clean and say, ‘This is not going to be \$34 billion, it’s not going to be \$40 billion; it’s going to be \$50 billion or \$60 billion.’ There is ample evidence of that. North East Link is a 9-kilometre tunnel. It is presently costing us \$26 billion-plus for 9 kilometres. The Suburban Rail Loop is 27 kilometres, and it is going to cost, allegedly, \$34 billion. The Suburban Rail Loop has a much more difficult route to traverse – it has to go through a number of contaminated sites; it has a number of engineering challenges way beyond the North East Link – so the idea that it is \$34 billion is I think a ruse. The reason there is no business case being issued is because that would expose the ruse.

The other obvious problem with this is the opportunity cost of miraculously quarantining \$40 billion in an already distressed budget for this purpose and this purpose alone at the cost of health. In my electorate just last night Box Hill Hospital went to code red at 10 pm. Waiting hours in the emergency department were in excess of 9 hours. Across health we have cut cancer treatments. We are cutting billions potentially out of the health service, yet we quarantine this concrete tunnel. People do not get healed in tunnels. People do not get housed in tunnels. They do not get educated in tunnels. Across my electorate schools have facilities that are long past their economic life, where schools themselves have to fund their own playgrounds. They have to fund portables coming in. The parents themselves have to fund the STEM resources and things that are built for the future. Why? Because the Treasurer, bizarrely, chose to quarantine a concrete tunnel over the lives of people in everyday suburbs.

I think the gravest sin of all is that through debt we are locking this generation’s and the next generation’s productive capital into a nonproductive purpose. This tunnel will not generate wealth. In fact it will run at a loss because a significant part of the \$216 billion cost is operating cost. No-one can tell me that fares will make up \$60 billion. \$6 billion a year in fares – it is a fantasy. It is only possible when you have a union industrial complex driving economic decisions in Victoria. We will suffer generational loss of generational productive capital, meaning the wealth of Victoria will decline because we have locked up this capital. As Mr Limbrick said, in my view we should get it off our

books, we should conduct budget repair and we should claw back what capital we can so that we can put it into productive purposes. I can tell you now, though, we are not getting one dollar to the dollar. We would be lucky to get 30 cents to the dollar if we sold it off. This project does not stand up, because if it did, the private sector would be doing it.

There is also the other dimension where we can talk at length of how the rest of Victoria is missing out as a consequence of this project, but it is those communities along the route of it who are missing out as well. The intense overdevelopment is extraordinarily bad suburban development, suburban planning and suburban design. It is going to mean 10 years of disruption to businesses, who will leave perhaps never to return. It is in fact a concrete noose around the circumference of Melbourne, cutting a swathe through these suburbs. There is no talk of extra school capacity. There is no talk of extra sewerage or electricity capacity. There is no talk of extra parking capacity for the 70,000 or 120,000 people who are coming, of which 15,000 or more will be children. All the schools in that area are already at capacity. There is no plan about that. Where does that come into the calculations? As always people are the last consideration in these areas.

The government has a choice: to make a graceful exit or a graceful pause now and save what money it can or to let this project implode and cost us even more. ‘Graceful’ I put in inverted commas because there are contracts signed that are going to be liabilities, but everybody knows you do not put good money after bad. Whatever loss we have to bear we need to bear it now. I am just so glad that everybody over there is on the record supporting this because these words will come back to haunt you, and I will make sure they do.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:18): Where do you start? Anyway. ‘An underground folly’, ‘a wasteful investment’, ‘a white elephant’, ‘not needed’, ‘Our population could never grow enough to justify the investment, to justify the cost,’ ‘We can just fix it with more buses.’ That was a campaign waged against a project by one of Melbourne’s daily newspapers for a decade – that is what they said about the city loop in the 1970s. Fifty-three years ago, when plans were made to build underground rail in the centre of Melbourne, sections of the community in Melbourne, parts of the intelligentsia, storied academics, could not imagine that Melbourne would need an underground rail line. They questioned the ‘folly’ – their word – of the government investing in that kind of infrastructure, because they could not imagine us ever needing it. I challenge anyone to stand up in this debate and say that the naysayers of the city loop were right. They were not. They were wrong, just as those who have been standing in this chamber bloviating against progress are also wrong today.

What people could not imagine back in the 1970s turned into a reality in the 1980s and became unimaginable to be without in the 1990s and the 2000s. But by the turn of the century, a mere 30 years later, it became clear that it was not enough and that despite all the work, despite all the planning, despite the revolution that the city loop brought to Melbourne’s metropolitan train network – something that a major metropolitan daily newspaper in this city campaigned against day in, day out, that special levies were raised to help pay for, that the state borrowed to fund – that loop was at capacity. Melbourne’s productive capacity was being constrained by the constraints of a piece of infrastructure about which 30 years earlier people had stood up, I suspect in a manner similar to those who contributed to the debate today, and said – probably as red in the face by the end of their contributions back then as people have been today – that we just do not need it and it would be a waste.

No-one is saying that about the city loop these days. In fact that important part of Melbourne’s transport infrastructure today was at capacity, and we needed to build a new underground train line through the city, the Metro Tunnel, which is fully funded by this Labor government and constructed by this Labor government and next year will be delivered by this Labor government, which will revolutionise the transport network here in Melbourne, freeing up capacity on other metropolitan train lines, bringing more people into our fixed-rail transport network, moving more people across Melbourne from the northern suburbs to the south-eastern suburbs, transforming the way our public transport network works. It happened with the city loop when they planned it in the 1970s and opened

it in the 80s. We planned it with the Metro Tunnel, which has been built over the course of the last decade and will open next year.

What this motion seeks to bring to the fore of the debate is the suggestion that we should repeat the mistakes of the past by not investing in the infrastructure we are going to need in the future. Just because something is not within the conception or the vision of those who like to say no to everything, just because there are some who are so short-sighted they cannot see the need to continue to invest in our public transport infrastructure, just because some people cannot imagine what Melbourne might be like in the next generation, they are saying we should do nothing. They are saying –

**Richard Welch:** Differently.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Differently. Well, what would you do instead, Mr Welch?

**Richard Welch:** Buses.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** You would use buses. There we go – just as the way they said that we did not need the city loop because we could run more buses in Melbourne. Can you imagine? Can you imagine if the Liberal Party today had any influence over the Liberal Party of the past? We know the Liberal Party has changed. I think there is no greater evidence that the Liberal Party of today are nothing like the Liberal Party of yesterday – absolutely nothing like it – because they think that our public transport constraints can be solved by putting more buses on congested roads. That is their solution. They have no vision for this state. They have no understanding about how transport infrastructure planning needs to work. If they had their way, we would be building nothing, ever, anywhere. That is exactly the path that they want to take us down.

The speakers in this debate from the other side have traversed a wide range of topics – I will not go through all of them. They have decried on several occasions the need to invest in the future of our city. Labor does not support that notion. We believe that you have got to invest in the future of our city. They are opposed to a project being initiated, supported and financed by the government, because they believe that we should just leave everything to the private sector.

**Tom McIntosh:** Nuclear.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** That is a very good point, Mr McIntosh, because the only thing I think they want there to be public sector subsidies in that the private sector will not do is the nuclear industry in Australia, but I will not get distracted by that debate, because I would stand here for another hour talking about the folly of that.

We need to be continually investing in the productive capacity of this city, of this state. If we do not continue to invest in the infrastructure that improves productivity and that means that we can get people and goods across this city in more efficient ways, we will constrain our citizens sitting in those buses – that Mr Welch thinks are the solution – in traffic jams for eternity. No-one will get on Mr Welch's buses, because the roads will be clogged, because nothing will get built, because no-one will be able to get to the universities they need to get to or to the jobs that they need to get to or be able to live near public transport infrastructure or employment opportunities. Those opposite have got no vision for this state. They have no conception of what this state needs, and we should not listen to a word they have got to say.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (15:29): I rise to speak on behalf of the Nationals, very much in support of this motion. When you talk about what the vision is for this state, we certainly do have a vision for this state, and it is to be a state of cities, not a city-state, which is very much Labor's approach. It is interesting that Mr Batchelor mentioned Premier Henry Bolte, who still holds the record for 17 consecutive years, and it was the city loop rail that was a vision in 1969 as part of the Melbourne transportation plan. They had a plan, but boy oh boy, are we in a very different environment today, because under a decade of Labor we now have absolute record debt – the highest of any state in Australia. We are now heading towards nearly \$188 billion of debt within a couple of years. This is

extraordinary. The *Herald Sun* has reported about our credit rating. Standard & Poor's analyst Anthony Walker has expressed concerns about the estimate. He said:

That would see the state reduced to a record low AA- rating – three notches down from AAA in 2020 – and would mean increased borrowing costs of between 0.1 per cent and 0.5 per cent at a time when the state's debt is ballooning.

This is the state we are in at the moment. This government is putting all its eggs in one basket. You look at the major projects that have been done by this government, and the track record speaks for itself: over \$40 billion absolutely wasted in cost blowouts. When you look also at Labor's state budgets and what has been spent in regional areas compared to Melbourne, regional Victoria has about 25 per cent of the population, but under this government state budgets have had about 12 per cent to 13 per cent of new infrastructure spent in regional areas. To think that yet another major project is going to be focused in Melbourne, with the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL), is extraordinary.

Where could that money be going? What else could that money be going to? Well, I will tell you: to things that have been a priority for some time – infrastructure projects like the Kilmore bypass, which remains yet to be done; and the Shepparton bypass. We have got a bridge in Yarrawonga – a major bridge with significant traffic flows, 100 years old this year – that needs to be redone. Then we have got roads under this government that are underfunded: 91 per cent, according to the state government's own survey, are in poor or very poor condition. I have spoken in this house about intersections that need to be upgraded. We do have significant concerns; we saw that in the RACV survey recently. Seven thousand residents submitted to that survey and showed that actually one of the worst, most dangerous intersections is in the Premier's electorate, yet nothing has been done to improve the safety at that intersection.

We know hospitals are under significant pressure at the moment. Bendigo Hospital was asked to find \$120 million in savings in its budget. We have got a police force that is struggling – 700 vacancies we have had and stations have had to close their doors and reduce their hours, yet at the same time we have got significant crime issues right across the state. I know for a fact that Bendigo residents are concerned by the significant rise. We have a need for regional infrastructure with public transport. I have spoken recently of Strathfieldsaye; it does not even have a bus service on a Sunday – not a single bus service. I have also raised concerns about the need for additional bus services to Marong, a growing suburb just close to Bendigo.

We know that interface shires are facing significant rapid population growth, and they spoke at the local council inquiry recently about their need for more infrastructure to support this population growth. The Victorian Parliamentary Budget Office has given us figures from 2021–22, and when you look at Melbourne the amount spent on investment was \$15,268 per head versus \$7142 in regional areas. I know from speaking to regional councils as well that it is very expensive to build infrastructure in regional areas. This is what needs to be considered, as we are putting all our eggs in one basket. Population growth is going to rise dramatically in regional areas. In 2021 it was 1.6 million people; by 2051 it will be 2.3 million people. This government does need to look at what is happening in the rest of the state, not just Melbourne.

Mr Galea talked about the SRL being a visionary project. I would call it more like a mirage, because there has not been a proper business case. They went to two state elections without telling the truth and the reality of this, which is going to be a significant burden of debt on our state for future generations. We are the highest taxing state in Australia. We cannot keep taxing ourselves out of this debt. It is 114 weeks until the next state election, and it cannot come soon enough.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:34): I will take a few moments to sum up on my motion. It has been an interesting debate to hear those backbenchers from the government trying to argue the case around this flawed project. It is a project that is going to saddle generations of Victorians with this enormous debt. \$216 billion of money going into this project at this time is not the priority

that the government should be focused on. They keep talking about issues around moving people around the city, but it is not going to help people in the northern or the western parts of our city.

The first part of this Suburban Rail Loop, which has already blown out, does not have the federal funding. Ms Terpstra was carrying on about the government giving \$2.2 billion – well, that is way short of the blowout of somewhere in excess of \$35 billion, and the estimates are more like \$50 billion for this. You cannot do these projects on a hope and a prayer. It is irresponsible of the government to pursue this at this time. We just do not have the economic capacity to do it, and that is why I say again that the government backbenchers who have been rolled out to argue against this important motion have no clue. They did not even understand Standard & Poor's concerns. They did not even reference that. I want to say again – this is what Anthony Walker said:

... there's a real risk the SRL may cost more ... given the size and complexities of the undertaking and the state's recent history of major projects going well over budget ...

He said:

If Victoria pushes ahead with the Suburban Rail Loop without additional federal government funding, the state's fiscal outlook may weaken, further eroding its credit standing ...

When that happens, that has a massive flow-on effect to every part of our economy, and this is something that the government just has not grasped. They do not understand. We had that ludicrous suggestion of productivity – that what is good for the economy is getting cups of coffee and sandwiches at the local level crossing removal, for God's sake.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** It was an embarrassment. I mean, these people have got no clue. If any Victorian was watching this debate, they would be horrified about the lack of understanding of how a budget works or how an economy operates. And what is so terrifying is that in the government many of them have never worked in the private sector, so they do not understand risk management. They do not understand actually balancing books. They have all just taken taxpayers money and are blowing it because they do not have any responsibility or accountability for it. That is a tragedy, and that is why we are in this dire situation that we are in. That is why Standard & Poor's took the unprecedented move to speak publicly about this.

**Richard Welch** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Unprecedented, Mr Welch. It was an unprecedented move to come out and speak publicly about this project. This is a very serious situation. It is nothing to be laughing about, like those that have been laughing throughout the debate, with their incredulous, outlandish and stupid statements. It was just extraordinary.

There are young people in the gallery who are watching this debate. It is those children in this gallery today who are going to be saddled with this intergenerational debt. I do not want them to have this debt. It is those children's future that we are debating, and it is going to be ruined if this state is absolutely downtrodden because of the reckless decisions by the Allan Labor government. Those children deserve to have a great future. They deserve to have services that can be delivered to them, like health, like education and like community safety. As I said, it does not matter where you live in Victoria, you should have access and not just be confined to one project that is going to cost hundreds of billions of dollars in one tiny part of Victoria. I urge all members, for the sake of those children that are in the gallery today, to support my motion.

**Council divided on motion:**

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



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

**Motion negatived.**

### *Bills*

#### **Government Construction Projects Integrity Bill 2024**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Evan Mulholland:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:47): I am pleased – I probably should use a better word. I am going to speak as a further speaker in relation to the Government Construction Projects Integrity Bill 2024, a private members bill moved by Mr Mulholland which the government does not support, largely because the government is taking this issue seriously and taking serious action and Mr Mulholland's attempt to do something in this space is neither of those things. It is a misguided bill that seeks to do a range of things urgently but does so without any form of consultation, thought or assessment about the consequences of the action that it is seeking to take. That is perhaps indicative of their view that serious matters in our community are issues from which a political opportunity can be sought and a political advantage might be held rather than any sort of notion that there is a real public policy or integrity issue that needs to be addressed. At that very basic level the government will not be supporting the bill, because there are a range of issues with the proposition that has been drafted and rushed before us today and which seeks to permanently alter the laws of the state of Victoria. We do not think that that is the right approach.

What we have seen from the government since revelations came to light several weeks ago about allegations of illegal activity in the construction sector is a very clear response that has demonstrated the seriousness with which the government takes matters to do with the infiltration of criminal elements into the building and construction industry and our determination to stamp it out. What we have seen, sadly, are criminal elements using and misusing the good work that the union movement has done in the construction industry for a very long time, and that has undermined the excellent work that generations of hardworking unionists have done in the construction industry. What we have seen by the infiltration of organised criminal elements into the construction industry is not unionism, it is the antithesis of unionism. It is not about the collective good, it is about individual gain, and that is nothing to do with unionism and is all to do with selfish and illegal activity.

What the opposition has tried to do in their drafting of this private members bill is to appear to be tough and appear to be serious. What we have actually seen from the government, firstly, in immediately dealing with issues around the construction and general division of the CFMEU Victoria and Tasmania branch is asking for immediate action from the federal government, which has constitutionally that workplace relations authority and has constitutional responsibility for registered organisations in this country. You have seen that as a result of that swift action has been taken to put in place administration regimes, which will weed out criminal behaviour and criminal elements from these registered organisations and which are putting in place mechanisms to ensure the continuation of the absolutely fundamental role that organised labour has to keep workers safe and to ensure that their pay and conditions are upheld and respected, that they get home safely from work and that they get paid a proper wage for the work that they do, which recognises the often dangerous work that many in our construction industry do. You have seen swift action to put in place administration regimes to ensure that those unions can continue to do their job properly.

You have also seen from the Premier the immediate commissioning of an independent review of Victoria's construction sector, looking at how we can strengthen the powers of the bodies which are engaged with construction companies and construction unions to respond to allegations of criminal or unlawful conduct. The Premier also immediately referred allegations of serious misconduct to Victoria Police and the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. Those were the immediate actions that the state government here in Victoria took when these allegations emerged. At the time we also, led by the Attorney-General, made mention of some work that was being done – it is well underway – to strengthen anti-bikie laws to make it easier for police and courts to prevent certain individuals from associating with each other. It was very pleasing to see today, following the time a couple of weeks ago when the Attorney said it was in development, the announcement of the introduction of new laws to toughen and strengthen our existing laws to combat organised and serious crime.

The Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024, which was introduced in the Assembly today, will improve and strengthen Victoria's unlawful association scheme, introducing a new serious crime prevention order and prohibiting the public display of gang colours. This is a significant crackdown on organised crime and bikie gangs, with some of the toughest laws in the country to deal with thuggish, illegal and bad behaviour. As part of the changes, members of specified organised crime groups will be banned from entering Victorian government worksites, ensuring that these sites are free from the influence of outlaw gangs and criminal groups. This will complement the work that I briefly mentioned earlier that is going to stamp out the rotten, unlawful culture that had emerged in sections of the construction industry.

The strengthened unlawful association scheme will give Victoria Police more power to stop criminals associating with each other and to discourage other people from joining them in a criminal network. Importantly, the threshold which exists in law for issuing unlawful association notices will be lowered to allow police to issue these unlawful association notices more easily and in a wider range of circumstances. The threshold will be lowered for the issuing of unlawful association notices, allowing police to issue them more easily and in a wider range of circumstances, with up to three years in prison for a breach of those orders. Importantly, part of the legislation being introduced into the Legislative Assembly today, the Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill, will grant the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission new responsibilities to monitor, oversee and report on the operation of the scheme. So we are giving new powers to police to crack down on these organised criminal associations and how they are engaging with a range of elements in the community but particularly in relation to the construction sector, ensuring that certain worksites that exist can be free of that influence, and we are providing IBAC as the integrity agency responsible to the Parliament with the necessary oversight and monitoring powers to ensure that the scheme is working as is intended, to produce reports to enable that oversight to take place and to satisfy both the Parliament and the community of its operations.

The legislation also proposes that a new serious crime prevention order scheme will come into effect that allows the Chief Commissioner of Police to apply to a court to impose a broad range of conditions on an individual who has participated in a serious criminal activity or is likely to help other person who is engaging in serious criminal behaviour. This serious crime prevention order scheme is designed to restrict the activities of certain organised crime group leaders. What these orders might include is a prohibition on a person leaving Victoria or possessing firearms or possessing a certain amount of cash.

Outlaw motorcycle gang members often wear and display colours, logos and other insignia to represent their gang membership, to intimidate others and as a mechanism to recruit and attract new members. The ban that this bill will introduce will ban the public display of insignia of certain criminal groups and in certain circumstances.

We said a couple of weeks ago when the allegations of criminal activity in the construction sector were aired that this work was being undertaken. A couple of weeks later we see the government delivering on that and introducing tough new laws to combat serious and organised crime, particularly

giving and expanding powers to also enable that to be extended into certain Victorian government worksites. We think that the worksite prohibition in particular here will help address some of the concerns that have been raised in relation to conduct. I think the comprehensiveness that the government has shown in relation to drafting and introducing these laws stands a little bit in contrast to the bill that we are debating here today. What we have been able to do is draft laws, get them right and get them introduced. It seems that the opposition managed to do just the last of those things.

I think what we also have to understand is that the construction industry is an exceptionally important part of the Victorian economy. It is important in providing thousands of jobs to Victorians – and this links a little bit to the debate we were just having – and is part of ensuring that our city and our state are able to continue to have strong economic growth. The construction industry is a vital part of our economic toolkit to ensure that we have the public civil infrastructure but also the private infrastructure, the homes and the private capital that enable our state to not only continue to grow and support growing jobs and economic growth but allow that expansion to occur in a productive way that ensures that the economic capacity of the state is improved through these measures that we are introducing that I have spoken about earlier in this speech. The strengthening of integrity around the construction unions and the review of the government contracts and projects in these new laws that have been introduced in the Legislative Assembly today will ensure that this vitally important sector is able to do the job it needs to do to support all Victorians in a way that is free from unlawful criminal activity.

The alternatives we have, I think, are to go one of two ways. We could let criminal elements gain more of a foothold in parts of the construction industry, with all of the negative consequences that that would bring. We cannot allow that, and there is action that is being taken to not do so. The alternative, the other path, is to do the things that those opposite seek for us to do, which is to destroy the capacity of workers to engage collectively for their own safety and to improve their own pay and conditions. We will not do that. In fact what we are doing, and what the Labor government federally is doing, is ensuring that those unions continue to have that capacity. That is the fundamental issue. It is a fundamental issue for any civilised society that it has effective and functioning associations of workers who can act in the collective interests of those workers, and that is what our actions are doing.

We know that those opposite would prefer that we did not have trade unions in this state; they would prefer that we did not have protections. They vote against increased protections that we bring as a Labor government to this Parliament. They have voted against a raft of laws that we have brought into the statute books here in Victoria that have strengthened protections for Victorian workers. They are only interested in running down the protections that Victorian workers have. They have used every opportunity in the past to do it, and we have stood against them every step of the way. These laws that this bill would seek to introduce on the statute books here in Victoria are ill thought through, yet again, and do not deserve to be supported.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:02): I rise to speak on the Liberal Party's private members bill, namely the Government Construction Projects Integrity Bill 2024. In doing so, I note that Mr Mulholland moved this two weeks ago and laid out two main points of the bill. First, it requires the parties to major construction contracts with the Crown to ensure that no person with a criminal history, links to the criminal organisations listed in the schedule to the bill or links to the declared criminal organisations is employed or engaged for these projects; and second, it mandates that registered employee organisations do not issue entry permits under section 83 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to individuals associated with these criminal elements.

This bill, in my view, wants to do everything urgently, and by doing everything in a rush it gets nothing right. If you look at my contributions in *Hansard*, there is word I often say and it is a keyword, and that word is 'consultation'. We believe in consultation on this side of the chamber, because by listening to the experts you can achieve the best outcomes. This is what makes a good government great: checking, double-checking and checking again with people who have dedicated their lives to becoming experts in their field. We do not know what unintended consequences will come; these

proposals could be constitutionally invalid. The plenary power of the state is not unlimited. This bill just simply does not consider the possible ramifications these measures could have, and by rushing into this we do not know the consequences.

While those opposite are reckless, the Premier has been serious about getting down to business. The Premier has referred allegations of serious misconduct to Victoria Police and IBAC, or the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. We are toughening anti-bikie laws, and that bill will be debated this month. The Premier has established an independent review into our construction sector. As part of that review, we will find out how we can strengthen the power of the bodies engaged with the construction companies and how the construction unions respond to allegations of criminal and unlawful conduct. We want to be thorough, and we want to ensure that nothing is missed by the legislation.

The opposition clearly has no interest in delivering meaningful change for Victorians. They do not want a better Victoria – or they would not be wasting our time with this bill. This government is serious about getting to the core of these matters and taking advice from experts to deliver reforms that will do good for this great state, but this bill before us is not grounded in any legal advice we can see. It is a slapdash effort to punish workers for the acts of a few. This bill proves that the opposition is not fit for government. They would rather rush through these measures than stop and consult and follow the appropriate steps. Those across from me are no friends of the Victorian people; they have no clue what they are doing, and they have no vision for the future.

This bill would stop the overwhelming number of hardworking men and women trying to earn a solid and good living in construction. There is being tough on crime and then there is this. I believe the word ‘draconian’ is more than fit to describe this bill. Let alone believing in second chances, those opposite do not even believe in first chances. It is wrong and it is uninformed. Being tough on crime should not mean punishing those who do not deserve it. Blocking those individuals from employment could only serve to do one thing: push them back into crime. Crime is a socio-economic matter. Harsh punishment should be reserved for individuals who have proven they have a pathological disregard for the safety of others and themselves – a fundamental disrespect for society. This bill would instead prevent them from rehabilitating themselves. Why on earth you would not want someone to be able to improve themselves and turn away from crime is beyond me. This is not effectively addressing what they want to fix; it could even make it worse.

This matter is complicated and requires thorough independent examination, but the opposition wants to jump to conclusions before we even have had the opportunity to get all the facts straight and before we have had a chance to examine the best way forward. Because of this I look forward to the review led by Mr Greg Wilson leading to a strengthening of the integrity agencies, and not just strengthening the integrity agencies but ensuring that they do not unfairly punish those hoping to move away from mistakes and misgivings of the past. I look forward to a serious report, unlike that by their mate Dyson Heydon. Then the government can get down to the brass tacks and do what needs to be done to ensure all Victorians are protected in the best possible way once we have all the facts and not before.

As I said earlier, being tough on crime and misconduct does not mean punishing those that do not deserve to be punished. This government is very proud of its track record in addressing criminality in the state of Victoria. Victoria’s success in addressing it is in no small part due to the exemplary efforts of cabinet ministers working tirelessly to improve this state’s response to and mitigation of crime, like our current Minister for Police and Minister for Crime Prevention, my good friend Anthony Carabines, who is in the other place, and our colleague here Minister for Corrections Enver Erdogan.

This government knows that crime is a multifaceted problem with a lot of influences. We understand that measures to address crime must be balanced to ensure the best outcomes for the community. This does not mean letting off offenders lightly – absolutely not. This government is tough where it needs to be. That is what this bill fails to deliver for the Victorian community. The opposition want to appear as if they are tough on crime, but they have just shown us they know nothing about addressing crime.

This government's track record, however, speaks for itself. Last year Victoria Police recorded that the crime rate is at the third-lowest point that it has been in the past decade. That is not a coincidence – this is due to the hard work of our Minister for Police.

This government have been prolific in introducing programs and policies to improve the way that we are addressing crime, and it has already paid off – like the Made for More campaign to boost recruitment to the police force, therefore ensuring that our police force is better staffed and better equipped to respond to criminal activity. For large-scale crimes we introduced reforms that will catch career criminals unable to explain how they acquired their wealth. This means that Victoria Police have more avenues to disrupt organised crime – crime that ruins countless lives in its operation. That is what a government serious about addressing crime would do. We are exploring how to reduce reoffending rates. This bill does not consider that.

There is another thing that leaps out at me from this bill before us about the coalition's entire response to the situation: the coalition's fundamental hatred of unions, the union movement and, in that vein, workers in Victoria. They pretend to care about workers. They say that Victorians lose out under Labor governments. They could not be more wrong. The opposition has been given countless history lessons on what the union movement has done for this state – and for the world, for that matter. At this point they must be blocking their ears, because there is no other explanation. They have taken this situation to jump to demonising unions before a proper independent investigation has even been completed. I know a bit about the union movement, so I am more than happy to tell those across from me once again exactly what they are demonising. They are demonising the movement that gave us minimum wages, 40-hour work weeks and the criminalising of negligence – and the opposition wants Victorians to believe that they are on their side. I think that is quite ridiculous.

I was the secretary of the Transport Workers' Union from 2016 to 2021. Before that I was the assistant secretary for seven years. The Transport Workers' Union is a proud union with a history of delivering wins for workers in some of the most dangerous roles in the workplace, and I am very proud to be able to say that I presided over the TWU during some of those significant campaigns. Over the past decade the TWU has successfully fought for fairer conditions and wages for workers. It was the TWU that fought to get bus drivers in Melbourne safety screens to prevent harm coming to them while on the job. Without unions, workers are left vulnerable; with the unions, they are protected. I was also lucky enough to participate in the criminalisation of wage theft, now codified nationally thanks to our federal Albanese Labor government and the minister for industrial relations Tony Burke. This means that Australia is now a country where it is criminal for workers to be taken advantage of – vulnerable workers who are owed their fair wage. Australia is no longer a place where that can be tolerated.

Without unions, mechanisms would not be in place to properly prosecute and punish employers who abuse and mistreat their employees. Without unions, we would not be able to secure job security and safety. This was made painfully clear during the COVID-19 pandemic when companies like Qantas tried to unfairly dismiss nearly 2000 workers. It was the union that stood by these workers. The Transport Workers' Union took Qantas to the High Court of Australia, and the High Court found that Qantas was responsible for the largest illegal sacking in Australia's history. It was the union movement that ensured that they were held accountable. It was the union movement that ensured that these workers were not being left out.

Those across from me want to equate the union movement with criminality while enjoying the benefits of what the movement has brought to this country. They are no friends of the Victorian people. When they criticise the union movement, it is not out of genuine concern. They do not care about Victorian workers, plain and simple. On this side we believe in workers, and we know that what has to happen is not an indictment of the entire union movement. I am keen for our side of the chamber to get on and deliver for all Victorians and to continue to support the more than 300,000 hardworking Victorians on construction sites. Our government builds things: the North East Link, West Gate Tunnel and, yes, Metro 2.0.

Mr Mulholland said in his second-reading speech that ‘Every Victorian loses.’ It speaks to their great privilege and small mindedness that they could imagine expanded transport infrastructure as a loss. More trains more often is somehow a loss. Traffic cut on the Eastern Freeway is somehow a loss. Better conditions for our transport workers who keep Victoria running is somehow a loss. It is actually an insult to Victorians to say that better public transport is a loss. Victorians lose when the Liberals come in and ruin our public transport system. However, Labor governments make public transport better, just as this Labor government has.

The Metro Tunnel is set to open next year. Running through the city, the Metro Tunnel will take pressure off our currently operating city loop to ensure more comfortable, quicker experiences for commuters and passengers. When the tunnel opens, you could get on a train at Sunbury station and take it all the way to East Pakenham. The Metro Tunnel will introduce five new stations on our transit system, ensuring low congestion in our existing stations during peak hours. And speaking of congestion, this project is expected to slash down road congestion during peak hours. The economic, environmental and social benefits of this project are endless. Those across from me want to make out that it is a bad thing for Victorians, and this is absurd.

Other rail projects the Allan Labor government is delivering include the SRL East and the Level Crossing Removal Project. These will transform what it is like to travel around Melbourne for the better – safer, quicker and better. We are not just making advancements in rail infrastructure; projects like the West Gate Tunnel and North East Link are set to massively improve the state of road travel in Melbourne. The North East Link is of particular interest to me as the terminus is located right at the northern end of my community of Southern Metro, and I cannot wait to see how this will improve the commute and the day-to-day lives of people living in my community. However, the opposition would rather they did not benefit from this project. They do not want a better Victoria.

I could not imagine coming to this place and not fighting for a better Victoria, let alone trying to stop the government that is. This bill, hidden behind the pretence of concern, is just another example of the opposition trying to take from the Victorian people. As I have illustrated in my contribution, this is wildly inappropriate to address what it wants to address. The opposition clearly have no idea what they are doing and no regard for the potential harm that rushed legislation can cause. They see no value in thorough consultation and would have a bandaid solution rather than a proper one if they had their way. So our side will wait for Mr Greg Wilson’s interim report on 29 August 2024 and then the final report on 29 November 2024, and we will deliver real reforms informed by facts, informed by experts, unlike this so-called bill, which offers nothing to the Victorian people.

I look forward to voting in support of a bill that will deliver actual solutions for Victorians, a bill that will make for a safer Victoria. Until then I will do the right thing for working Victorians and vote down this pointless bill. I hope that everyone in this chamber will join me in the decision so that this house can get back to delivering for Victorians rather than wasting our time with the opposition’s opportunistic cheap shots.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:15): I also rise to put my view forward and share a few remarks on this bill which has been put together by the opposition. At the outset I will reiterate what I have said already on this matter today, and that is that when it comes to matters of integrity on government construction projects, that is something that this government takes very seriously indeed. That is something that Premier Jacinta Allan takes very seriously, as evidenced by her comments on this matter, and our Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes takes very seriously as well.

The bill that we have before us today though is something of a rather hastily drafted piece of legislation that seems to be more in search of a media mention than it is in search of an actual beneficial outcome. There are a number of concerns that have been expressed and raised by others about this bill, and I would add my voice to a few of those concerns. More valuable than anything I might have to say on the matter, though, is what the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee had to say on the bill, which was, frankly, a scathing 13-page report on the various shortcomings of the legislation that is

here before us. The SARC, which is one of the pre-eminent joint standing committees of our Parliament, plays an important role in going through and assessing all pieces of legislation that come before this place, in their relation to both the charter of human rights and other aspects, and indeed subordinate legislation through regulation as well.

I am not a member of SARC, but as other members do we receive the alert digests. In this one in particular we see a number of issues which have been raised by the SARC as it relates to this bill. SARC references that they have concerns that this bill trespasses unduly on rights and freedoms when it comes to the presumption of innocence – a very longstanding legal practice in this country. They note that even where charges are pending, this can lead to adverse actions being taken against individuals. The report also notes that it trespasses unduly on people's rights and freedoms when it comes to spent convictions and implied repeal. It trespasses unduly upon rights and freedoms with regard to freedom of association, and freedom of association is of course one of the very fundamental rights that not just Victorians but all Australians have. I understand one of the very first pieces of legislation in our Commonwealth Parliament was to codify the rights of all Australians to freely associate, be they in unions or in other contexts. That is a very important thing and part of the bedrock foundation of our union movement. I will come back to the union movement as a whole a little bit later on.

In the view of SARC, the bill also makes rights, freedoms or obligations dependent on non-reviewable administrative decisions. Again, part of due process is that people do have the appropriate rights to recourse to challenge a decision that they may believe to be unfair and to go through every reasonable avenue. That is a very fundamental part of our judicial and our legal systems, and any bill which undermines that, even in a relatively small area of society, is a very dangerous thing and one we should not be rushing in to do – certainly not rushing into with the evident gaps in detail and the evident gaps in what this legislation before us here today provides, which is again why you legislate with the outcomes in mind, not with the media attention that will you get for a piece of legislation in mind. Pages and pages and pages of this SARC report continue talking about the risks of undue influence, undue requirement or authorisations – practices that may have an adverse impact on personal privacy within the meaning of the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 – and that is not even getting into the issues of where SARC views the bill coming into conflict with the charter of human rights. So there is a significant issue, as I say. Noting that there are currently no opposition members in the chamber, I am not sure how committed they actually are to this bill; however, if they were here, perhaps they would like to explain to us just exactly how these things can be suitably addressed and suitably answered. I see they have come back in, so I look forward to that explanation.

Notwithstanding the very, very many issues within this bill, as I said at the outset, this is a very significant issue which has come to public attention, and that is exactly why the government is taking serious action. I spoke earlier today about the Wilson inquiry that was set up immediately by Premier Jacinta Allan. I also note in particular that today the government is implementing its own legislation to directly address the issue of serious organised crime. Indeed they will be amongst the strongest laws in the country, if enacted, when it comes to stamping out organised crime. The Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024 as it is known will, as I said, be this new set of laws which addresses the unlawful association of criminal syndicates and criminal participants and other various gangs and criminal groups. The work will be done deliberately to complement work at the federal level to stamp out rotten behaviour where it has come up in the construction industry.

I do want to make a note of saying that despite whatever bad eggs, there are a great deal many more people – construction workers, electricians and other various people involved in major construction projects, the vast majority in fact – who do a hard day's work for a fair day's pay and deserve to be treated with that level of respect.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** I will absolutely not accept those opposite saying that the hardworking men and women who go to work each day – I will not have them being accused of taking bribes and all this other stuff. The actions of a few bad apples do not mean that an everyday worker on a construction site is doing those, and for you to imply that is a disgrace. It is an absolute disgrace for you to imply that about everyday Victorians doing their bit, helping out our state enormously through the Big Build. These people are going into their places of work just to do their jobs to support their workers, and for you to make those allegations against them, Mr Mulholland, is absolutely disgraceful.

The action that the government's bill will focus on will not be attacking everyday workers, be they in construction or in health care or driving public transport or whatever else it might be. The actions in this bill will go directly to the heart of addressing the issue of organised crime and stamping it out. What we have from Mr Mulholland and his Liberal Party is a bill that is by his very own admission just then about attacking working people in Victoria and saying that everyday workers on construction projects are participating in the sorts of disgraceful behaviour that we have seen. They should not have to deal with that in their union, in their companies and in their workplace, and that is exactly why the government has taken firm action. The working people, the real working people of the union, deserve better than to have criminals infiltrating and getting involved with their workplaces.

Unions do play such a pivotal and important role in workplaces, whether in construction, in retail, in professional services, in nursing, in teaching or in public service, when it comes to protecting the living conditions, when it comes to advancing the pay improvements and other improvements for these people and when it comes to, perhaps most importantly of all, making these workplaces safe so that people can come home in the same condition that they went to work in. I have seen, in my previous career, far too many people dealing with the impacts of serious workplace traumas and injuries and the toll that they had on them and their families. In other sectors we have seen cases of deaths in workplaces, and that is something that has particularly been seen on construction sites.

We cannot overstate the importance of workplace health and safety, and that is something that working unions, along with health and safety reps and other things with them, are so pivotal in securing. What I do not want to see is the actions of a few officials who have gone very, very wayward and quite possibly outrageously corrupt – that is a disgusting thing, and it is a disgrace to working people that they would go into a union to take profit for themselves over others; that is a disgrace, and they should be out of the union movement. But the vast majority of people on these worksites – these delegates, these members, whichever union it is – are going in to advance themselves, their families and their workmates.

What we have in this legislation, aside from the very many issues with regard to what SARC has raised in its report, comes back to the fact that when the Liberals talk about this, they are talking about undermining the rights of working people, and that is ultimately what it is about. We know that they have opposed virtually every major infrastructure project that this state has done. They would rip those jobs away from those honest, hardworking people. I think one of the Liberal members before talked about filling in the tunnels of the Suburban Rail Loop. At least the silver lining of that is you would at least need some workers to do that, but aside from that disgraceful short-sightedness you would be ripping out those jobs that we have delivered with the Metro Tunnel and with the various road projects such as the West Gate Tunnel and the North East Link. You would rip out, for example, the level crossing removals that we have been investing in. These are all things that we have faced opposition from from those opposite. The big city- and state-changing infrastructure projects, right down to the Regional Rail Revival and other projects right across Victoria, are projects that the Liberal Party have opposed and attempted to block at every opportunity. Indeed we have seen it just today, just an hour or so ago, in the previous motion when they tried to stop and oppose yet another major infrastructure project. The result of that, if they were to be successful, if they were to ever be given the reins of power, would be that these people would not have their jobs. There would be no jobs in continuing to tunnel the Suburban Rail Loop. There would be none of the thousands of jobs for electricians to power the Suburban Rail Loop.



We know in fact that the Liberal Party are not really concerned about such things. On one of the few occasions in the last government when they actually did make some sort of transport investment, I was actually living in Pakenham at the time next to a brand new station – and I am very, very grateful that there was a new station at Cardinia Road. However, the then Liberal government forgot to provide an electricity substation so that trains could actually accelerate out of this new station. So they could run past, but they could not actually stop. We had a brand new station, and then no train could stop there. It was several months later before we actually got those trains up and running again. That is, I guess, what you have as well when you have a government that completely blithely ignores the role that electricians or other working people play and that you need to have. When it comes to these infrastructure projects, you need a steady stream of work – if you will, a pipeline of work – so that working people can continue to be supported and have the jobs that they need when it comes to making the Big Build happen and making the infrastructure changes that all Victorians need, be it for the local school being upgraded or rebuilt, the new road duplication, the new bus route or of course the major new transport projects.

I will reiterate that this is an important subject, and I do not discount that for a second; it is a very important subject that we are discussing today. The bill that we have before us does not treat the matter with the seriousness it deserves, and that 13-page blistering SARC report underscores why it should not be taken seriously. The government, under Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes, has brought in legislation to the Parliament today, which I very much look forward to debating at a point in the near future and which will bring in effective measures to, as I said, make Victoria one of the toughest states on organised crime. This is a government that, to steal a phrase from abroad, is tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, because you need to address things from the source, and this is a bill that will bring in tough measures that will effectively work to stamp out bad behaviour, whether it occurs in construction or indeed in any other sector.

I will conclude my comments there. For the reasons I have outlined I will not be supporting the bill today, but I am very much looking forward to having some better legislation in a very short period of time, which I will enthusiastically support in the interests of making sure that the honest, hardworking people who make the Big Build and other projects happen can be supported and have honest, open workplaces.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:30): I am happy and sad to speak on this bill, really. I have not got a lot of good things to say about this bill, although I am going to try and find a positive reframe as much as I can. I think it is not a very good example of legislation, and the reason is because it essentially proposes to ban anyone from working in the construction industry that has a criminal record or an association with someone that has a criminal record. It kind of sounds like a good idea, except let us have a look at just how that is going to play out in the community. Look at the evidence of how that will play out. It proposes to establish a legal form of discrimination – that is my opinion – against a significant portion of our community, many of whom are now upstanding citizens or indeed have always been upstanding citizens. The groups captured under this so-called bill are people who may have served their time in prison and have re-entered society, having committed some kind of an offence. That flies in the face of everything we know about restorative justice, everything we know about rebuilding your life after you have been in prison and all of the research that we know in the youth justice space, which we just debated last sitting week, about rebuilding the person – rebuilding the child – and bringing them back into society in a way where they can behave acceptably but also in a way where they can contribute to our society through employment, paying taxes and being a self-sustaining member of our community. Under this bill all of those people are not eligible to have a job – in this case, in the construction industry. I would even go as far as saying there is a bunch of legislation that would need to be changed in the justice space to accommodate this, so it is very poor from that perspective.

Then in relation to the bill's use of the word 'association', a further group of people stand to be officially and legally discriminated against if this bill is passed – people related to a criminal or a

former criminal. So if you are a child of a criminal or if you are the partner of a criminal or the parents of someone who was a criminal or is a criminal, that may well potentially exclude you from working in the construction industry. I think back to what Ms Terpstra said about the all-women drilling team. It is a real shame if people cannot go into an industry that might interest them or that might give them great satisfaction or at least give them a secure job and decent pay.

Then there is another group under this heading of association, and that is survivors of sexual assault and family violence. Even an ex-partner of a person who is guilty of family violence or sexual assault may be deemed as having been associated with someone with a criminal background. That is unclear in this bill. It is very, very all encompassing. The absurdity of this proposal is almost unbelievable. In fact it really does make me wonder if it was just hastily thrown together to provide the opposition with another opportunity to have a bit of a conversation about unionism – that concept that they do not really like.

To that effect I want to talk about what has been happening and what has been revealed in recent weeks. What we have seen in recent media reports is not trade unionism. Reports of organised crime elements infiltrating construction sites and the CFMEU are absolutely unacceptable. Construction workers certainly do dangerous work, and it is an important job. You only need to have the privilege of observing a construction site to see what must be very, very complex work in an incredibly dangerous environment, with cranes working all the time. The skill sets involved in working on a building site I think are absolutely fascinating but also a very strong set of skills that are unique. They are the workers delivering the benefits of the Big Build in Victoria in many cases, and they deserve good, honourable, honest union representation that puts their safety first and is in it for the right reasons. It is unacceptable for this important work to be undermined by any form of criminal or corrupt conduct.

The government has moved quickly to stamp this out, partnering with the federal government, which has the responsibility for industrial relations. I do remember when Jeff Kennett handed over responsibility for industrial relations to the federal government. Whether it was the right or wrong thing to do I do not have a view about, but it certainly changed the state's role in industrial relations, so much of the regulation and monitoring in that space falls within the purview of the federal government. But of course the Victorian government have also taken action to make sure that we investigate anything untoward that may have been going on. We have set up an independent inquiry to rapidly investigate the government's powers to address revelations of corruption, and that inquiry will be headed by respected senior public servant Greg Wilson, former Secretary of the Department of Justice and Regulation. Mr Wilson has been asked for recommendations on strengthening the state's powers to address potential corruption and address any possible gaps in the government's or a government body's powers under that Victorian bailiwick. On this side of the chamber we believe everyone has the right to feel safe at work. Those opposite are really interested in playing political games with this. We have got multiple investigations underway, and I think that is the appropriate thing to do.

I just want to go on before I finish up. The construction industry and in particular the workers in the construction industry are working on Victoria's Big Build projects, which of course we are incredibly proud of. That work is helping to shape the future of our state, whether it is tunnelling, whether it is construction or whether it is public transport. In particular with the Warrnambool railway line, I just want to highlight the complexity. I have learned a lot just monitoring and observing the work that has been going on on the regional rail upgrade on the Warrnambool line project in order to ready that line for VLocity trains. By the way, I do not think the coalition ever thought there would be VLocity trains there, but I can absolutely guarantee you that I saw one of the first VLocity trains on Saturday morning. They were testing the train, training the driver and testing the line and signalling by bringing the test train up to Warrnambool.

In terms of the Warrnambool line upgrade, upwards of 50 to 53 level crossings – in fact every public level crossing between Geelong and Warrnambool – are going to be fully signalised. When I say fully

signalised, that is triple signalised – lights, bells and boom gates. This is going to be a huge safety improvement for the community of the south-west and the farming communities between Geelong and Warrnambool who cross that line. The complexity of the construction work in that project alone has involved installing wiring and signalling a kilometre each side of each crossing, so at various times there have been upwards of 600 construction workers working on that upgrade between Geelong and Warrnambool. I am very proud of the work of construction workers in our region and across the whole state.

Stabling facilities to allow the new VLocity trains to be cleaned and for the toilets to be removed and cleaned will be going in at the Warrnambool station. There have been sleeper replacements. There has been a station upgrade so that there are now fully compliant automated doors so that people with a disability can go in – and fully accessible toilets as well. There will be rumble strips perhaps updated on the platform and also a hearing loop added as well. That allows people with hearing aids to directly receive a station message through their hearing aids, which again is an inclusive thing that previously was not possible. You can imagine standing on the platform asking someone you do not know, ‘What was that announcement?’ Again, that is another incredibly positive infrastructure project that has a reflection of the values of our Labor government all over it.

In closing, I want to say that it really disappoints me to see a proposal that involves so much discrimination against people who want to get their lives back on track, and we certainly will not be supporting this bill.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:45): There have been some extraordinary comments by those opposite in regard to this bill, but can I pass on one message to the pimply-faced people who are writing these speeches, maybe with not so much experience, in the Premier’s private office: maybe give your members different speeches to say different things, because we hear so much repeating of lines and of talking points – most of which are untrue, by the way. We just see repetition after repetition in regard to these members all saying the same thing. To be honest, it is boring to hear the same things from member after member repeating exactly the same lines, most of which are wrong.

One interesting thing Mr Berger said was that the government was delivering Metro 2, which as far as I am aware, they have not even announced that they are delivering, which is interesting. Mr Galea talked about – I think he confused his words a bit. He said ‘a hard day’s pay for a hard day’s work’ or something along those lines. I know what he actually meant.

As uncovered in the media, we have seen a huge amount of kickbacks on state government projects – kickbacks using taxpayer money for their own benefit – and I know they have got the talking point in there that they all repeated, that, ‘This is not unionism.’ You have had union bosses that have literally said, ‘Okay. Here’s four shifts. You only have to have two turn up, and we’ll take the rest. We’ll just claim they all turned up and take the rest.’

You have got other examples where the union bosses have literally had members who were docked for Metro Tunnel work come to their homes and renovate their own houses at taxpayer expense. Every parent, every family that pays taxes is paying for union bosses to have their own homes renovated, but these guys think it is okay. That side of the chamber thinks it is all good – nothing to see here. These are union bosses personally benefiting from taxpayer dollars that we all pay, that everyone pays in taxes, for their own benefit.

We see the government itself has preferenced the CFMEU. They have aided and abetted, and they say they are talking about it now. We know the Premier is disgusted and says these revelations are completely new and she is completely shocked about it. Then when asked by Nick McKenzie if she knew, she said, ‘What? What? What? What?’ Of course they had documents. I also asked her about a lot of these matters last year and she said they were matters for the federal government, but now she is completely shocked.

I want to touch on something Ms Ermacora said that was completely wrong: that a domestic violence survivor – and I am – associated with a criminal bikie could be affected and prohibited from going on construction sites. This bill, if the member had read it, actually leaves it to the discretion of the Chief Commissioner of Police to report on associations and furnish relevant intelligence to decide if someone is an associate of a criminal organisation. Does that side of the house not trust the Chief Commissioner of Police? That is the assertion that is being made. Now I see on the day we are voting on this bill the government has finally announced some changes. The police have only been asking for extra powers since 2016. The government has finally been dragged kicking and screaming to bring in laws, but there are a number of things that I want to comment on – reasons why I think our laws are better. Our bill requires mandatory criminal and intelligence checks for all new employees on government worksites; Labor's does not. Labor's bill instead relies on organised crime figures openly identifying themselves on sites – volunteering to identify themselves through the display of covers – and on police coming forward to employers with relevant intelligence.

Labor's bill reportedly beefs up their existing anti-consorting laws, which by the way have to date never been used to declare a bikie gang or organisation, so how can we possibly trust these new laws if they have actually never been used? I note Ms Symes said today police will be able to charge people if they are a current member of a prescribed criminal organisation when they enter a Victorian worksite. To date there are not any prescribed organisations – there just are not. We list that in the bill. Our bill fixes it by listing key known bikie organisations that are already prescribed in other jurisdictions. Ms Symes's comment is basically nil – that police will be able to charge them – when we do not actually know, according to government legislation, who they are.

Another key difference is our bill is proactive. It deals with the issue at the procurement phase as well. It mandates background checks as a precondition of signing a contract and roots out all bikie influence across the sector. Based on the government's announcement, their bill gives Victoria Police the ability to charge bikies if they come on a worksite. But how would they actually know? That is the question. How would they actually know who is on the worksite? It seems like the only people that get charged here are people under the active surveillance of police or those who openly declare themselves to be bikies. So the government's bill is reactive. They have been dragged kicking and screaming. There have been repeated attempts by Victoria Police asking for these laws from as far back as 2016. The government has done nothing about it. They have reacted to detailed stories in the media.

The Premier on a lot of occasions has been warned about what has been going on on construction sites. And what is the Premier's response? What is Premier Allan's response? Actively preferencing the CFMEU on state government construction sites. We know this through documents obtained on the Commonwealth Games. For the build of the athletes village to all tenderers they put out: 'If you're not going to use a CFMEU workforce, you need not apply.' That was written in the contract, extraordinarily. Usually they just get people in a room and say, 'You have to use a CFMEU workforce.' It was literally written in the contract for the athletes village. No wonder the CFMEU –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I can show you the contract. I am happy to show you the contract, Minister. You may have been responsible for that.

In regard to the athletes villages for the Commonwealth Games, the government wrote it in the contract. It does not actually appear in any other contracts, but we know the government preferenced the CFMEU on state government construction sites, and we know that because of what happened with the east–west link, where you could not possibly have an AWU workforce. I think the day after or the second day after that was announced –

*Members interjecting.*

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Don't you talk to me about business cases. You have not submitted one to Infrastructure Australia for the Suburban Rail Loop. They are still waiting on it.

I saw many members speak about the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee report, and I am happy to make available my detailed response to SARC, which was acknowledged. I will make that available to members that want to peruse that –

**David Davis** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** but it was in the digest. Please have a read. I encourage all members to have a read.

The bill responds to a real and ongoing threat of organised crime in Victorian government construction sites and on construction projects. It prioritises transparency, accountability and safety while carefully balancing and respecting individual rights. The bill is a proportionate response. The bill strikes a careful balance between protecting rights under the charter and the imperative to safeguard public safety and project integrity. The limitations on rights such as freedom of association and privacy are proportionate, targeted and justified within the specific context of preventing organised crime from infiltrating government projects. The bill carefully balances individual rights with the need to protect public safety and maintain the integrity of projects.

The bill's restrictions on employing individuals associated with criminal organisations as outlined in clause 6(1) are a justified limitation on the right to freedom of association under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. The bill mirrors a framework created by the Criminal Organisations Control Act 2012, where such limitations have been upheld as necessary for public safety. In this context the bill's focus is on government construction projects, where the stakes are high and the risks of criminal influence are too great to ignore. I think it is quite clear that they are too great to ignore, but they have been ignored by this government for years. What was said on the *60 Minutes* program? It is an open secret. They all knew about it but they did nothing. They did absolutely nothing to stop the infiltration of criminal elements on taxpayer-funded construction sites.

**David Davis** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** By doing nothing they are –

**John Berger:** On a point of order, Acting President, I think Mr Davis is out of his seat. If he is going to interject –

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora):** Order! I would like to hear the point of order again, please, Mr Berger. I could not hear it.

**John Berger:** Thank you, Acting President. Mr Davis was interjecting while not in his seat.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora):** I uphold the point of order. If you are going to speak, you speak from your seat.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** They are absolutely complicit in what is going on – the coercion, the corruption, the kickbacks that dodgy union officials have received to renovate their own homes and the ghost shifts that have occurred on major projects. And you wonder why there is over \$40 billion of cost blowouts on our major projects – taxpayer-funded cost blowouts – which means you have to cut hospitals and you have to cut funding across the board. You are having to cancel other desperately needed infrastructure projects in our growth areas because of your cost blowouts on construction sites, because you have got dodgy union officials – and I agree – giving unionism a bad name, giving good unionists a bad name and giving good construction workers a bad name.

We have criminal elements on construction sites, like on the Hurstbridge line upgrade, where you have got bikie gang members using taxpayer-funded government cars to run criminal operations. And everyone knew about it. It was an open secret; people knew from the hospital reports. But what did the government do? Nothing – absolutely nothing. They hid it away and waited for it to be reported

by *60 Minutes* – an absolute disgrace. This Premier has been responsible for taxpayer-funded infrastructure projects for the past 10 years and is complicit in what has gone on, because she has aided and abetted the CFMEU, a criminal enterprise, at every step of the way. We need to support this bill. It is a good bill, and if the government is actually serious about getting criminal elements and bikies off government construction sites it will pass this bill. We know that there are criminal elements on our construction sites. The CFMEU acted very quickly when under the threat of administration to get rid of over 20 bikies from construction sites. But we know – and do not think I do not know – that there are more. There are absolutely more. The government’s pathetic attempt at an announcement today to avoid a serious vote on this bill is weaselling their way out. It is not proactive. It means that people will have to volunteer if they are a bikie gang member. The police might just have to show up and ask nicely. This is why this bill should be supported.

**Council divided on motion:**

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

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

**Motion negatived.**

*Motions*

**Electricity infrastructure**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:06): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West (VNI West) and West Link transmission lines are proposed to be built in Northern and Western Victoria by Transmission Company Victoria (TCV) and VicGrid;
  - (b) the significant community opposition to these high-voltage powerlines;
  - (c) the powerlines propose to cross valuable agricultural land which plays a significant role in Victoria’s agricultural production and agricultural exports;
  - (d) the Paris agreement, a legally binding international treaty adopted by 196 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015, states at article 2 that the agreement aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by ‘Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production’;
- (2) is of the view that:
  - (a) the consultation process by TCV and VicGrid has been inadequate;
  - (b) the impact of the proposed transmission lines on remnant vegetation at certain sensitive locations must be fully and transparently assessed; and
- (3) supports detailed independent examination and economic assessment of the impact of the proposed transmission lines on agricultural production, including on individual properties, prior to the granting of any permits or the signing of deals with landholders.

I and many others have had significant contact with the hundreds, indeed thousands, of people in country Victoria who are to be impacted by these high-voltage powerlines and the matters surrounding them. The concerns that people have raised are legitimate concerns. The concerns that have been raised by so many people relate to the future of their community and relate to the future of their property.

Victoria's biggest export is agricultural products, and indeed we heard today in the chamber and elsewhere one of our other export industries, education, is going to be hit by changes put in place by the federal government. The importance of agriculture cannot be overstated, either the direct export of agricultural products or the value-adding that often occurs with our agricultural products. The government would cover large swathes of Victoria with these high-voltage transmission lines and the renewable energy zones, and I will have more to say about those on future occasions, but on this occasion I am particularly interested in the high-voltage lines that have been proposed by government.

The government's behaviour through the Australian Energy Market Operator, the Transmission Company Victoria and VicGrid has been very, very ordinary indeed. Individuals have been bullied, individuals have been pressured and individuals have been treated very, very poorly indeed. I think the community is entitled to be angry. The community is entitled to be standing up and saying to the government, 'Whatever your proposal, it should be put in a way that's not going to damage our community and that's not going to damage the quality of our agricultural land.' This government has not given those guarantees and not gone about it in this way. They have gone about this in a high-handed way, imposing these changes. We saw the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 go through this Parliament recently with a whole swathe of new powers. It will give the government in Victoria and AEMO indeed additional powers to ride roughshod over local communities, over landholders, and to do so in a way where they can simply thumb their nose at what local communities want.

Mrs McArthur has been fighting very hard on this. Mr McCracken has been fighting very hard on this. Others in northern Victoria, Mrs Broad and others, have been fighting very hard on this as well, trying to make sure that their local communities have a fair say and that their local communities are in a position to advocate and to put forward their best proposals and best ways to resolve these issues. But the truth is the government is not listening. The minister is not listening. The government's agency, VicGrid, is not listening. The national agency, AEMO, is not listening. We know the impact that this is having on local communities. It is causing division in local communities, and the government is in the process of deciding what it is going to do, allegedly with consultation, but we know that the government is not listening to the community. The government is actually just pushing forward in a very unsatisfactory way.

I put on record my thanks to a number of the people in the north-west, coming from Jeffcott down south and further, that hosted me and Mrs McArthur the other day, particularly Marcia McIntyre but others as well who were generous enough to spend time with us to show us some of the issues that are developing. The intrusive nature of these large-scale wires is something to behold. These are very, very large. They will impact tourism, they will impact the property values of people in those areas and they will impact the ability to undertake a whole series of agricultural production techniques. We engaged closely with a number of landholders who pointed to very specific impacts that this will have on agricultural land. I will not get time to detail those today given the shortness of time, but I will use additional time on the next sitting day to actually make sure that I do get all of those agricultural impacts on the record and understood by the community.

There are fire risks. We went to the CFA and heard from CFA brigades about a number of issues that are there. We heard today in the chamber the minister deny that there is any prospect that a high-voltage line will cause a fire. Well, I am not convinced. When I read the evidence from the New South Wales inquiry it is clear that there is a substantial risk, and there is a legitimate debate between knowledgeable people about that risk. But where there is no doubt relates to the issue of firefighting. How on earth do you fight a fire under those wires? How do you take up water and drop it onto territory through some of these areas? There are significant impacts, and there are setbacks and requirements for firefighters to stay away from those high-voltage wires.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority***Report 2022–23*

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:15): I am speaking this evening on preserving Victoria's natural environment. It is something this government takes enormous pride in. We have ended native forest logging, we have some of the best conservation laws in the world and we are pursuing some of the most ambitious emissions reduction targets in the world. This government and its concerns for environmental welfare do not stop there. Organisations like the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority, or the MLRA, are a core part of this government's environmental protection tools.

Mining and, more specifically, declared mines which are deemed to pose a safety hazard to the surrounding environment have the capacity to cause significant long-term risks if not managed properly. This is where MLRA comes in. Their duties and functions cover mine operations and the long-term management of declared mining sites. This includes monitoring the three declared mines in Victoria, and – there is more – it includes managing the future of these sites once mining has ceased and it also covers the residual risk once the rehabilitation of an area occurs. These functions and powers are aimed at ensuring that Victorian mining sites that may pose a risk to environmental health are correctly maintained, do not result in contamination and are responsibly managed and rehabilitated. One of the considerations that we need to make is for the impact that the three brown coal mines, which are all relatively close to each other, have on the surrounding environment. Environmental impacts are not the only impacts that the MLRA look at, though. They look into and consider the socio-economic impact of mine rehabilitation. We need to take a multifaceted approach to the way we approach mine rehabilitation to ensure that the entire Latrobe Valley community and the surrounding environment are considered and protected.

We know this approach is especially important in the Latrobe Valley. Mining has been a core part of the local economy and also the local identity of the area. With the mines in the Latrobe Valley being so close together, the government has developed the *Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy*. The LVRRS, as it is known, aims to ensure an all-inclusive approach is taken to the mines and the local area, including water rights and consideration for farmers and townships. The MLRA has ensured the community has been more than up to date with the work that they are doing. They have been extensive in their community consultation along every step of the way. The MLRA used a range of different methods to communicate with local and interested parties as well as accepting feedback from members of the community. There were multiple open houses, environmental videos, mail-outs, radio interviews, news items and more. The MLRA even had multiple meetings with locals to answer questions and listen to their views on mining rehabilitation.

While I am talking about this, I have in an earlier contribution spoken about the enormous opportunities for the decommissioning of gas, and there are a range of professionals right across the country that work in mine rehabilitation. I think they too would find enormous opportunities here in Victoria not just for our decommissioning gas work but further for our work in decommissioning mines when those three mines do eventually come offline. I am excited to see the growth and regional jobs that may come from the opportunities contained in mine rehabilitation in our state.

This report, the one that I am speaking to this evening, details a concrete way that the Allan Labor government is caring for the Victorian environment in an extremely practical way, all while planning for the decommissioning of our ageing out coal mines. I look forward to seeing the good work the MLRA will continue to do in rehabilitating Victoria's stunning natural environment.

With the time that I have got left, I will just take a moment to acknowledge the Minerals Council of Australia, who I am sure will be a part of this work, having recently joined them for a mine rescue celebration with my colleague from the opposition Gaelle Broad. We had a wonderful evening



celebrating the enormous work of our emergency services personnel in the mining industry. I know that that will of course be part of the work as we continue to consider rehabilitation of mines in our state.

### **Department of Treasury and Finance**

#### *Budget papers 2024–25*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:20): I want to say something about mining and the importance of mining, and I refer to the budget papers and the outputs around resources and the state government's ideas about mining. I am particularly today pointing to the fact that we have a very significant layer at the federal level which is causing serious problems of regulation and of control. The states, frankly, should be running most of our mining decision-making, and we have had a bad government in Victoria that has put new taxes on goldmines and put up massive regulatory hurdles and controls which have made it difficult for miners.

I want to put on record today my concern about Tanya Plibersek's decision in New South Wales and the fact that this is a harbinger of trouble for our state and all of Australia. The decision at a mine near Blayney, near Orange in New South Wales, has cost 800 jobs. It has cost a billion dollars in mining activity. It has cost massive revenue for, in this case, the New South Wales government. Tanya Plibersek has made these decisions on the basis of secret Indigenous information supplied to her. Even some of the Indigenous land councils in the area have rejected some of these points that she has made. But she claims that the person who has told her this secret information has been persuasive, and she has used cultural heritage matters to kill this important mine. This is a stupid decision, it is an irreverent decision in many ways and it is a dangerous precedent for not just New South Wales but all of Australia.

Tanya Plibersek being in charge of these mining matters is a frightening outcome. The relevant act, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, is a very significant act with significant powers. The state government here should be pushing back on this and saying that we really need to draw some lines and draw some controls around these matters to make sure that projects are not nobbled by federal activities. We have already seen the federal government intervene in a number of projects in Victoria, but specifically this one in New South Wales in recent times is an absolute shocker. The EPBC act gives enormous power to the federal minister, but it is also the case that Tanya Plibersek is seeking even more powers. She is seeking to put in place a federal environment protection authority, which will become one of those bureaucracies that heads off on its own frolic, and I see really significant danger and damage that can occur from this new environment protection authority created at a national level, duplicative of state efforts and duplicative of the regulations. With every step that I see with Tanya Plibersek she seems to be asserting further Commonwealth control, asserting further regulatory input, and this equates to costs and a wind-back of the number of projects that will be successfully brought forward. That will cost Australia an enormous amount.

We have a very successful mining industry. We have a mining industry that is actually one of the biggest exporters, our biggest exporter in fact, Australia-wide – not in Victoria, and I make the point that in Victoria the state government has not been a friend of the mining industry. It has made it very difficult to get mining and other projects off the ground. But this intervention from Tanya Plibersek in New South Wales and her proposals for a federal environment protection authority frankly chill me, and they should chill anyone who wants to see our economy move forward and thrive. We need an economy where businesses and mining companies can go forward, where the appropriate checks and controls are in place and where these are clear, these are brought up-front and decisions are made in a timely way so that in the mining industry there is not uncertainty and insecurity. Our future depends on it. Our economy depends on it.

**Department of Treasury and Finance***Budget papers 2024–25*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:25): I rise today to speak on the budget papers of 2024–25 and indeed one of the most important parts of the budget, which is the education budget. Under this government of course we are the Education State, and we have seen incredible investment in building 100 new schools right across the state, with all of them to be opened by next year. I have spoken many times in this place about the impact that has in my community, and I note in particular the diligent work of our current Minister for Education Ben Carroll in his advocacy for Victorian school students and indeed –

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: you raised phonics, Mrs McArthur – his leadership on the issue of phonics and applying the best possible teaching methods so that our students get the best possible start. This is a government that is ensuring that our kids get the best possible start, and it is why I was so proud to see our education minister in Canberra last week standing up for Victorian students, indeed standing up with ministers from across the country – state education ministers from across the nation – and standing up for the full 25 per cent federal funding component that is being asked for. I note, and I will even pay credit where it is due, that we did under the previous federal government see the rate increase from 17 per cent to 20 per cent, and that was a very good step forward. We need 25 per cent, though, and the offer of 2.25 per cent, frankly, is not going to cut – it should not be 17, it should not be 20; it should be 25 per cent. As a member of the Legal and Social Issues Committee I, like others in this place, have heard repeatedly from stakeholders, from principals, from teachers and from parents just how important that full 25 per cent component is. That is why it is so good to see our education minister taking that case up to Canberra. The difference it would make would be absolutely transformational. Some data from the *Herald Sun* shows, for example, two schools in my electorate. Lysterfield Primary School under a 25 per cent funding formula would receive an additional \$517,000 of recurring funding. Rowville Secondary College, another terrific school, would receive an additional \$1.7 million in funding. Ben Carroll gets it – I think we get it in here – and it is time for Victorian students to get a fair shake.

There is of course another way to achieve this if we do not receive this funding component from the federal government. We also know, and I have spoken in the past about it, the ongoing impact of the rate of GST reimbursement that Victoria receives as a state. We are constantly helping to lift up other states and getting less than our fair share back of our GST revenue. We have seen again some very good improvements under this federal government. It is now 97 cents back in the dollar, as opposed to the 80-odd cents that it was previously, but it is still under what we are getting, especially when the Victorian state government has continued to invest in all sorts of areas, including things such as the priority primary care centres – that was done here and also in New South Wales – as well as the trial of the sick pay guarantee. Again we were making sure that Victorians were supported even if there was an absence of leadership at the federal level in both of those cases under the former federal government. So maybe we could have a conversation about our states all getting our fair share of tax revenue back. Maybe we could even look at, if the states are going to do all these services, getting some of the income tax as well. But there is a much simpler way to do it, and that is of course with the full 25 per cent.

I do want to conclude my remarks by making a brief remark too about another very important issue as it pertains to the Victorian budget and as it pertains to education, and that is the news we have seen in recent days of a proposed cap on the amount of international students that universities in our state can take. That is a very serious and very concerning measure, because international education is one of our state's most valuable, and one of our biggest, exports. It would be akin to going to tell WA that they have to cap the amount of mines that they can process in a year or the amount of mining that they can do. They would not tolerate that, and it is quite right as well that the Victorian government is

speaking up on behalf of this state and saying, ‘No, you cannot put that cap on those industries.’ Our education sector is thriving and dynamic. We are one of the world’s leading places for medical research, and our universities are a fundamental part of that. I join other colleagues from the Victorian government in calling on the federal government to support Victorian education.

### **Corella control**

#### *Petition*

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:30): I rise to speak about a petition that I was pleased to sponsor and put to the house yesterday about the destruction from a plague of corellas and the damage that is causing to the Bridgewater community. It had 497 signatures, and locals certainly put the word out about that petition. It was in the Bridgewater bakery. I was invited to visit Bridgewater, meet with local residents and learn more about the impact, and I can tell you it has had a huge impact on their community. If you can imagine thousands of corellas screeching every single day, day after day, you may get an insight into what it is like to live with a plague of destructive corellas on your doorstep.

I heard from local residents that are trying to build houses in the region, and they are being pulled apart by these birds. The new housing estate is at risk of delays and additional costs. People who purchased property and had not actually visited the region in recent times – they just had memories of it from their childhood and they made the investment – were shocked when they moved and found these destructive corellas there. I know that the stunning river gums along the banks of the Loddon have absolutely been decimated. The leaves have been removed. Every tree has been host to hundreds of corellas, tree by tree.

I spoke to a gentleman who works in Bridgewater and has a fan that goes every single day just to drown out the screeching noise that is there. We know that corellas have caused damage to the powerlines, to the lights in the street there – and the list goes on. The tourism industry there – we have got the beautiful Bridgewater Caravan Park – is at risk, because if tourists come to the region and there is constant screeching, they certainly do not want to return.

This is something that has been having a huge impact on the mental health of residents, and this is an area that has actually been devastated by floods in recent years as well. So it is very disappointing that they have had very little support to address this issue. We know corellas have been a problem there since 2011. The community tried to manage it themselves but made hardly any dent on the problem. We know from previous patterns that they will return; it is just a matter of time. Although they have left currently, they will certainly be back. We know that corellas have had a big impact on areas of Kilmore, places like Axedale. We know golf courses have been chewed up.

*The Victorian Corella Strategy 2022–2032* was released last year, and it is a bit disappointing when you look at it because it is not very clear what the approved methods are to actually manage them and how to help communities navigate this very difficult issue. Some of the methods that are talked about are a scaring program, corella-proofing infrastructure, relocating food sources, doing decoy food sources, putting screens around tennis courts or bowling greens and visual barriers – but these visual barriers certainly do not work when you are doing broadacre cropping. It is interesting to note the corella management grant program closed earlier this year, but it does not actually permit lethal control mechanisms; it says they will not be supported.

I am certainly keen. I know Martha Haylett, the local member there in Ripon, is aware of this issue, and I really appreciate the work that the local residents have done in trying to raise their concerns about this issue. They really rely on the state government’s support because this issue is far bigger than they can manage by themselves. I congratulate the local community for raising the matter.

*Petitions***Wonthaggi planning**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:35): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

While most of us were preparing for the holiday season last year, many residents in Wonthaggi were about to enter one of the most stressful periods of their life. Days before Christmas, on 21 December, the Minister for Planning signed off on a retrospective environmental audit overlay that covered hundreds of properties throughout Wonthaggi north-east precinct. It was only when residents accidentally found out about the retrospective EAO being applied to their titles that they realised the consequences of this ministerial decision. For months residents were left in the dark about what the decision meant, what effect it would have on the value of their property and how this sudden and retrospective governmental decision could be rectified. The local community galvanised quickly, and the Wonthaggi north-east residents action group was established to coordinate their response and activities. This was the result of a government who blanked its constituents in their darkest hour and at their time of greatest need.

At this stage I would like to thank its members Helen, Pru, Liam, John and Alan and acknowledge their incredible and selfless work. This committee organised rallies, lobbied their council and parliamentarians and started the very petition that we are here discussing today. While the EAO has now been removed from almost all of the affected properties, the fact is that the stress this community has gone through should never, ever have happened.

It is clear that if the community, led by the five people I mentioned earlier, had not created a movement, the government would not have acted. The fact is they only removed the EAO to save face. This is selfish Spring Street focused politics at its best. Making this decision even more galling is the fact that not one single property was found to have any historical contamination at all. This whole nightmare was completely unnecessary. The minister deliberately kept people in the dark. The Premier tried to pretend that this was a longstanding issue and nothing to do with her government at all, and the local member went missing in action. The entire government dragged their feet on resolving the issue until the local community pressure made it impossible for them to ignore.

I was first contacted about this issue in April, when residents started getting advice that there was an overlay placed on their property which was making it impossible to build, extend, develop or sell their land. The local council even recommended no gardening until the all clear had been given. I heard terrible stories from people who battled through these past months under enormous stress and uncertainty – families who were uncertain about what their future held, their homes and their value being their biggest asset. One resident wrote:

The imposition of this EAO has taken a toll on my health and well-being. Recently diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, the added stress from the EAO has made managing my condition even more challenging. When I purchased my land, I considered it to be one of my biggest achievements and was very proud to call myself a landowner, I now consider it to be the single worst decision of my life (at no fault of my own).

...

How can this happen in the midst of one of the worst housing crises in our state's history?

This is from a couple in their 60s who had bought what they thought would be their last home:

What should be a great time in our lives, we have had nothing but stress and anxiety since we heard of the EAO placed over our area. We cannot leave work now even when our house is finished as we do not know if we will get our Occupancy Certificate, therefore we still need to work to pay the loan, we are tired, run down and had enough. We cannot afford to pay for testing and just to add insult to injury, we received a \$1600 Land Tax Bill from the State Revenue Office! For what, we cannot do anything with our land atm and they want to also slug us Land Tax?

These are stories from real people who have been tormented by this government.

In closing, I have had many conversations with the local community around this issue. At the last meeting I asked them: what would you like to see to conclude this nightmare? They gave me three points: (1) they want the EAO removed from all existing land throughout the precinct, (2) they want acknowledgement that there are residents that are still taking medication and are still having counselling to deal with the stress and anxiety that this disaster has caused them and (3) they want this government to take responsibility and for the Premier to apologise for what they have been through. These requests would seem to be the very least that this government can do to rectify the damage and stress that they have caused.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:41): I want to start by acknowledging that there has been a lot of stress for residents throughout this process. There were those that were undergoing financing on their properties, those in the process of building, those looking to sell. As Dr Heath pointed out, there were those working on gardens – a variety of people at a variety of points along their path with their properties.

It has been a difficult time, but I think during this process local member Jordan Crugnale leaned in with residents and engaged the minister. The minister took briefings on a weekend, understanding the importance of the issue and the importance of getting on with dealing with the issue. Funding was made available to the council for the co-funding of preliminary risk screen assessments. Between the state government, the council, the EPA and the Victorian Planning Authority work was done to audit properties. As I said, it was a matter of urgency to go through and conduct those PRSAs and move through and clear properties to give owners and residents peace of mind about their properties going forward. I think it was really important to go through that process.

We heard calls of ‘A stroke of a pen to change an overlay’. But the point is that residents deserve certainty over their property, and we have done that work and been able to do that. I know sometimes perhaps it is a bit of a hangover from the Matthew Guy days – those in the opposition like to be able to strike a pen through planning and look at rezoning. But I hope there has been an understanding in the community of the work that has been done this year to work through those properties as a matter of urgency. We absolutely acknowledge the stress that many felt and faced with that uncertainty, but the funding has been put in, the work has been done and residents have been given certainty. I will leave my contribution there.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:44): I am pleased to rise to speak to the petition tabled on behalf of the community of the north-east precinct in Wonthaggi by my Liberal colleague Dr Renee Heath, and I thank her for her work in this department. You hear the phrase ‘Your home is your castle’. It is the very foundation of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs – to have a place of shelter, to have a place of privacy, to have a sanctuary free from intrusion and free from harm. These are the foundations of what it is to own a home.

At the end of last year, 2023, people had purchased homes. They had purchased lots to build homes. They were planning a future for their lives, for their castles, for their families or for their retirement – a whole range of issues – and they were going to live there and enjoy the wonderful place that is Bass Coast shire. When they looked at the section 32 of those properties, the land or homes, they looked at that with due diligence, and they found that there was no potential for land contamination due to farming activities on that section 32. So it was clear – they had done their due diligence and away they went. Move forward, as we have heard, a few months or a month into the summer period, and what do these people become? We see that they unknowingly become protagonists in the most nightmarish debacle not of their own making. Under the threat of an environmental overlay these people were thrown into chaos. There were approximately 600 homes and a couple of thousand people but still over 5000 blocks of land. And what happened because of this? They could not build. Their building was halted. They could not occupy their newly built homes. They could not access finance on these homes. If they were retirees, they could not redraw or build that equity in these homes. Who has a lazy \$80,000, the maximum that would be required to remediate works to clear an environmental audit requirement? Who has that money? They were in freefall about this government and what it did.

We have heard from my colleague that there was no communication, and indeed the government took five months to go in and to explain, 'Whoops, we've made a very big mistake.' On 2 May I raised it in the Parliament in this house, and I called on the Minister for Planning to find a solution: 'You have stuffed up monumentally. Find a solution.' My colleague Renee Heath, with members of that community, instigated a petition that has garnered over 2000 signatures. The government's response has been very tardy and dismissive. I have heard the complete opposite to what my colleague the Labor member over there Mr Tom McIntosh said about the local member. I have heard that people were frustrated and angry with the fact that the local member told residents, and I am quoting a local resident who sat and spoke with me: 'This is a storm in a teacup, and it will go away in time.' Well, let us look at what that teacup was: enormous financial stress. They could not sell their homes, they could not build their homes and they could not finish their homes. They could not even build a pergola or a garden shed. People were wondering, in relation to the contaminated land, should they let their kids go outside and play in the backyard? Could they put a stake in the ground to tie up a plant?

What we now see is that there was total incompetence between the Victorian Planning Authority, the Environment Protection Authority Victoria and this state government. People felt very aggrieved. As we have heard, and I concur entirely with the good residents that I have spoken to, they want an admission of wrongdoing, they want an apology and they want this overlay removed, period. There have been wonderful people who I have spoken with too, and some of them are Prudence, Helen, Ricky, Brian, Alliza, Paul, Brandi, and also I acknowledge the work of Mr Allan Brown. This is a shocking indictment of this government, and they should learn this lesson and apologise to the community of Wonthaggi.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:49): I rise to support Dr Heath's petition. I would say that this local member – I have never heard of this person who is the local member, obviously totally irrelevant – has failed the people of Bass, and this government has completely failed the people of Wonthaggi and the people of Bass. When the Minister for Planning approved the Wonthaggi planning amendment last year she exempted herself from providing notice to any of the affected residents. Really? What was that about – a conflict of interest, no less? She needs to fess up.

The only information released was a reference to the decision about the planning amendment in the *Government Gazette* and a press release from the Victorian Planning Authority on 18 January. However, both of these failed to mention the environment audit overlay. This government made no effort at all to let people know what was happening, and this lack of information just made the situation worse for many. On top of that, this government tried to avoid any responsibility. No surprise there – that is what they do all the time. This Labor mob are always trying to avoid responsibility and accountability. When the Premier was asked about this overlay in Parliament, she referred to it as:

... a planning issue that has been an issue for the Bass Coast community for a number of years now.

This was not the case, and I am proud that the Liberal and National parties stood up for the residents of Wonthaggi, especially their local upper house member Dr Renee Heath. At a rally in Wonthaggi the Leader of the Opposition, no less, committed to overturning the overlay. He said:

A future Liberal and Nationals Government ... will not let Labor's planning overlay stand.

We will rip it up. Labor has callously attacked the homes of Wonthaggi residents and we will fix it.

I am sure government speakers on the other side will stand up today, as Mr McIntosh did, and pat themselves on the back for belatedly addressing this cruel and unnecessary torture they have put the community through. The people who deserve the credit are the local community, and I congratulate them for the way they pulled together to create the enormous response we are debating today. This government needs to take note. And that local member, whoever she is – I have never heard of her, as I said before – clearly failed, totally failed the people of Wonthaggi and the people of Bass. She will not be there come the next election, that is for sure. This will kill her off.

We need to congratulate their local MPs, as I have said, Dr Heath and Ms Bath for standing up for the people of Wonthaggi. If Labor fails them continually, at least we have some people that stand up for them – Dr Heath and Ms Bath. They stand up for the people of Wonthaggi and the people of Bass. You lot totally failed them at every opportunity. You put them under stress and strain, as Dr Heath has told us. They are still suffering the mental anguish from what you have put them through. How do you do this to people? You do it all the time. You are forever riding roughshod over every community, every individual. It is outrageous. Anyway, you will get your comeuppance at the next election. People have had enough of all this shocking riding roughshod over everybody.

**Michael Galea** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You will be lucky if you are still there, Mr Galea. And Enver – you are failing all those prisoners as well, Mr Erdogan. Anyway, congratulations to Dr Heath and to Ms Bath for bringing this to our attention and for those wonderful people of Wonthaggi in that electorate of Bass, where they have been totally misrepresented by their local member – as I said, I have never heard of her – and this Labor government, who have failed them considerably. So well done to the people of Wonthaggi and the people of Bass and their local Liberal and National members. Without them, they would have been down the gurgler totally.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:54): First of all, I would like to thank Ms Bath for her incredible contribution and also for championing this issue in the local community, and Mrs McArthur for her words there – thank you so much. I will come to Mr McIntosh shortly. While this house considers so many significant issues, for the people in Wonthaggi there will be no issue that is more important than this one. This issue has occupied their every thought. The whole fiasco was created by that government, and it was managed appallingly by the government.

First, no notice was given or provided to the people of Wonthaggi, the community or its residents. There was no consideration for what impact the environmental audit overlay would have on them, their mental health, their families or their properties. Next, the government denied the matter was caused by them and refused to take action, and we saw that again today. It is disgusting. And they were dragged kicking and screaming to finally take steps to rectify this situation. Lastly, the government have tried to claim credit for returning things to the status quo after they finally acted on the very situation that they caused – and, no less, they put the community through a whole lot of pain to get there in the first place.

A couple of comments I would like to say on Mr McIntosh's contribution: I am glad that he finally acknowledged the stress, but to turn it around and to politicise it and use it as an example to take a cheap shot at Matthew Guy, of all people, is just a disgusting disregard of what this government put people through, and he should be ashamed of himself. Secondly, to talk about the government's response – and by the way, where is Jordan Crugnale? If she cared that much, she could have come and she could have sat in the gallery and listened to the pain that she has put her residents through. Where is the Minister for Planning? If they really cared, they would be here. I just want to say you cannot put yourself on the back for giving certainty when that is what you have ripped away.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Adjournment*

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:56): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Housing affordability**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:56): (1086) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing. My constituent Emily Ross is a mother of five children, and she has four weeks to find a home – another home – as her private rental is being sold off and she has been issued with a notice to

vacate. She is desperately trying to find another residence and has approached every real estate agent in the Latrobe Valley, wanting to keep her family near friends and family, and she has approached every housing provider as well. She is on the waiting list for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing apparently, in the Gippsland section, and she has approached Community Housing and Quantum housing for assistance but with no success. Despite having a very good payment record and paying her rent on time, she has a very low income, and Emily is being overlooked in the private rental market due to incredibly high competition. In a cost-of-living crisis Emily is frantically trying to save her children from going onto the streets.

We know from the Council to Homeless Persons chief executive Deborah Di Natale that data shows that Victoria is desperately behind the rest of the country in terms of public and community housing. We are the worst in the nation, and that is no comfort to Emily and her five children. It is the lowest, and this minister has been a few years in this role and this government has been in for almost 10 years. Time after time we hear the minister get up and spring forth with a whole lot of platitudes about what this government is doing for social and affordable housing. Well, 10 years in power and we are the bottom of the ranks for social and affordable housing. This is not good enough. Can you imagine the desperation of this mother, this beautiful mother who has friends and family in the Latrobe Valley, who is desperate to put a roof over her head? The action I seek from the minister is to actually intervene in this case and ensure Emily and her five children do not become homeless and are not turfed onto the streets.

### Sexual offences

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:59): (1087) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General.

The Victorian Government should provide funding for people who wish to bring civil proceedings against a non-institutional defendant (or defendants) for sexual assault where:

- a. their case raises important systemic or legal issues, or
- b. they face multiple barriers to justice and their case has reasonable prospects of success.

This was recommendation 41 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2021 report *Improving the Justice System Response to Sexual Offences*. Civil litigation can provide an alternative to criminal justice where someone does not want to report sexual violence to police, where the police or the Director of Public Prosecutions decides not to prosecute or where a criminal trial occurs but the accused is found not guilty. We know that these experiences are common, and when it comes to reporting sexual assaults, survivors are understandably reluctant. They see it in the news and they hear it from their friends: survivors go through hell and back even to get into court, and when they do, they are often judged, ridiculed and left with nothing. With a lower standard of proof, civil litigation means a survivor is more likely to be successful. It can also help a survivor to receive damages, an acknowledgement of the violence and its impacts and a sense of closure. Beyond this it allows us to send a message that sexual violence has serious consequences and that survivors will get the justice they deserve.

Notwithstanding these benefits, civil litigation for sexual assault does have drawbacks. It is not funded by Victoria Legal Aid and can be costly, lengthy and retraumatising. Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ communities are more likely to experience sexual violence and are also more likely to experience barriers to accessing justice. This is why the Victorian Law Reform Commission's recommendation is so essential, but to date this government has failed to respond to this recommendation. So I ask: will the Attorney-General agree to recommendation 41 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's report and ensure access to justice for survivors of sexual assault?

### Broadmeadows Road–Johnstone Street, Westmeadows

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:01): (1088) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns a dangerous intersection on the corner of



Johnstone Street and Broadmeadows Road in Westmeadows. It is something that many locals raised with me in Westmeadows when I was out doorknocking and listening to people. In Westmeadows many raised with me the narrow and difficult turn on Johnstone Street onto Broadmeadows Road, especially during rush hours. The tight corner does create congestion and puts motorists in unnecessary danger as they merge into a 70-kilometre lane on Broadmeadows Road. The fast-moving traffic exacerbates the already dangerous intersection, which, combined with the congestion, is a car accident waiting to happen.

Residents have long been calling for this intersection to be converted into a traffic-controlled junction, which has not happened due to a lack of funding. Despite the necessity and clear hazards of the intersection, Hume City Council actually missed out on black spot funding for this intersection. This deeply concerns me as it is quite a high-risk intersection. You have got a sharp turn, and it is clear that this high-risk area has been overlooked, just like the electorate of Greenvale has been overlooked time and time again when it comes to both black spot funding and funding in general, when the government is spending \$216 billion on a vanity project, the Suburban Rail Loop, in the eastern suburbs.

We see it time and time again – the growth areas miss out. Where there is the most need – where the government is cramming in new housing after new housing in areas – they are not making the capacity and planning for the capacity for growth, particularly when you have got dangerous intersections. I have heard stories about pedestrian near misses at that intersection in Westmeadows and near misses with some incidents involving cars. It is a clear danger for the area. Something needs to be done about it. So I seek the action of the minister to improve the safety of road users at Johnstone Street and Broadmeadows Road, to signalise that intersection. I also seek the action of the minister to come out with me to the intersection so that I can actually show the minister how dangerous it is, particularly at peak hour. Perhaps then we will get some improvement and perhaps then this government will actually look after the needs of growth areas in the northern suburbs.

### **LGBTIQA+ community**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:04): (1089) My adjournment tonight is to the Premier, and the action that I seek is that you advocate to your federal colleagues and implore them to change their position on the census topics for 2026 to ensure that all LGBTIQA+ Australians can be counted. We have all heard the saying ‘Nothing about us without us.’ The 2026 census is the opportunity for the government to finally hear from the LGBTIQA+ community – to know who we are, to know how we live and then to make decisions and policies to benefit our communities. It is supposed to take a snapshot of the whole Australian community, and it is an absolute joke that Labor has betrayed LGBTIQA+ folk by backtracking, refusing to update the next census despite it being part of Labor’s own national platform, agreed to just last year.

After a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission from someone whose family could not be accurately recorded in the last census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics considered including topics on gender identity, sexuality and variations of sex characteristics. Well, none of that is happening now. How can decisions possibly be made regarding health care, social services, education or economic inclusion that specifically affect LGBTIQA+ people if we are not counted? To quote Nicky Bath from LGBTIQ+ Health Australia:

... people think the census is just about counting all of us when in fact the data from the census is what is responsible for assisting in planning, looking at financial investment, looking at where hospitals are built, where schools are built et cetera. We have incredible health disparities, and we need to know where we are living.

Labor’s refusal to include my community is a slap in the face. It feels like Labor cares more about appeasing Sky News than helping the LGBTIQA+ community. This is not even the first time that Labor have betrayed us or ignored their own platform. I mean, how does the saying go: when you stand for nothing, you will fall for any headline written by the Murdoch press. Premier, please take

this up with your federal Labor colleagues and make sure that the LGBTIQ+ community is seen and counted in the census.

### **Anam Cara House, Geelong**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:07): (1090) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to Anam Cara House in Geelong. It is a place that I have spoken about in this place previously. It is a tremendous facility. As we all know, the pressure on the public health system continues in Geelong especially. We have had some significant issues around ambulance ramping, which occurs on a regular basis, and at times there are just no ambulances available for that community. As I said, I have spoken about Anam Cara as a magnificent palliative care facility that serves the Geelong community very well. On 17 August the *Geelong Advertiser*, however, reported that Anam Cara House had offered solutions to assist Barwon Health by opening beds for public patients. Often these palliative care patients are ending up in the Barwon Health emergency department and cannot be cared for and assisted properly.

Anam Cara Geelong has the capacity to admit Barwon Health patients diagnosed with a life-limiting illness to ease the load – if it is funded to do so. And that is the problem here. The first solution is to refer Barwon Health patients diagnosed with a life-limiting illness with private health insurance to Anam Cara Geelong. The second solution is for just \$2 million of Barwon Health’s funding to be reallocated to Anam Cara, which will enable four public beds to be open 24/7, including weekend admissions, for a year. Anam Cara chair Diana Taylor told the *Geelong Advertiser*:

We have the space and capacity to do more and we want to support Barwon Health and our community.

The Allan Labor government has continued to reject Anam Cara Geelong’s submission for \$2 million per year to open up these public beds for patients with a life-limiting illness. Anyone who knows someone or has had someone dear to them who is in palliative care understands the enormous support that these facilities provide – and those doctors and nurses that provide the care. It is critical at this time that they be supported. What this \$2 million will do is support those patients very ably. It will provide access to exemplary palliative care and support their families in a state-of-the-art facility with 24/7 medical coverage.

The action I seek, therefore, is for the government to reconsider the offer presented by Anam Cara House for this funding so that they can open up access to much-needed beds and in doing so ease the immense pressure on the public system in Geelong and the surrounding areas. As a result, the ambulance ramping for these patients that are going to Barwon Health because there is nowhere else to go to get pain relief or palliative care will also be eased. I urge the government to reconsider this and provide the \$2 million to open up those four beds in Anam Cara House immediately.

### **Land Forces International Land Defence Exposition**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:10): (1091) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Police to ensure that Victoria Police adhere to their obligations under the Victorian charter of human rights when policing protests expected at the Land Forces expo being held in Melbourne from 11 to 13 September 2024. Let us call the Land Forces expo for what it is: an arms fair – a massive event selling weapons. The protesters expected to attend are part of a centuries-long tradition calling for peace and disarmament – calling for governments to stop the trade in weapons and in doing so not facilitate the trade in human death and suffering that is caused by those weapons. We know that this is a large event selling weapons, we know that there is going to be a large protest outside this event and we know that Victoria Police will be the ones policing this event and policing the protesters, so it is timely to consider the obligations of those doing the policing.

Police services must respect and protect the right to protest for all without discrimination. They must not use indiscriminate policing tactics like mass arrests or use of pepper spray except when strictly necessary and proportionate. Police officers are obliged to de-escalate all situations that might result in violence and exhaust all nonviolent means, including giving prior warning before resorting to the

use of force. Any use of force by police must comply with fundamental obligations: it must be legal, necessary and proportionate; use precautions; be non-discriminatory; and be the minimum force required to achieve a legitimate purpose. Use of force includes the use of weapons like OC or pepper spray, and an officer must be accountable for each use of force. Uniformed police officers should always display easily recognisable identification.

Importantly, it is a time for us to all recognise in this place that civil disruption is not violence. International human rights law protects disruptive protests provided they remain peaceful, and temporary disruption should not be used as an excuse to deny protection to protesters. Simply blocking or disrupting traffic or pedestrians does not amount to violence at law. Police must treat measures like street closures or redirecting traffic as necessary tools to protect people participating in protests and not use it as an excuse to limit or disperse a peaceful protest. This includes an obligation to protect protesters that use peaceful collective disobedience and peaceful direct action tactics.

The action I seek is for the Minister for Police to uphold our community's charter rights by ensuring that Victoria Police facilitate citizens' rights to protest, peaceful assembly, association and expression.

### **Wild dog control**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:13): (1092) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment. In September 2023 the Victorian government ordered an extension of the wild dog control program for only 12 months, and that extension ends on 1 October 2024, five weeks away. The action that I seek is for the minister to extend the current wild dog control program for at least another five years or preferably indefinitely. The control of wild dogs is crucial to prevent them attacking, maiming and killing the livestock of Victorian farmers. The control program includes a livestock protection buffer in north-east Victoria, which gives the state's wild dog controllers the authority to bait and trap wild dogs on public land within a 3-kilometre radius of private farm fences. It was put in place in 2012 with great success. A decade ago trappers would catch 120 feral dogs a year, but now the number rarely tops 30. That low number does not mean the program is no longer needed; it means the program is working, and if the program stops, wild dog numbers and wild dog attacks on livestock will return to the much higher levels of previous decades.

Those who lived through the torment of the time before the buffer zone told me and my colleague the member for Benambra about herds decimated and animals left half eaten. They have told us about the toll on their mental health. They have told us about the impact on native animals as well as livestock, because wild dogs also prey on native species like possums, bandicoots and quolls. The 12-month extension was an interim measure to allow a comprehensive assessment of the dingo population across Victoria, but the government has done no significant consultation with farmers and has relied on a small study with an unrepresentative sample to infer dingo populations. This is not a sufficient evidence base on which to end the wild dog control program.

On 6 August this year the Minister for Agriculture met with representatives from the North East Wild Dog Action Group, the member for Benambra and members of the Duduroa Dhargal Aboriginal Corporation, but the decision does not lie with the agriculture minister; it lies with the Minister for Environment, who has not met with farmers or stakeholders in the region. The extension ends on 1 October, only five weeks away, and as the deadline gets closer without any consultation or communication from the responsible minister there is growing angst and worry amongst my constituents. The continuation of the program is crucial for the safety of native animals and livestock and for the people who live and work on land that borders on the dogs' habitat. The traditional owners have written to the Minister for Environment in support of the wild dog control program continuing as it is currently run. I urge the minister to listen to these petitioners, to farmers and to the traditional owners.

### Animal welfare

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:16): (1093) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for MD Foods in Echuca to have their licence removed following yet more evidence of extreme animal cruelty. Hidden camera footage from the Farm Transparency Project has for the third time caught workers at this abattoir abusing goats and sheep before they are finally slaughtered. Animals in the footage are shown being beaten, thrown and dragged across a kill room floor to endure multiple attempts at stunning before their throats are slit while still fully conscious. Even after this point, sheep can be seen blinking, lifting their heads and struggling on the shackle line while continuing to show signs of life. Other animals are pinned to the ground by gate machinery, where they become squashed and panicked in the cramped space.

The footage is difficult to watch, and yet it is not at all uncommon: the Farm Transparency Project have shown the public what the industry refuses to disclose at 18 different abattoirs in less than two years. Each time the story is the same, but animal cruelty at slaughterhouses is still always dismissed. Each time footage is captured the government repeats the same standard response about following the correct channels of reporting, but there is rarely if ever at all an outcome. This slaughterhouse was reported first in 2013, again in 2016 and now again this year. It has been reported again to state and federal departments, the environmental protection agency and PrimeSafe for the exact same reasons. All that has happened following numerous complaints is a name change. In 2021 what was then known as Riverside Meats reopened as MD Foods, as we know it today. It is almost as though the operators know they can continue harming animals without any consequences at all. The disturbing nature of these breaches calls for immediate suspension of MD Foods' operating licence while a comprehensive investigation takes place. I hope the minister can finally take action to end this cruelty.

### Child protection

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:18): (1094) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Children, and the action I seek is to end the crisis unfolding in Victoria's foster care system, with better financial incentives for functional families and relatives, and parents indeed as well, to support children in need and support for the parents who desperately want to help and keep their kids at home. Victoria currently boasts the lowest foster carer allowance for children aged zero to seven in Australia. At this rate we are losing carers at an alarming rate and hundreds of households a year. It translates to some children under 12 being placed in impersonal group homes; in fact I have heard in my own electorate of children being placed in hotels. It includes astronomical costs, ranging from \$561,246 to a staggering \$1.1 million per child. Now, these are children that are in need. They are vulnerable, yet the government is focusing on wasting more money on more projects that it cannot afford.

A recent report funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing reveals the immense economic value of foster care in Victoria: a whopping \$533 million in 2021–22, far exceeding current government funding. The national inflation rate is 3.6, yet Victorian foster care allowances have not been indexed since 2016. This means carers are effectively receiving a pay cut yearly, making it increasingly difficult to provide for the vulnerable children entrusted into their care and also at times meaning that very good foster carers cannot actually volunteer for the job. The system is in freefall. The figures show that our most in-need children are not experiencing the stability and love of a family environment. A 2011 figure of 37 per cent of children in out-of-home care being placed in foster care plummeted to a mere 18 per cent in 2020. Children are missing out on a crucial element of their development.

Foster carers in Victoria have repeatedly called on the government to help. They have even provided petitions to the Department of Treasury and Finance as well as the minister, but nothing has happened to fix the problem. The Victorian government must (1) index foster carer allowances to inflation to ensure they can afford to care for children properly, (2) invest in recruitment and retention programs to attract and keep dedicated carers and (3) prioritise foster care as a cost-effective and nurturing

solution for vulnerable children. The government must act with urgency to ensure every child in Victoria has a safe and loving home environment. Our most vulnerable children are being impacted through the failure of the Allan Labor government's ability to manage our finances effectively.

### **Myki ticketing system**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:21): (1095) My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport in the other place. In May 2023 the then public transport minister announced changes to the Myki system, which included introducing the system to regional stations such as Swan Hill, Echuca, Albury – noting that Albury is listed on our V/Line system – and Shepparton in my electorate of Northern Victoria. These were supposed to commence in 2024. Currently travellers on these lines must obtain a paper ticket from the ticket office at the station. This is inconvenient and can be frustrating if tickets are lost, misplaced or damaged. The action I seek from the minister is for northern Victorians to be updated on when these Myki changes will be implemented at regional stations.

### **Energy policy**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:22): (1096) My matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place, and it concerns the recently released so-called *Cheaper, Cleaner, Renewable: Our Plan for Victoria's Electricity Future* document released just about a week or so ago. Of course the plan is nothing of the sort. The plan is a thin, vacuous document that cobbles together aspects from previous announcements, but there is no coherent plan here for the future. In fact there is no sense of urgency in it, given the state faces a really very challenging future which may see our gas supplies run out and our gas supplies short as early as next year. The minister does not appear to have understood that she has got to get off her tail and get moving. We actually need exploration to bring forward gas to make sure that our industries are not clobbered. We need to make sure that choice remains a significant part of our system. Even the federal Labor government admits that choice should be a critical aspect of people's energy choices and businesses' energy choices as well, but none of this comes through in the document.

What I am seeking for the minister to do today is to revisit all of this, look at the federal government's documents and understand the urgency of the position the state is in. We have already seen businesses start to leave the state. The prices of gas have surged. The prices of electricity have surged. The government promised and the federal government also promised lower electricity prices, yet we have got a government that has allowed these huge surges in price to occur. One of the reasons gas prices have gone up is because there has been no new supply. There has not been a single permit given to a company to explore in Victoria since 2013. That is 11 years ago, a drought of exploration. We know there is gas onshore, conventional gas that is available to be got, and they have got to get on and get it. So we need the minister for energy, who is also the minister for resources, to convene some sort of high-level taskforce that brings in the gas industry, brings in the energy industry more broadly and actually starts to find some solutions. She is on her ideological frolic over here with the war on gas and closing off gas but at the same time not bringing forward the supply and actually pushing people to use more brown coal generated electricity, which is high in emissions. So take urgent action, convene a taskforce, reverse the pattern that she has got in place – *(Time expired)*

### **Commonwealth Games**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (18:25): (1097) My adjournment matter is for the Premier regarding the current situation with the promised Commonwealth Games legacy projects in the Premier's own electorate of Bendigo East. To refresh the memory of the house, the Premier is also the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery. The Commonwealth Games were due to be delivered in 2026, highlighting Victoria's regional cities. As members will recall, the much-hyped games were cancelled on 18 July 2023, well over 12 months ago. The government had allocated \$2.6 billion to deliver the games. Nearly \$600 million of taxpayer funds were wasted along with the irreparable damage to Victoria's international reputation.

Regional communities, sporting groups, businesses, tourism groups and schools were left devastated at the loss of the games and the promised benefit to the local communities. Instead, they were promised a range of legacy projects focusing on sporting infrastructure and housing. Regional communities including Bendigo are still waiting to see any concrete outcomes from these promises. In Bendigo promised projects included an expansion of the Bendigo stadium, along with upgrades to the lighting of the outdoor netball courts, new solar panels, improvements to accessibility and the car park; four refurbished bowling greens and an upgrade to the clubhouse at the historic Bendigo Bowls Club; two refurbished croquet courts at the Bendigo Croquet Club; an upgrade of the Bendigo showgrounds, including a new pavilion, redevelopment of the arena and upgrades to fencing and entrances; and a major social housing project in Osborne Street in Flora Hill. I understand that some of the sporting groups are currently working with the City of Greater Bendigo in a bid to have these projects completed; however, some expect the construction will not start for about 12 months. This is despite the government's own website assuring us that construction on these projects is set to begin in mid-2024.

Transparency is vitally important when it comes to government, because taxpayers deserve to see how their money is being spent. The action I seek is that the Premier provide a detailed overview of each of the Bendigo projects and their current status, along with details of the budget allocations to cover them, plans and timelines for completion. After all that has happened I ask the Premier to provide the community with some clear and concrete answers on this very important issue.

#### Corrections system

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:28): (1098) My adjournment is for the Minister for Corrections, and the action that I seek is that the minister rectify the disgraceful COVID consequence and remove the emergency management days (EMD) credited to violent and high-risk offenders during the COVID state of emergency. These emergency management days were originally meant for extreme examples where prisoners were denied their normal entitlements. However, because COVID was declared an emergency, prisoners are now getting hundreds of days off their sentences, some more than a year. This is the case for the family of Katie Haley, who learned that her killer will now receive 427 days off his sentence and now will be released earlier than his original non-parole period.

The government was warned about this exact scenario by the opposition when it enacted the COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) Bill 2020, and despite the Leader of the Government and now Attorney-General saying 'emergency management days are not a right', these EMDs were automatically provided to prisoners during COVID instead of the usual practice of prisoners having to apply for them. Now that some of Victoria's worst and most violent criminals are getting a year or more off their sentences, something needs to be done. Victims and their families are suffering very badly because of this.

In 2021 the federal Parliament passed legislation to retrospectively remove EMDs and their eligibility for federal prisoners in Victorian prisons. While I do not normally agree with retrospective legislation, I refer to the comments by the federal member for Isaacs and now Attorney-General, who stated on removing EMDs for federal prisoners in Victorian prisons that:

... we do not think those concerns outweigh ... the interests of community safety.

Minister, I am asking you to urgently review this legislation and give these families some peace.

#### Schools funding

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:30): (1099) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. In 2014 then opposition leader Andrews pledged that if elected Victorian number plates would bear the slogan 'Victoria – The Education State'. The press release said that:

Under Labor, education will be more than just a word – it will be a rock solid foundation for our economic future.

But under Labor education is not a solid foundation of our economic future. Schools across my electorate, particularly in Glen Waverley, are being told that the state has no money and that schools will not get critical updates, upgrades and necessary repairs. At Camelot Rise Primary School in my electorate, in Glen Waverley, unit D floors are unsafely uneven. Last year an air conditioning unit fell through the ceiling onto the floor of a classroom with children in it due to repeated water leaks and plumbing issues. In unit B, if the air conditioners or heaters are turned on at all, teachers and students cannot hear each other. Toilets at the school are falling into disrepair. The oval is reminiscent of the Somme, it is missing a goalpost and it is of too poor quality to even host the school carnival. The lack of infrastructure investment is an indictment of this government and the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) for their lacklustre efforts across Glen Waverley. Labor are failing our children.

John Pesutto and I had the pleasure of visiting Glen Waverley Primary School last week, where again the school facilities were past their use-by date. Many of the classrooms are too small, they use a corridor as an improvised library and the school had to pay for its own STEM room. In 2014 we – the Liberals – promised to entirely rebuild the school, but this was not matched by the Labor Party, and the children of Glen Waverley Primary School have been left behind in substandard facilities. Labor cannot manage money, and Victorians and schoolchildren are paying the price. The action I seek from the minister is to urgently review the infrastructure funding to schools – public and independent – across Glen Waverley and review the performance of the VSBA, which seems to act more as a middleman taking a cut than as an enabler of improved facilities, and ensure that our local schools are made fit for purpose.

#### **Victorian public service enterprise bargaining agreement**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:33): (1100) My adjournment is for the Minister for Women, and it concerns the Victorian public service enterprise agreement which came into force last week. It is an extraordinary document and also an incredibly expensive one. Few pieces of paper, even in Labor's Victoria, will end up costing us more, and it says a lot about the government which signed it. Specifically, it reveals their political weakness – their factional debts, their economic recklessness and their ideological obsessions. This year's budget showed public sector wages more than doubling since Labor assumed office. In just 10 years they blew out from \$18.8 billion to \$36.5 billion. This agreement will make it worse, with four guaranteed 3 per cent pay rises, the first even backdated to May, just five months after the last salary increase in the 2020 agreement.

Then there is the cost-of-living payment for everyone: \$5600. For an average employee, that is more 7 per cent this year. What about the cost of living for non-government employees? Not only will they miss out on this \$5600, but they will have to pay for it themselves through taxes. Another gem is the mobility payment. This annual payment ranges from \$700 to \$3400 in recognition that job specs may sometimes change. That is just reality for everyone else – normal everyday life – but here the Victorian government is paying all its employees a sizeable allowance just to compensate for the possibility that something might one day happen. Aside from pure cash there are the usual sops to unions – paying union staff and encouraging membership at every opportunity.

But I want to end with something different: a shocking ideological decision. Clause 65 grants staff four weeks paid gender affirmation leave – four weeks – yet reproductive health and wellbeing leave available to women is just five days. The agreement contains 27 types of leave but can only find five days for women's health problems – five days versus four weeks. There are five days per year for conditions associated with periods, or – not 'and' – five days for the menopause, which can cause complications which last years, yet four weeks every year for gender affirmation leave. Minister, the action I seek from you is an immediate intervention to address this deplorable mismatch, which is insulting to all Victorians and a stain on our state.

#### **Responses**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (18:36): There were 15 matters raised today. I might before addressing

some of these just respond a little bit to Dr Heath and then give her a more substantive answer in writing, as per the orders. I just want to express my deep sympathies to the Haley family. I know the way that emergency management days were applied during the COVID pandemic – a once-in-a-century pandemic, I may add – have caused great distress for a number of victims in our state. It is a matter that I am looking at closely, but I will provide a more comprehensive response in writing, Dr Heath.

On that note I might just go over some of the other matters raised: Ms Bath to the Minister for Housing, Ms Payne to the Attorney-General, Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Mr Puglielli to the Premier, Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health, Ms Copsey to the Minister for Police, Ms Lovell to the Minister for Environment, Ms Purcell to the Minister for Agriculture, Mrs Hermans to the Minister for Children, Mrs Tyrrell to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, Mr Davis to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Mrs Broad to the Premier, Mr Welch to the Minister for Education and Mrs McArthur to the Minister for Women. I will make sure that all those matters raised are referred to relevant ministers, and I will provide a written response to Dr Heath.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 6:37 pm.**