



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Thursday 7 March 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 ¹	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 ²	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 ³	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
			Welch, Richard ⁴	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² Lib until 27 March 2023

³ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁴ 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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Thursday 7 March 2024

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

*Committees***Parliamentary committees***Membership*

The PRESIDENT (09:35): I advise the house that I have received a letter from Kim O’Keeffe, the member for Shepparton, resigning from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee effective 6 March 2024. I further advise the house I have received a letter from Ellen Sandell, the member for Melbourne, resigning from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee effective 6 March 2024.

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

Auditor-General – Results of 2022–23 Audits: Local Government, March 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

Building Act 1993 – Cladding Rectification Levy Review Report, December 2023, under section 205LO of the Act.

Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 – Cladding Safety Victoria Act 2020 Review Report, December 2023, under section 45 of the Act.

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Return submitted by a Member of the Legislative Council – Primary Return, 4 March 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.****Adjournment**

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (09:48): I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday 19 March 2024.

Motion agreed to.*Committees***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee***Membership*

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That Aiv Puglielli be a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee*Membership*

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That Gaelle Broad be a member of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee.

Motion agreed to.

*Motions***Middle East conflict**

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since the Council's resolution on 17 October 2023, which stated this house 'stands with Israel', over 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed at the hands of Israeli defence forces;
- (2) further notes the increasingly desperate calls from healthcare workers in Gaza about the collapsing health system and resulting humanitarian crisis; and
- (3) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza.

Leave refused.

*Members statements***Western Victoria fires**

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (09:50): The community spirit and resilience of western Victorians is something I am so very proud of, and I am absolutely proud of what I have seen throughout February and March as we faced extreme weather and tackled the devastating impacts of fires. We have seen the best sides of humanity, with everyone focused on ensuring that lives were protected. I would like to pay tribute to all of our volunteers from the CFA and the SES and everyone who volunteered to ensure the evacuation centres were ready to provide support and relief. What was equally profound was the influx of volunteers from across the state and the country. All hands were on deck as Forest Fire Management Victoria, along with the CFA crews, set up base camp at Victoria Park at Ballarat, and it was set up in record time to support 300 fire crews who travelled from far afield to protect our communities. This was extraordinary work in extraordinary times, and I am so grateful for all of it. I know every shire in the region was on high alert to protect and support their communities, but I would like to really acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of the Pyrenees shire, the Ararat Rural City Council, Golden Plains shire, Southern Grampians shire and of course the City of Ballarat, who I know work tirelessly to protect their communities. Everyone was and is remarkable, and I can assure my electorate that I recognise the devastation that we have faced and continue to face. I am here to say that I will work with you to ensure that Western Victoria not only rebuilds but also thrives into the future.

Government accountability

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): Yesterday it was brought to this chamber's attention that I am inexperienced, and perhaps the way I phrased a question was reflective of that inexperience. The fact is: yes, I am. But sometimes fresh eyes are useful. Something I observed yesterday was the fact that it was somehow implied that it is inappropriate to ask questions about the appointment of a senior public servant who is receiving serious delegated ministerial powers. We had the Minister for Housing saying she is not responsible for a cornerstone housing policy, and we had the Minister for Skills and TAFE unable to answer a basic question about the staffing of their department. We do have a lot of theatrics in this house, but what is serious is the accountability of the government for its policy and its delivery. Our role and our obligation, equally, is to bring that accountability to the floor.

Greyhound racing

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (09:53): It was with great pleasure that I met with Greyhound Racing Victoria chair Peita Duncan and CEO Stuart Laing at the Shepparton Greyhound Racing Club last week to learn more about the industry and the work of the GRV on the welfare of Victoria's racing greyhounds. Joining us was Shepparton Greyhound Racing Club general manager Carl McGrath, who provided an insight into the workings of the club and its importance to the Goulburn Valley community. The greyhound racing industry contributes an estimated \$643 million to the Victorian economy each year, and the GRV supports 13 registered racing clubs, 11 of which are in regional Victoria. Greyhound racing in the Goulburn region alone supports 98 full-time equivalent jobs and contributes an estimated \$13.1 million to the local economy. The Shepparton Greyhound Racing Club has been a generous contributor to the local community since the early 1970s and conducted 117 race meetings in 2023. As well as being responsible for regulating the industry, GRV's main focus is the welfare of the racing dogs themselves. The Greyhound Adoption Program does a wonderful job of rehoming retired dogs, and GRV's racing and safety strategy has seen both race fatalities and injury rates steadily decline over the last four years. I want to thank Peita, Stuart and Carl for taking the time to meet with me, and I wish the GRV and all in the greyhound racing industry the very best for the 2024 season and beyond.

International Women's Day

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:55): I rise to make a contribution in regard to International Women's Day this year, which falls on 8 March 2024, which is tomorrow. Politics as a system was designed by men for men. There were obviously no women at that series of meetings when the system was designed. Sadly, we see that when women do enter the political fray that is not uncommon to see them conforming to the system rather than working collectively to change it. I reflect on recent comments in the lead-up to the Dunkley by-election by the Honourable Sussan Ley, member for Farrer, with her tweet to Victorian women over the wrongful arrest of a man accused of sex crimes. Well, you know what, as a woman I call that out. I call out acting as a third-party mouthpiece for your leader. Actions have consequences and words matter, and a use-by date will absolutely come. Self-interest has a price.

I also call out the desire of powerful men to hold open the door to a political career for women. Guess what, you actually do not need them to do that for you. In the ALP we have affirmative action rules that open doors for you so that when you embark on your political career you do not need to be beholden to bloated old warlords or have them auspice your political career. You can do all those things yourself. Women do not need to do the bidding of men anymore or those who seek to bolster their own ministerial quotas, nor will women in our party allow our affirmative action rules to be undermined in this way.

To women everywhere, remember when you enter politics that not only do you have a chance to make a difference to the communities that you are now incredibly privileged to serve, but also you have a chance to change the system, to think and act collectively and to make it easier for the next woman and the ones that come after you. Let us reflect on and remember this on International Women's Day – *(Time expired)*

Turkish Pazar Festival

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (09:57): On Sunday I had the great pleasure of attending the 17th annual Turkish Pazar Festival held at Queen Victoria Market. I want to begin by acknowledging the great work of the Moreland Turkish Association for hosting this festival every year. I particularly want to thank Cemal Akdeniz OAM, who provided me with a briefing prior to the event. It has been great seeing the event become stronger and such a wonderful reality each year. I want to acknowledge Veysel Kurtoglu from the Turan Australia Association, who does great work educating his community on Turkish language, culture and history. It was a great event and great to speak to many community leaders and stallholders.

St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (09:58): I also just want to say that last week I had the honour of visiting St Mary's Coptic Orthodox College in Coolaroo for a meeting with Abouna Tadros Sharobeam and principal Germaine Saad. St Mary's is a wonderful faith community. I was delighted to receive a tour of the school and chat to many staff and students, and I really enjoyed hearing information about the school's future plans and plans for years to come, which I am looking forward to assisting them with.

Northern Metropolitan Region electorate office

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (09:58): I also want to say it was great to move into my new electorate office last week in Meadow Heights. I want to thank the parliamentary team for helping, particularly Spencer King, and thank the Meadow Heights community, who have welcomed me so warmly to Meadow Heights shopping centre and have come in to visit.

Supermarket prices

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): What are you doing to our apples? We have just heard that Coles and Woolworths are marking up the price of apples by well over 100 per cent. It is reported that most growers are actually receiving between 50 and 60 cents a kilo, which is below the cost of production, and in fact I opened up my Woolies app this morning and saw that I would be paying almost \$5 a kilo – outrageous – for the same apples. It is not even just apples. Apparently, some pears are also being completely jacked up in price. In a surprise to no-one, the major supermarkets Coles and Woolies are treating their customers and their suppliers with contempt. People are struggling right now to keep up with these rising prices of groceries. Rents are too high. Mortgages are too high. Groceries are way too high. We need to stop Coles and Woolies from ripping us off. We need our apples to be affordable. Remember, they do in fact keep the doctor away. Labor declared groceries an essential service. Regulate the supermarket industry. Stop this price gouging.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): The Allan Labor government is continuing to deliver new and upgraded education facilities across the south-east. Last week I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of Topirum Primary School in Clyde North and Kurmile Primary School in Officer, along with the Minister for Education, the member for Pakenham and the member for Bass. These are the final two of 14 schools the Allan Labor government has opened for term 1 in 2024. These new, modern, state-of-the-art facilities will be the learning home for many students now and in years to come. It was wonderful to meet the first cohort of students and an absolute delight to tour the schools with the bright, articulate and caring school captains and principals Marc De Ley and Sharon Mitchell.

I also had the pleasure of visiting Brentwood Park Primary School with the member for Narre Warren South to officially open their year 4 learning centre and STEM building. Brentwood Park's year 4 students now have a modern learning environment which will help them develop creative thinking, promote STEM literacy and inspire learning for life – critical skills for the future. Thank you to school leaders Inaaya, Vish, Angel and Aarav, who took me on a tour of the school and the new building, and a big shout-out to principal Jim Bell, the hardworking teaching staff and the builders who made this vision a reality.

The real value of having these new, inspiring and modern facilities is that it makes it easier for our young Victorians to learn new things and easier for our hardworking teachers to teach them. This is all part of our commitment to ensure every child can get a great education regardless of where they live, and it is why over the last nine years the Allan Labor government has invested \$14.9 billion in building new schools and more than 1940 school upgrades have been delivered. Our education system is one to be proud of, and this investment is ensuring our schools are better equipped to prepare students for the future.

International Women's Day

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:01): Now for a happy story as we come into celebrating International Women's Day tomorrow, this week and perhaps all month. On the mezzanine level of the Victorian state Parliament there is a little library of artefacts. One of my favourites is a little tea set that says 'Votes for women'. I recently contributed an article which will be coming out in my local papers, and I want to share some of it with you.

A forgotten history, and it happened in Victoria. There is a moment, a wonderful moment in world history, that can easily be overlooked and forgotten because it was short-lived. Did you know that in 1863 some Victorian women were accidentally given the right to vote when our Victorian Parliament passed a law to allow all ratepayers on municipal rolls to vote in Assembly elections? In 1864 some bold Victorian women took advantage of the oversight and cast their votes for the first time. Can you imagine the victory of these women and what they must have felt? Sadly, the opportunity only lasted a short time, as after a short debate Parliament restricted the vote to only male ratepayers with the Electoral Law Consolidation Act 1865. A handful of women from the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Victorian Temperance Alliance, with other suffragette groups, went door-to-door to gain the right to vote for Victorian women. 33,000 Victorian women signed the monstrous Victorian women's suffrage petition in less than six months, and it was tabled in September 1891. Isabella Goldstein and her daughter – *(Time expired)*

Sheilas Shakedown

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:03): As it is International Women's Day tomorrow, I would like to acknowledge an incredibly empowering and inclusive space created for women, a place where difference is valued. Sheilas Shakedown is an annual festival that celebrates women who ride motorbikes and love vintage cars, bringing women together from all over Australia. Imagine this: hundreds of women collectively riding down the Western Freeway, engines roaring, hair flapping at the back of their helmets, while sitting on about 80 kilometres per hour to keep the learners at the back safe. Riders at all levels are welcome to attend, and the organisers want women to feel comfortable, because hooning is kind of a bloke thing. Arriving at the campgrounds, 500 women, non-binary and trans motorcycle lovers connect over music, tattoos, motorcycle games and fundraising for causes that are close to their hearts, and this year it was flat out. Sheilas Shakedown has built a phenomenal community where women feel equal, free of bias and stereotypes. It is truly an inclusive space. But that is about all I can tell you about that sacred space because whatever happens at Sheilas stays at Sheilas.

Housing

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:04): Residents are moving into new housing projects built by the Allan Labor government as part of the Big Housing Build. We have got 39 new affordable rental apartments, rented out at below-market rents, in Cheltenham, which Minister Shing and I visited last week. They are modern, they are spacious, they are energy efficient and they have got great outdoor areas. Ninety per cent of these apartments are already tenanted, showing the demand for affordable homes in Southern Metro. Residents are also moving into the new development at New Street in Brighton – 291 new homes, 19 per cent more social housing on the site. Some may think this is an ineffective housing model, but talking to residents like Tanya, who moved in last week, you can see what these new apartments mean to them. She was very heartfelt with the minister and with me about just how important these homes are to her. New homes being built by the Allan Labor government are giving people the sort of accommodation that they deserve. We have new homes being built on land that remains in public hands, where residents are getting access to the kinds of services that they need. Some opposed these projects in the first place. Some oppose these projects going on. This Labor government will keep building homes for Victorians.

ASEAN–Australia special summit

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:06): I want today – and I am sure I will be joined by almost everyone in the chamber – to mark the ASEAN summit that was held in Melbourne this week. I think this is a very important outreach for our country. Not only does it mark 50 years since the first dialogue partner status of Australia in 1974 and the comprehensive strategic partnership in 2021 but our friends are here – Indonesia, the Philippines and in particular Singapore. I am not going to name everyone, but this is a group of Australia's closest neighbours. We need to foster and build our dialogue and relationship with these countries, which are such an important part of our trading environment and also our security environment. I pay tribute to the decision to hold the ASEAN summit here and to make sure that we build and strengthen our relationship with all of the members of ASEAN. I understand the unfortunate activities in the last few days of some demonstrators – we are a democracy, but sometimes democratic actions are misplaced. But in this case I pay tribute to all those who have been involved and indicate, on behalf of the chamber I suspect, that this is a very important summit for Australia and Victoria, and we are proud to have hosted it.

International Women's Day

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (10:08): It seems like only yesterday that I stood up over there in my old seat almost 12 months ago to speak about International Women's Day. Even though everybody loves to be seen to be celebrating International Women's Day and to be seen to care about women and women's plights and women's issues, I decided to speak about the disappointing reality, which is just an ugly truth: that governments, not just this one but governments all around the world, have betrayed women and girls. They took our sex-based rights and they gave them away to men. I am going to stand up here again today and I am going to remind you that we did not consent to having our rights and our identity taken away from us in law. We did not consent to the removal of all the sex-based safeguards for women and girls. That was not the deal. And despite all the abuse and the violence and the smears that are just lashed upon every single woman that tries to say something about it, we are not going to be silenced. We will speak, we will get organised and we will absolutely get those rights back.

Housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (10:09): It is always really important to be able to see the impact of housing on people who are vulnerable and often have very complex needs. It was therefore a really wonderful opportunity for me to talk with residents in Drouin and in Pakenham who are now living in accommodation which is bright and modern, energy efficient and connected to communities. Being able to see the impact that is occurring through partnerships between Homes Vic, the Haven Foundation and Mind Australia and the way in which we are seeing one-bedroom apartments being developed with connections to intercom technology and the opportunity for people to access the services that they need when and as they need them is why we are investing, why we are building and why we are delivering on record numbers of social housing across the state.

Linda White

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (10:10): I want to pay tribute today to Linda White the extraordinary unionist, thinker, advocate and most amazing mentor for women. It seems fitting that as we head toward International Women's Day we talk about those women leaders and role models who have made such a fundamental difference to the lives of so many. I was privileged to learn so much from Linda over the years. To see her in action was a true privilege. She was a sharp mind. She was generous with her genius. She was Labor and a unionist through and through. She will be so missed. My love to everybody who grieves her passing.

International Women's Day

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (10:10): As I stand here as an elected member of this Parliament on the eve of International Women's Day, I stand here wearing the women's colours but also very proudly wearing my women's suffrage brooch. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, when our great-grandmothers fought for the right not only to vote but also to stand for Parliament, it was not a time when they wore T-shirts emblazoned with slogans. So to self-identify, women wore jewellery in the women's colours of purple, white and green – amethysts for the purple, either pearls or diamonds for the white and a peridot or emerald to signify the green colour. This was their way of self-identifying that they supported other women.

I also want to pay tribute to Sir Robert Menzies, who 80 years ago formed the Liberal Party, and in doing that he partnered with the Australian Women's National League. Menzies was truly a man of the future. Eighty years ago he gave women in our party equal representation at all levels of the party. We have enjoyed that. It is not something we have had to fight for. We have enjoyed having equal representation. It has also been forgotten in recent times that it was Liberal governments that passed legislation and made some of the great changes that enhanced the status of women. In this state alone, it was a Hamer government that passed the first Victorian equal opportunity act.

Tibetan New Year

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (10:12): Tashi delek. Happy Losar. It was a privilege to attend along with my colleagues Tim Read and Aiv Puglielli the first Tibetan New Year festival hosted in the Victorian Parliament over the last week. Thank you to my colleague Sam Hibbins and his team for supporting the Tibetan Community of Australia Victoria association to bring such a joyous celebration of Losar into this place. Our Parliament looks the best when the community is here, and the Tibetan community transformed Queen's Hall into a shrine of devotion and transported us all to the lush mountains of Tibet, where these celebrations would ordinarily take place. The community adorned the event with ancient artwork, song, dance and food and gave us a glimpse into the compassionate and kind culture of the Tibetan people.

The Tibetan people continue to struggle for self-determination and the survival of their culture, traditions, language and identity, given the oppression they continue to face. Despite this adversity, they continue to embody one of the greatest characteristics of the human spirit, and that is kindness. In his new year's address His Holiness the Dalai Lama spoke of the importance of continuing to cultivate love and compassion in the world as well as good-heartedness and morality. Tibetan culture, he said, is the world's precious treasure, and the courage and determination of the Tibetan people is truly Victoria's treasure. We stand with you, we send our love and solidarity to all Tibetans and we remember especially this year the Dalai Lama's words: peace in the world begins with kindness in the heart.

Bendigo Sports Star of the Year Awards

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (10:14): I rise to speak about the Sports Star of the Year Awards. I went to the gala dinner in Bendigo recently, and it was a fantastic night. It celebrates athletes and sportspeople that are doing work at an amazing level, representing Australia around the globe in sports like basketball, swimming, athletics, canoeing, shooting and cricket. It started in the 1960s, and next year it will be celebrating 60 years. There was a record field of 24 recipients in the scholarship awards. We had Todd Murphy, who has been spinning out batsmen in India and England, and Alessia McCaig and Blake Agnoletto: they hurtle around the velodrome. The class of 2023 includes multiple monthly winners of the award, such as the Bendigo Braves women's basketball team, Emma Berg, Jontee Brown, Col Pearse, Maddy Theobald and Aaron Wilson. It was fantastic that Todd Murphy was the overall winner, so it was great to hear from him via video on the night. Champion cyclist Glenn O'Shea was added to the Bendigo sports hall of fame.

Bendigo had a golden girl, Faith Leech. She was an Olympic champion at the four-by-100-metre relay at the 1956 games in Melbourne. She was among the first to be awarded a Bendigo sports star hall of fame at Red Energy Arena. It was wonderful that Robyn Powell was recognised on the night for her contribution as a cricket scorer over many years. I just want to congratulate all the athletes for their commitment and all the award finalists, sponsors, families, coaches and friends for the part they play. We are all looking forward to the Paralympic Games, which are about 143 days away, and many from northern Victoria will be part of that.

Korumburra infrastructure funding

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:16): I rise to inform the Parliament of all the investments the Labor state government are making into Korumburra. The secondary college has had a multimillion-dollar massive upgrade to ensure that the teenagers of Korumburra are getting a world-class education. We have got the new kinder at the primary school, ensuring that local families are getting their kids into places and getting them the best possible start in life. The new lights at the rec reserve are making sure that the soccer and the cricket clubs are able to be out under the best lighting that they could possibly have. We have got the new upgrades coming along with the netball rooms and the footy club rooms, ensuring that anyone getting involved in the clubs there has the best facilities. We have got the massive new facilities at the men's shed, converting the old disused loco shed into something truly incredible. All the members at the men's shed are fitting that out and getting office spaces set up, so congratulations to them. There are the upgrades to maintain the RSL, the work that has been done there to futureproof the building, but not only that they are throwing it open to the community so groups can come in and use the buildings as and when needed. There is also the beautiful new community hub looking out across town, the library, the historical society and rooms for the whole community to come in and use, not to mention everything that is happening at the railway precinct and the investments we are making to make sure that kids can get into Coal Creek and learn there. There is just so much going on. Congratulations to everybody involved.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:17): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 221 to 325, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:

That the bill be now read a second time.

And Wendy Lovell's amendment:

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with 'the bill be withdrawn and not reintroduced until the government:

- (1) provides a preliminary or draft fee structure for the early learning centres (ELCs) scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026;
- (2) seeks written feedback from any childcare centre, kindergarten or preschool within a 15-kilometre radius of the proposed government ELC sites regarding the likely impact of a government ELC on their workforce capacity and enrolments and provides their feedback to the house;

- (3) conducts an analysis on the childcare workforce implications of the new government ELC sites, including:
 - (a) establishing the workforce vacancy rates around the locations of the new sites;
 - (b) providing the house with a comprehensive plan on how the government will ensure existing childcare centres and kindergartens are not disadvantaged in their ability to recruit and retain staff in their existing programs; and
- (4) provides an estimate of the budget impact of the operating costs for the government ELCs scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026.’.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:18): I rise today to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. This bill is about ensuring that our youngest citizens have the best possible start in life. On this side of the chamber we are committed to delivering the support that will give every child the ability to live up to their potential.

I want to start by acknowledging the work of Minister Blandthorn and her team and department in putting this bill together for us today, although based on some of the contributions yesterday perhaps it should be Ms Lovell I congratulate, as it appeared that she was the one taking credit for this work. It is good to see such enthusiastic support in this space even from those members opposite, despite perhaps sometimes a patchy record, especially given we have seen stories in the paper this morning too and comments yesterday from Liberal members about the urgency of this, which makes it all the more staggering that when this bill was put through the Assembly just a short time ago the opposition actually put forward a reasoned amendment to the bill. I have got to say I found it quite staggering. Putting some thoughts together for my contribution on this bill – you speak so evidently passionately in support of these changes and yet then put a reasoned amendment to the house. As members well know, and for those who do not know, a reasoned amendment’s purpose is to effectively neuter the bill, to effectively stop it. That is what they did in the Assembly.

I found it quite remarkable, but I found it all the more remarkable after Ms Lovell spoke so passionately about supposedly supporting early childhood education that she herself would put this reasoned amendment through, again mirroring the one put through by her colleagues in the Assembly. So to say that you are supportive of the changes but ‘No, here’s a reasoned amendment. Actually we’re not going to support it’ – come on, guys, get your act together. If you actually support early childhood education, support this bill. I am sure there will be much more entered into and much more discussion from both sides of the chamber about that reasoned amendment as well. But to say ‘No, no, no. Stop everything. Don’t do this bill until you’ve done this, this and this’ – many things which I think the government has actually already done anyway – is just frankly a time-wasting tactic and a delay when we should actually be putting this bill through. So if you do support that, if you do support this support for early childhood education, do not play games – support the bill. If you have a serious amendment, put it up, but a reasoned amendment is not that. A reasoned amendment is, as I say, to stop the bill, and if you do not want to see this go through, that is why you would support that reasoned amendment. I did make some notes yesterday saying hopefully we will have no similar stunts in this place as we saw in the Assembly, but evidently that is what we are seeing with this reasoned amendment put through by Ms Lovell.

What this bill does is reinforce the transformative power of education and the vital role it plays in a child’s journey from the very beginning. The bill extends the legal and operational framework of the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 by encompassing early childhood education and care. This legislative expansion is crucial for assembling a specialised government workforce under the act, ensuring the state possesses the requisite legal authority to officially manage and deliver the ambitious project of 50 government owned and operated early learning centres (ELCs).

The profound impact of early childhood education extends far beyond foundational learning of course. It plays a major role in shaping our children’s future. Engaging in high-quality early education not only prepares children academically but also gives them the social skills and other various aspects of emotional intelligence that set a solid groundwork for lifelong success. As members of this place will

know, the government's Best Start, Best Life initiative really does demonstrate that deep-seated commitment that those of us on this side of the house have towards universal access to superior early learning, acknowledging that these early investments deliver substantial societal benefits and substantial returns over a long period. The research backs this up. It shows a marked improvement in school readiness and academic achievement as well as social behaviours among children who attend these or similar early education programs.

Further to that, early education offers an equitable start for children across all backgrounds, significantly narrowing those achievement gaps. Providing all children with that same equality of opportunity is such an important part of what these reforms do. Again, economic analyses reinforce the value of this and highlight the benefit that it provides in levelling out that playing field to give everyone that equal shot for success. It also has been shown to lead to enhanced workforce productivity, reduce dependency on social services and even decrease criminality. So this government has a holistic approach to early education which underscores our vision for a thriving, well-rounded future generation which will be poised to contribute positively to community and economic growth.

I touched on some of the contributions of Ms Lovell before, and I had the opportunity to listen to some of the comments made by my region colleague Mrs Hermans yesterday as well, and whilst I probably did not have the brainpower yesterday to process every single one of the rebuttals I could make to that particular speech, there are a couple of points that she made which I will touch on briefly as well when it comes to Best Start, Best Life reforms. Firstly, Mrs Hermans lamented the cost barrier to accessing early childhood education, and that is something of course that this government is very cognisant of. It is something that is actually quite a priority for this government, and that is exactly why we have implemented free four-year-old kinder for Victorians, and it is also exactly why we are currently implementing free three-year-old kinder. So I am happy to assure my colleague Mrs Hermans that that is actually what we are doing. These free kinder programs will make a significant difference for families, and as I say as well, they are a great social equaliser in providing those services to those who might have had those challenging conversations, the ones which Mrs Hermans referenced – 'Can you afford this? Well, you might have to limit what you can provide for your child because of that.' That is exactly why we are proceeding with free four-year-old kinder and free three-year-old kinder as well.

Another point: I do note her commentary around wages, and that is obviously a very important thing we have to be mindful of too – supporting early childhood educators with the best possible wages. I do note that that is a federal issue, and there has been I believe a lot of work done by the current Albanese government after, let us just say again, a fairly substantial period of inactivity by the former Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison governments. So that is a federal issue, and I look forward to seeing further progress on that front as well. But it is something of course that those of us on this side of the house are particularly and acutely mindful of, because on this side of the house we support working Victorians getting their fair share.

An essential element of this bill is the comprehensive empowerment of the Secretary of the Department of Education with a broad authority to hire a diverse array of personnel essential for the operational successes of the new government-funded early learning centres. This includes a spectrum of roles ranging from early childhood teachers and educators through to trainees through to centre directors, assistant directors, administrative staff, cooks and otherwise. Direct employment by the secretary is a pivotal point of this strategy aimed at fostering a workforce that is not only skilled but also deeply committed to delivering those high-quality educational services to our young children. This approach underscores the government's dedication to creating that supportive environment.

Our leadership in this space when it comes to early childhood education and care is further exemplified through, as I mentioned earlier, those \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms. They are set and they are already delivering enormous benefits across the state, addressing critical childcare shortages, as others have raised in this chamber, particularly in those areas of dire need. This initiative to establish the 50 government owned and operated ELCs will greatly enhance access to early learning by co-locating these centres with schools and other child services. I note my colleague Mr Tarlamis had the

opportunity to visit Topirum Primary School, one of the many new schools that we are building in the outer south-east alone, in the wonderful growing area of Clyde North. It is a fantastic new school, and both Mr Tarlamis and I have had the opportunity over the past year to see it growing and see it develop, and it is wonderful to see that school now open and accepting its first batch of students. There is a huge and growing population in my community of Clyde North.

Lee Tarlamis: A kindergarten is on its way too.

Michael GALEA: And as Mr Tarlamis rightly notes, there is a kindergarten being built onsite as we speak, which will be operational from next year, and that is exactly what these reforms are delivering. It is putting the kinders at the schools so that you do not need to do the double drop-off, as we spoke about in this chamber and as Minister Blandthorn commented yesterday as well, avoiding that double drop-off, which will certainly be of benefit to many parents in Clyde North and it will also be of benefit to other road users, hopefully from less congestion caused by those double drop-offs.

Co-locating these kinders is a really exciting initiative. It is also being done of course in established schools. I have enjoyed working with other schools across the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, be it in the Berwick area, be it in the Rowville area or otherwise, in trying to locate some of the opportunities for some co-located kinders on existing school sites. But in growing areas such as Clyde North we have the new Topirum Primary School that has just opened, coming of course after Ramleigh Park and Grayling primary schools, which opened in the previous years, and in fact another two schools which are currently under construction just at the primary school level, the interim-named Thompsons West and Clyde North primaries. We also of course have, very excitingly, Clyde North secondary college under works as well, as well as an expansion, stage 2, of the neighbouring Clyde Secondary College.

There is a lot of investment in education, particularly in our region of the south-east, as there is in all growing suburbs. I believe that there are 14 new schools that have opened this year alone. I appreciate, Mr Welch, that you are new to this chamber. I enjoy your company, but I do miss the company of the good Dr Bach, who used to frequently yell across this house that we were building schools only in Labor seats, which was quite an odd thing to say given that Labor holds the majority of outer suburban seats. I would happily retort that in the state seat of Berwick alone, which as members would be aware is a Liberal seat, we are building more new schools in that single seat than the previous coalition government built across the entire state of Victoria in their last term of government. That is because when you have a government that delivers, that gets results, it provides services for people, whether that is the schools, the houses, the road upgrades, the transport – the bus routes – or everything else that goes with it, including level crossing removals.

As our growing suburbs grow and experience the challenges of that growth, as I have seen day to day, as has Mr Tarlamis, in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, this is a government that is absolutely transformationally changing the way we move around that area. We have seen countless upgrades, including the recent completion of the Hall Road upgrade in the south-east, which I believe was completed ahead of time. It benefits communities right across that Cranbourne belt, right through to Clyde North and right through to Frankston as well, which is perhaps another reason why the people of Dunkley so enthusiastically supported Jodie Belyea to be their new federal local member, seeing that their local state members – the member for Cranbourne, the member for Carrum, the member for Hastings, the member for Frankston, and I could go on – are delivering those services. Obviously the late, great Peta Murphy, who was a tireless and passionate advocate for her community, did so as well, matched perhaps only by Ms Belyea, and I am very much looking forward to working with her in the interests of those communities there.

As I say, co-locating kinders and two primary schools is a very exciting initiative. It is something that is getting a lot of attention in communities, as I say, especially in those growing communities. It really is an important part of these Best Start, Best Life reforms. Beyond that, this bill will support various and widespread infrastructure improvements, providing better accessibility as well as providing space

for land acquisition and development, which will be of great assistance to delivering these projects in my community, as with many others. There are many other initiatives. I have touched on free three- and four-year-old kinder, which is a significant benefit. We also recently had, as I commented in a contribution earlier this week, the Casey early parenting centre, one of the 12 new and upgraded centres across Victoria, which is also in the suburb of Clyde North, providing that support for Casey and Cardinia families to get that critical support when they need it the most.

As you can see, there is a lot going on in this space. This is a sensible reform. It should be supported. For the reasons I have outlined, the reasoned amendment should not be supported, and I do commend the bill to the house.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:33): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. I take good note of Mr Galea's comments. There is no disagreement about the quality of the idea – it is an excellent idea. I am a dad; I have got two kids. I have done the dreaded double drop-off. It is a great idea that we consolidate these things. We should be looking to consolidate them not just in education but in other service areas as well – in health and other things. It is a great idea. I think everybody on this side of the house supports the idea.

I think what was completely missed, though, in Mr Galea's contribution is that an idea is not a policy. The questions we have and why we have moved a reasoned amendment is simply because, as is all too typical of the government, it comes up with ideas but it does not know how to implement them or deliver them. It is rushing to outcome without process. A policy has the process baked into it so we know how we are going to deliver something. You have already got form on this. How many projects have we had where there has been an idea but there has been no process? The Suburban Rail Loop has not even got a business case and has not been ticked off by Infrastructure Australia. Good idea, no process. The North East Link was a good idea, but no process. We have got a \$10 billion blowout and probably more to come.

The reasoned amendment is simply to give you an opportunity to put some rigour into what you do, because there is no rigour in what you do. Have you asked the simple questions about what effect this is going to have on other businesses in the area? It is a pretty obvious and simple question. Whilst you can put phrases like 'We're committed to deliver' and 'We've got a strategy', there is no detail around those things, and it is patently obvious you have not considered them. Because we believe this is a good idea and because we agree it is a good idea, our contribution is simply to put some rigour around what you are doing so that it does get implemented. Ideas are cheap. It is implementation that is difficult. You have got to be able to implement these things, and too often the government's only solution is not having rigour in process, it is 'Let's just throw a bit more money at it. We'll throw a bit more money.' You can look at every project that the government engages in: the solution is never to get it right in the first place, it is always to patch it up with a blowout and just add it to the growing list of state debt. So these are eminently sensible amendments that will put some rigour around the government's process so that this incredibly important initiative actually has a hope of being delivered to scope, to budget, on time and without risk, and we are doing the responsible thing in putting that rigour in, because we believe in it.

Really, I do not have much more to say beyond that. Let us have some rigour. The amendment is eminently sensible, because if you are not considering how it is going to affect other businesses – well, let us talk about them specifically. What is the budget?

A member: Good question.

Richard WELCH: That is a very good question. Rigour about what you are delivering – who goes into a project without a budget? Our amendment asks that the government:

provides a preliminary or draft fee structure for ...

them. How much are others going to pay for it as well? Rigour.

Further, it:

seeks written feedback from any childcare centre, kindergarten or preschool within a 15-kilometre radius of the proposed ... sites regarding the likely impact of a government ELC on their workforce capacity and enrolments and provides their feedback to the house ...

Rigour. If you want to run a project well, you do your research. You get your arms fully around the scope of the project and then you know how to deliver on it. And further it asks that government:

conducts an analysis on the childcare workforce implications of the new government ELC sites, including:

- (a) establishing the workforce vacancy rates around the locations of the new sites;
- (b) providing the house with a comprehensive plan on how the government will ensure existing childcare centres and kindergartens are not disadvantaged in their ability to recruit and retain staff in their existing programs ...

Again, we have got ample precedent across the rest of the community on that, where the Big Build has sucked up all the resource and we are making other essential deliveries near-on impossible or more expensive when we are in a cost-of-living crisis. So again, this is a perfectly sensible amendment to put some rigour around a very important idea, and we are very pleased to be able to flesh out the policy for the government.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:38): I am very pleased to speak in support of this bill today, the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. This bill is to ensure the timely delivery of the first four early learning centres proposed to open in 2025 as part of our early childhood reforms and investments. The bill is focused on making sure the state has the necessary legislative powers to deliver the 50 early learning centres, the commitment we made in the 2022 election, and it will expand the scope of the act to matters in relation to early childhood education and care and create a new government workforce under the act. The bill recognises the change in the Secretary of the Department of Education employing a range of staff to deliver on the 50 early childhood centres that we are following through on. Those early learning centre workforces will include staff that are early learning childhood teachers; educators, including trainee educators; centre directors and assistant directors; administrative staff and cooks. As we promised at the election, these staff will be directly employed by the Secretary of the Department of Education.

I want to make mention of the direct employment opportunities of the entire reform strategy. These reforms are creating more than 11,000 new early childhood teacher and educator positions over the next decade. The government is determined to make sure that we have the workforce we need to support our reform strategy, investing close to \$370 million to attract new educators, upskill existing professionals and make it easier for those returning to work. That includes things like free TAFE places, university scholarships to study teaching, supported traineeships and incentives for those moving into or rejoining the Victorian sector. These opportunities are encouraging a whole new cohort to embark on a change of career with new skill sets in teaching, caring and administration, and they will go into a workforce which is being built for our future generations.

Early childhood care and education make a fundamental difference to the outcomes of a young person's life, and there is extensive research that has produced evidence of the importance of those investments. Cognitive and socio-emotional skills are also fundamental for children's future achievements in school. These skills are important ingredients for a successful and resilient life and, as my colleague Mr Galea mentioned, preventing crime and basically what I would phrase as successful adulthood – being able to overcome all the challenges and trials and tribulations during a life. Clear and overwhelming evidence indicating the importance of early childhood development is the guiding light for our Best Start, Best Life reforms. It is an investment that says regardless of where you live this is a government that believes every young Victorian deserves a bright future.

Equality is not negotiable for this government. This is demonstrated by the government's commitment to early childhood education. This generational reform will fundamentally shape and profoundly influence early childhood for decades to come. To my mind this represents the best of our government.

We want the best start possible for our children at the most important phase of their development no matter their circumstances, no matter where they live. This alone has already transformed the lives of children and their families, helping greatly with the cost of child care and enabling many parents, particularly women, to return to work. The use of our investment in free kinder has allowed so many more families to access kinder and has alleviated their childcare costs as well. The free kinder rollout for their three- and four-year-old children at participating services is helping more women get back to work. A scenario that too many women know is that childcare costs often make it unjustifiable to work, and I certainly had that experience after I gave birth to my first child. It is why these reforms from government-owned child care through to pre-prep and free kinder are so smart and needed. Not only will they benefit Victorian kids but they will also make a massive difference to parents, easing the pressures on family budgets, making it easy to return to work and addressing the shortage in child care. It is sophisticated, it is holistic, and it is human-centred policy delivered by a government that gets it.

As I mentioned earlier, this bill is the next step in the delivery of 50 government owned and operated early learning centres. They will be located in communities that need them the most. The bill's provisions will provide the state with the necessary legal powers to operate the government-owned centres. The first of these will be opened in 2025 and will be located on school sites at Sunshine Primary School, Murtoa College, Moomba Park Primary School and Eaglehawk North Primary School.

There is no doubt that our commitment to investment in the development of the littlest people in Murtoa in the electorate of Lowan is proof that we are governing consistent with our values. The facility will provide long day care, three-year-old kindergarten and pre-prep programs. These programs will be delivered across three rooms, with space for up to 57 local children in the centre each day. It will also include a maternal and child health consulting room for local families and of course a car park. We are locating the centre at the college to help parents avoid that dreaded double drop-off – which none of us can say, except for a few people – and to make child care and early learning accessible and convenient for working families. Getting rid of that dreaded double drop-off may not sound like a very big deal for some people, but I am quite sure that any one of us who has done the morning drop-off to multiple places knows what a stress this can be. As a parent, I will tell you that this is a very appealing proposition.

I certainly know that Portland South Primary School will be one of the next schools to have an early learning centre in 2026. I visited that school last Friday, and it was lovely to meet the members of the school council, the staff, the school leaders and the students, who are delighted to be participating in the planning and consultation process underway for 2024 and are looking forward to the build process that will be happening in 2025. And absolutely the families coming into the school will enjoy the new early learning centre in 2026. The school has a wonderful culture and is actively supported by so many families, and I appreciated their welcome last week. They are very proud of their school and have been chosen to receive a new centre.

There is an even longer list of local projects that I would love to wax lyrical on. We do have an upgrade for Port Fairy, we have a new outdoor space with kids at Mitchell Park in Hamilton, planning money for Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative's children's centre and a new kitchen for the kinder in Warrnambool South, enabling this great centre to run cooking classes for their kids as well as establishing a breakfast program. Better yet, free kinder, as I said, is saving money for families – around about \$2500 a year.

I would argue that this is a sophisticated, holistic and human-centred policy. I want to acknowledge the work of Minister Blandthorn. This is a comprehensive integrated reform strategy. I just want to summarise how integrated and thought through this strategy is to counter the arguments from those opposite. For starters, the strategy is evidence-based, based on research into early learning and the best ways to do that. It then has the capital investment backing it up, and I would point Mr Welch to the Victorian budget, a copy of which would be available across the way in the table office. Then we have

the educational reforms; we are restructuring and transforming the way we teach early learning. Then we have the location of multiple services on one site to work for families. Then we have the workforce investments and incentives wound in with that as well, complemented and underpinned by free kinder to provide cost-of-living support right now.

I want to finish up by quoting Minister Blandthorn:

We're partnering with the early childhood sector to meet the needs of children and families, to value and grow the workforce, to deliver quality spaces for learning, and to support the sector through positive change.

This bill is another small piece of the government's much larger agenda for transforming early childhood education, and I heartily commend it.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:50): This is a really important topic that we are debating today, and I am pleased to rise and make my contribution to the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. We have heard some quite wideranging comments in this debate today, and I want to just pick up on a theme that has been operating from the government benches and put my perspective on it. Tomorrow is International Women's Day, and it is very important. As we know, women juggle many, many activities throughout their lives, and particularly when you are a parent, you are not only a parent, you are a carer, you are a community member and you are a volunteer, and you also very regularly now need to, must and want to be engaged in paid work to keep the lights on in your family home and provide for your family.

But one of the things that I find a little bit distasteful, which I will put into context, is that over there they were talking about the double drop-off – 'We need to eliminate the double drop-off' – meaning that if you have a kinder or childcare centre separate to a primary school and if you are a parent and you have got children both at kinder or a childcare centre and at a primary school or high school, you are not doing that double drop-off. Well, let me tell you that many, many parents in rural and regional Victoria would kill for a double drop-off. They would kill to be able to have childcare availability. They would kill to be able to have access to childcare centres in their regional towns.

I will put some context around this. We know that the Mitchell Institute put out a report in 2022 that speaks of childcare deserts right across Australia, so it is an overarching view. It speaks about how childcare deserts exist where there is one place in a childcare centre and there are three children needing to go into that spot, so the supply and demand are not equal. There is less supply than there is demand. It has a ratio, if you do the maths, of 0.333.

Let us look at a couple of towns in my Eastern Victoria electorate, the very positive and great towns that they are. Let us look at Wonthaggi. In terms of Wonthaggi, the ratio – and this is from the report – is at 0.275, so approximately for every one place in child care there are four children desiring of that spot. Let us go to another great town, Churchill in my Eastern Victoria electorate. For every one childcare spot there are approximately seven parents of children who are vying for that spot. If we go to Orbost, it is even worse. There is approximately, doing the maths, one spot for every 20 children who need to go and have access to that one particular spot in a childcare facility.

You talk about deserts; these are deserts. My constituents in those particular areas would kill for a double drop-off. They absolutely desire one. To say that it is not desirable – yes, I see the philosophy. Yes, the idea of co-locating childcare centres, childcare facilities and young learning institutions at the same location as a school is a very positive one, and it is not something that I argue about. But just to give some context about what life is like in rural and regional Victoria, as I said, many parents would absolutely be pleased to have the option to do a double drop-off.

I also just want to raise in that context a really good little town that is facing a challenge over years. It is not today but it is in the future, and I have raised this as a constituent issue with the Minister for Children, who I think is in the room and listening. It is about the government's policy around 30 hours of four-year-old kinder moving forward over the next decade. Historically it is very clear that the more access they can get to early learning centres, to organised programs, the better learning start our

children have. That is a fundamentally and universally supported initiative in terms of getting those improved learning outcomes during the transition period from when they are at home, through the three- and four-year-old stage and on to primary school. But because of this, it will have an impact in our regional areas.

I give you the picture of Willow Grove. Willow Grove is a fantastic community just above Warragul, and it has a great school. It certainly needs an upgrade, and I have spoken – as has my colleague Wayne Farnham – in this place about the need to upgrade that primary school, but the early learning centre is based in the community hall. At the moment that is three days a week, which is fantastic, but with the progression of this policy being rolled out, the Y, who run the facility, will not be able to accommodate it because it is a community hall. This is one example of the need to build a new childcare facility, a new early learning centre, in Willow Grove. To my mind the ideal location – this is not just me, this is the community talking, the primary school, the school community and the kinder parents et cetera who I have spoken to – is the site of the primary school. There is space. As I said, the school is run down and needs an overhaul, but there is an opportunity. I would like the 51st centre to go there, and I am sure if I delved a little bit further into my inbox I would find many more. That is one particular point I would like to raise.

The other thing my very good colleague Annabelle Cleeland in the other place spoke about is access. She raised this, and it is actually in the *Herald Sun*. In her electorate, where there is a dearth and there is not an availability of early learning centres, some parents are forced to choose, as she quoted:

... under-skilled and under-regulated childcare alternatives ...

I will continue quoting from the article:

The potential government childcare centre opening in Seymour is still at least five years away from being ready, leaving parents waiting and stopping private and not-for-profit childcare providers ...

It is a concern, so I am just putting that on the table on behalf of my good colleague Annabelle Cleeland. It is an evolving problem, and the government has got these 50 early learning centres that are going to be on the table. I have said this in this place before, but I know there is one slated for 'Yallourn – Glengarry'. I will just put on record again that Yallourn is a fantastic town in Yallourn, naturally. Glengarry is at least 20 kilometres away. The government may be looking at the two centres. I have pointed out three needs in very small regional area. I would argue that there should be two – one in Yallourn and one in Glengarry – and also, as I have just said, planning for that one in Willow Grove.

The other comment I would like to make is around our reasoned amendment and seeking feedback from childcare centres, kindergartens and preschools within a 15-kilometre radius of proposed government sites that are likely to be impacted. I have been speaking with one particular childcare centre that had been in Moe – a private childcare centre that had been in Moe for 30 years. It was a family-run business. It was very well respected. A lot of children coming through that childcare centre were under child protection, and they were really well respected. In the end they could not gain enough workers; there were not enough early childhood workers coming through. They said to me that they had written to government in the past, sought consultation and discussion around their ideas about training in the learning institutions for childcare workers and educators. But unfortunately, they faced closed doors and so they had to close. There was a location that had about 50 childcare places that had to close. I think it was back in around 2021, so these were opportunities that were missed.

I also want to put on record the importance of having choice for parents. Co-located childcare centres are certainly endorsed by this side but parents also want choice, and the potential to keep those private operators going and working is really important because we know that there is huge, huge demand. Access is important, as I have been saying. Equity is important, as I have been mentioning in relation to our rural and regional workforce and parents, and the learning of children is also really important.

I want to just go to the upper house inquiry into education. There were a number of parents and professionals that wrote in in relation to child safe standards, and I want to put a question on notice to the minister in the committee of the whole about child safe standards. When we open any centre, when we have an interface between professionals and young children, we need to ensure that child safe standards are not only adopted and seen to be in the system but actually implemented and monitored and there is transparency around that. I say that with the knowledge from my time in this place speaking with parents where they have felt that child safe standards were not upheld and that the Department of Education had not gone into bat for them, as they should have. I am putting on record that it is very important that throughout this process and the early childhood employment powers that give the government that commitment to open those 50 new centres – plus one, if the Willow Grove centre gets up – that they can employ staff and that they are also able to set charges and fees for parents. But again, I ask for that commitment from the government to ensure that all of those people working in institutions of this nature adhere to child safe standards and respond respectfully to parents about them.

One of the things that has cropped up is the costings. We have seen that they are in the vicinity, I think it is, of \$2500 per child, which will be paid by the government. But we have seen examples where there are centres – and if I just go to one, the Summerhill Park's program costs \$4000 per child, but it will now only receive \$2500 per child from the government, and it cannot charge fees to cover the gap. I raise this as one example, but I think there are plenty of others. This will put a big burden on those childcare centres that needs to be addressed. The government is creating a problem, and that problem will be borne by the community and those centres.

Finally, with International Women's Day, I want to just say to all of the childcare workers, kinder workers and early learning centres how important it is for learning – literacy and numeracy – to be presented for children to have that right start and that wonderful engagement early on. I thank all of the people who work in that very important industry. I also put to the government that the more childcare centres we can get open in rural and regional Victoria the more opportunities there will be for people with those qualifications who cannot get in and work because they are at home minding children, and it would open up access to more of those services.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:05): I rise to speak on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. This bill seeks to give effect to the government's commitment to open 50 new government-owned early learning centres by employing staff and to set and charge fees for parents. One of the things that it claims is that it will provide high-quality childhood education and care with a special focus on inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged families. For the first part of this contribution I will use the words 'child care' as opposed to the words 'early learning', and that is something that I will explain further in my contribution.

There is no doubt that there is a shortage of child care, and that poses a barrier to workplace participation, particularly for mums. However, it seems that one area that the government does not seem to want to face up to is the role that regulation plays in the availability of child care. The report called *Regulating for Quality in Childcare: The Evidence Base*, on the national quality framework, highlights some very interesting findings. The main areas of the national quality framework set out minimum qualifications and educator-to-child ratio requirements. Staff need to have a certificate III or a diploma-level education. In short, under the national quality framework there is a need for more staff per child to look after the same amount of children, and there is a need for staff to be more qualified. This is very well meaning; however, it can pose two main issues, which I would like to highlight. Number one: because staff costs are generally the biggest cost of any organisation, the national quality framework qualifications have been driving fee increases. As government expenditure on child care has risen, so has the pressure on the family budget. The second issue I would like to raise is that stricter regulations in the quality framework may not give us a higher quality childcare experience. This is something that has been backed up by research, and I will explain what that means. An Australian study found that only small positive effects from lower staff-to-child ratios were found

in some areas of social, emotional and behavioural outcomes and absolutely no effects in cognitive outcomes. Overseas studies have shown that there was no effect at all.

Some experts are sceptical as to whether mandated staffing requirements will generate better outcomes for children. This is because, due to their rapid development, children have very different requirements through those first five years of life. The evidence suggests that there is a strong case for lower staff-to-child ratios for the younger children and there is a strong case for more qualified staff for the older children. The basis of this is that lower ratios for babies under the national quality framework are a very good idea, but staff working with these children should not have to have a diploma-level education. For older children, however, the reverse is true. The evidence suggests that there are not the same benefits for lower ratios; however, they do have a much higher benefit from more qualified staff. Allowing more staff to work in the younger years but less and more qualified staff to work in the older years could make child care more affordable and give a huge boost to the workforce. By allowing more people to join the workforce and redistributing the resources of quality staff, this could increase the number of childcare spaces available. By managing our resources well we could see higher quality services at a much lower cost. I think that is something we really should consider, because it is just practical.

The second thing that I would like to talk about is that this program may not provide the best start to all children, although it certainly will for some. The individuals that this will benefit most are children who are disadvantaged. The evidence shows that we must provide a quality experience, not just an experience. One thing that I have heard through many of the contributions in both houses in the last sitting week and in this sitting week is that child care provides better outcomes later on in life. It can even reduce prison sentences – all of these sorts of stats. Some of those things are true in some circumstances, but it is certainly not a blanket rule, according to what the research shows us. We have long known that the early years are important. They lay a foundation for healthy development; however, the thought that it is essential to attend child care is a myth. The evidence shows that deficiencies in child development require a public policy response, and it is a significant factor for children who are disadvantaged. In this area disadvantage refers to a combination of low income, welfare dependency, unstable home life, single parenting, disability, learning difficulty and Indigenous status. These are the children who benefit most from interventions in early childhood, according to research. So if the program aims to benefit these children, we must make sure that is exactly what it is doing, because otherwise we could run the risk of reinforcing disadvantage. We have to be clear on this – is this a program about early learning, in which case we are working with children to give them the best opportunity to overcome disadvantage, or are we simply providing an option for parents to participate in the workforce? We must be clear on this, because our intentions will produce completely different outcomes.

My last point that I want to touch on today is early learning versus child care – the two are not the same. Although those words are often used interchangeably, it is misleading to conflate the two. Is this a program for child care or is it early learning? Is our childcare system an early learning intervention program or is it a tool designed to help parents engage in work to support their families? This is an important question because it will shape how we approach the whole area. It is also important to distinguish between the two, because there is often messaging that the government does it better, and this is just not the case. Research shows that we set the foundation for success in mathematics in preschool. Many children are at risk of long-term mathematical difficulty by the age of four. It also shows that children who start school with maths skills that are behind their peers are much more likely to stay behind, and this is a real opportunity where we can actually make an impact that can turn around the lives of young children who need it most.

I have heard claims about child care giving the best start. The fact is it will not give the best start unless we have a quality program that makes kids school ready. Children's school readiness can be directly observed in different areas. One of them is their ability to count. For example, they need to come through being able to identify one, two, three: 'How many glasses am I holding?' They need to have

these sorts of explicit activities that are helping them become school ready. Their ability to identify numbers and their ability to identify different letters, things like this, are actually outcomes that are going to be measurable and are going to allow us to know whether or not they are school ready, according to the research. My firm belief is if we are claiming it is early learning, we have to make sure that there is something that is measurable here, because if not, we are not providing early learning centres, we are providing child care, which is still good, but they are two completely different things.

In closing, I think certainly there are times in this debate where people have quoted things about how early learning can reduce crime and can reduce the cost on the economy later on in life. These things are true – but not if we are sitting kids in a room and not making sure that they are being challenged and stimulated and learning and having learning outcomes. I believe that this is an opportunity to make a big difference in the lives of children and especially the children that come from disadvantage, who need it most, but there must be something within this program that makes them school ready.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (11:15): I welcome the opportunity to clear up some of the muddled confusion that exists on the benches opposite. Ms Lovell gave a speech yesterday, and I thought for a while she perhaps had the government's speaking notes in her hands. She seemed very much in favour of the government's bill, which is about employment powers to employ the staff that will staff the 50 early learning centres (ELCs) that this house and this chamber have already, in passing the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Land Powers) Bill 2023, committed to, but then she went on to move a reasoned amendment that would stop us employing those people to staff those centres. Then today in the *Herald Sun* we have the member for Euroa in the other place saying we are not opening these centres soon enough.

There seems to be a fair degree of confusion on the benches opposite about what they would like to see in the early learning space and, with all due respect to Dr Heath and her contribution just now, even what we mean when we talk about early learning and the first 1000 days being the most important in a child's development, whether they are in simply what she is seeking to define as 'child care' versus an early learning environment. There is a fair degree of confusion on the benches opposite, so I do welcome this opportunity to speak for the bill and against the reasoned amendment.

In so doing can I thank members for their contributions to this debate on the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill 2024. I appreciate the constructive way in which the crossbench in particular has engaged with me and my office on the bill. That is usually the case, and it has certainly been the case for the bill that is before us today. I would thank the opposition for the way in which they have also engaged with my office, although I am concerned that the information that was provided to the shadow minister has perhaps not been shared with those opposite in this place. I think many of the questions that they have collectively posed in their contributions would have been better informed if the shadow minister had perhaps shared the information that we shared with her with them.

The bill before us today is the next step in our delivery of the 50 government-owned childcare centre reforms. At the last election our government committed to opening 50 new government owned and run childcare centres in the communities that need them most – again to go to some of the concerns of those opposite today – and whilst it should be noted that this is a Commonwealth responsibility, as this state government has done in so many areas where the Commonwealth continues to let us down, we could not sit idly by and watch as Victorian families were unable to find childcare places for their children.

Since the election we have not wasted a moment in doing the planning, the strategy, the consultation and indeed the work to deliver this reform. Whether it be passing the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Land Powers) Act 2023 through this house and addressing many of the concerns and questions those opposite have raised again on this bill – in fact I think some people have used in some senses almost verbatim the speaking notes that they used when they did not oppose that previous bill –

or announcing the locations of all 50 of the government ELCs in December last year, today marks the next step in delivering on this reform. To go to the member for Euroa's point in her article today, we are delivering this reform. The bill will amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 to provide the state with the necessary legislative powers to operate the government-owned early learning centres in Victoria. The bill will empower the Secretary of the Department of Education to employ staff at government early learning centres, enable fees to be fixed and charged to parents of children enrolled at government early learning centres – and I note some people have asked for the fees; that is exactly what this bill does, it allows us to set the fees – and enable the minister to make ministerial orders to fix fees for attendance and to set employment terms and conditions for the government early learning centre workforce.

This is indeed a very straightforward bill which is before the house today, despite the confusion opposite. It does not concern the location of the 50 ELCs – it merely seeks to provide the state with the legal power to operate the 50 ELCs. Alongside this bill, contrary again to what has been suggested opposite, there is a huge amount of work that is underway with local councils, with local communities and with sector stakeholders to plan, to design, to build and to establish and open each of the 50 centres over the next four years. I agree with the *Herald Sun* editorial today – parents need childcare help, and that is why we are taking steps through this bill today to address this. The Allan Labor government is stepping in where the Commonwealth has failed us to deliver child care where it is needed the most, establishing 50 government owned and operated early learning and childcare centres across Victoria by 2028 – including one in Seymour, as highlighted in the *Herald Sun* today – if this bill passes.

Regarding the reasoned amendment brought forward by Ms Lovell, I indicate that the government will not be supporting this amendment, and the reasons are as follows. At the outset Ms Lovell stated in her amendment that the bill be withdrawn and not reintroduced, again highlighting the confusion of those opposite because, including the member for Euroa today, they are advocating for these centres to open as soon as possible and yet the reasoned amendment put forward by Ms Lovell would simply deny the opportunity to do exactly that. The hypocrisy of Ms Lovell to yesterday be speaking to this bill as if it had been introduced by the coalition – as if she had actually had something to do with it in her time working in this portfolio – through to starting her amendment asking for the bill to simply be withdrawn is indeed laughable. If you want to improve the provision of child care in this state, you do not seek to prevent the government from having the legal power to operate these centres. And we will remind Victorians of the voting record of those opposite in 2026 if we are unable to open these centres.

The first element of her amendment, seeking a preliminary or draft fee structure for the early learning centres, scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026, is simply ridiculous. It is inappropriate for there to be a fee structure provided as the minister does not currently have the legislative power to set the fees. That is exactly what we are seeking to do here today – establish that power to set the fees. The fee structure will be published via a ministerial order when this bill passes. In addition, fees will be published in advance of centres opening in 2025 so that parents have the necessary information to inform their decision-making. Again, this is why we want to pass this bill as soon as possible: so that parents have that clarity, so that it can inform their decision-making. However, if Ms Lovell's reasoned amendment succeeds, there is no guarantee that we would be able to open the four centres in 2025, as we will not have the legal basis on which to employ the staff.

The second element of her reasoned amendment is that the government seeks written feedback from any childcare centre, kindergarten or preschool within a 15-kilometre radius of the proposed government ELC sites regarding the likely impact of a government ELC on their workforce capacity and enrolments and that it provides that feedback to the house. As I noted earlier, this bill does not actually relate to the 50 locations of the ELCs, but regardless, this request is simply unreasonable and would not provide any useful insights. The areas that have been selected for the 50 ELCs have been shown to have high unmet demand for child care and low supply in each of their locations, to go to some of the very points that Ms Bath was raising today. A 15-kilometre radius of a given site covers over 700 square kilometres. In metropolitan areas this covers many diverse suburbs and hundreds of

existing early childhood services. For example, in the areas within 15 kilometres of the Fawkner and Sunshine ELCs, there are 836 existing early childhood services. A 15-kilometre radius for ELCs in metropolitan areas also extends to other unrelated local childcare markets. For example, a 15-kilometre radius around the Fawkner ELC stretches from Southbank to Craigieburn and includes suburbs as diverse as Brunswick, Kew, South Morang, Wollert, Airport West, Kensington and Braybrook. Services this far apart are simply not a valid substitute for one another. They are not a valid substitute or a valid option for the families looking for a local service, and I suggest that those who think otherwise might like to have that conversation with their local families.

It is important to note that analysis as part of the ACCC's childcare inquiry showed that parents and guardians typically consider and prefer centre-based day care services located close to their home, not 15 kilometres away, let alone within a 700-kilometre radius. Most households travel a short distance to access their chosen service. This is by those opposite merely a delaying tactic to waste the Department of Education's time and resources. They sit here and say they are concerned about budgetary impacts – this is a waste of time and it is a waste of resources. Like the member for Euroa, the government's focus is on delivering and opening the 50 ELCs, not delaying the delivery of this reform through useless exercises like that we are seeing from those opposite now.

The third element of the reasoned amendment requires the government to conduct:

... an analysis on the childcare workforce implications of the new government ELC sites, including:

- (a) establishing the workforce vacancy rates around the locations of the new sites;
- (b) providing the house with a comprehensive plan on how the government will ensure existing childcare centres and kindergartens are not disadvantaged in their ability to recruit and retain staff in their existing programs ...

Again, this is nothing but a tactic by those opposite to delay the delivery of this reform. Government ELCs will grow their own workforce through initiatives and local partnerships with training providers to encourage and support more people to join the early childhood sector. The shadow minister in the other place was provided in writing – and I am sorry if she has not shared it with you – on 15 February this year the comprehensive details of the Best Start, Best Life workforce strategy.

The \$370 million workforce strategy has already expanded the workforce considerably. This work includes over 4000 scholarships having been awarded to remove financial barriers and support more people to become early childhood teachers; up to 1700 educators have been supported to upskill to become teachers through the innovative initial teacher education initiative; over 200 students have been supported through the early childhood educator traineeships program to work in the sector while completing their qualifications; almost 1000 teachers have participated in the end-to-end workforce supports program, including coaching for early career professionals; almost 2000 grants have been awarded to assist teachers to progress to full registration; over 4000 professionals have engaged with the three-year-old teaching toolkit to support evidence-informed practice; and over 1200 experienced teachers have participated in the effective mentoring program to ensure that their knowledge and expertise is shared with early career teachers. As I noted before, the shadow minister was made aware of this and whether she decided to share those details with her colleagues is a matter for her, but Ms Lovell's comments and those of many of those opposite today suggest that she did not.

The fourth element of this reasoned amendment requires the government to provide:

... an estimate of the budget impact of the operating costs for the government ELCs scheduled to open in 2025 and 2026.

Again, this is nothing but a tactic by those opposite to delay this reform. I am not the Treasurer, and those opposite should know well that operational funding to the early learning centres will be reported through the budget papers in the usual way.

I struggle to reconcile the reasoned amendment from those opposite with their comments that they want the government to increase child care provision. You simply cannot have it both ways. You either

want us to do so and will withdraw this reasoned amendment and support the bill, or you do not. We will make sure that Victorians who live near the four centres to open in 2025 know that those opposite did not want them to have access to those childcare centres. The centres opening in 2025 include the Eaglehawk North Primary School early learning and childcare centre, the Moomba Park Primary School early learning and childcare centre, the Murtoa College early learning and childcare centre and the Sunshine Primary School early learning and childcare centre. For these reasons, we do not support the reasoned amendment that has been brought forward by Ms Lovell.

Whilst we will continue to advocate to the Commonwealth for increased child care availability to ensure that Victorians in every corner of the state have access to child care, today there is an opportunity for those in this place to do something about the provision of child care in Victoria. This bill is a major milestone for the community, and its passage will pave the way for a new Victorian government employed early childhood workforce. This workforce – the early childhood teachers, educators, leaders and support staff – will be critical to the success of the 50 government early learning centres. I commend this bill to the house.

Council divided on amendment:

Ayes (11): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

Noes (22): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, 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

Amendment negated.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (11:36)

Melina BATH: We can put all our questions in clause 1 and then see how we go if there are some other specific ones. I have just got some general questions, Minister, in relation to enrolments. Have you had any modelling or any estimates done in relation to the enrolments across the 50 centres?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Obviously, by the very definition set in this commitment, these early learning centres (ELCs) are being established in places of anticipated and modelled need. They are designed and have been set in – to use a common colloquial word that has become known in this conversation – deserts but also areas of disadvantage, particularly where families who have additional needs may have trouble finding places in an early learning centre. All of the locations are being set around areas of need.

Melina BATH: I guess I am seeking to understand a quantum of, firstly, enrolments, but secondly, the workforce required for those 50. Have you done any modelling on the number of employees – front-facing educational experts – I will call them early learning teachers? Have you done any work or modelling on those?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Obviously the size of the ELCs – there will be a range. They will range in size from 57 places to 146 places, and the size and configuration of each ELC is being determined through that modelling around unmet need. The regulated childcare ratios are not relevant for the purposes of this bill, but in answer to your question – and I think some people's contributions went to this earlier, that issue of ratios – unmet kindergarten demand and feedback from local stakeholders

mean that across those centres, across those licensed places, the workforce demands will be different in each of them. The types of roles that we will need to employ range from the director of the centre through to the cooks and those who clean the centre, so there is a range of both educative and also support work that will happen, and based on the size and ratios within the centre it will be different in each and every one of them.

Melina BATH: In terms of the location, you have certainly heard my contribution, and I know this bill does not go specifically into the locations, but the locations are highly relevant in terms of the workforce that we have just spoken about and the need. You have announced there are three to open in the next year and another 10 by 2026. How close are you to making public the announcements of the location of those other 37, and if not now, when do you think you will have those locations locked in?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Obviously, as I said in my summing-up, there are the initial ones to open in 2025, where we have the very specific sites. There are 14 in total where we have the location and continue to do the work. I do not intend to make any announcements here today, but obviously the areas are known for the remaining 50, and that important planning and strategy work, which so many people asked for in their contributions, on exactly where the right places are for those is underway.

Just to further supplement my previous answer, I do have some approximate numbers – overall, not by centre – here in relation to the workforce composition as a whole. To go to your earlier question, Ms Bath, if it is at all helpful, we anticipate that there will be approximately 690 educators; 100 teachers; 50 centre directors for the 50 early learning centres – and in some centres there will be assistant directors, based on the size and needs of the centre; educational leaders; around 50 admin supports; and around 70 cooks. So that is just to further supplement my previous answer, if that is at all helpful for you.

Melina BATH: That is most helpful. If I can take you to the Department of Education, this is basically inserting these early learning centres into the education department. My understanding is, and correct me if I am wrong, that there are four school-related verticals or entities in the education department. We have got the school education programs and support, we have got the Victorian School Building Authority, we have got schools and regional services and we have got the schools workforce. Where will the new ELC workforce sit in the education department? Will it sit within one of those, or will it be established as a separate entity as well?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: I am advised by the education department officials who are here with us today that there will be a new business unit set up within the early childhood part of the department.

Melina BATH: That is great. From a regional point of view, how will they be auspiced? Will there be regional offices? Will each of the regional offices have the new business unit situated in them, or is it solely in the CBD top?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: That will be a matter for the secretary of the department – the organisation of that business unit.

Melina BATH: I guess I will put on record my request that when you do have these new regional centres that there is access to be able to meet the needs of those centres. We have got our regional departments – for example, in Moe. I will just put on record I guess my request for the secretary to actually note the benefit of having proximity to those centres by having them embedded in the regional offices, where it is deemed beneficial. I do not know if you want to speak to that.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Only simply to say that we can keep you updated in the usual way through the annual report, which obviously reports on staffing.

Melina BATH: Great. That sounds good. Will the government ELCs have organisational governance structures similar to schools? Will there be that leadership principle and the like, or if not, have you done that work? What would that governance structure look like?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The bill does not provide for the establishment of school council type governance bodies or those kinds of governance structures that we are used to in a school setting, as I went through when I spoke to the types of employees that will be within the centres. It looks very similar to what we see in centres that I am sure we all visit at the moment, where you have a centre director, you have teachers and educators as well as sometimes, depending on the size of the centre, an assistant director. It is that early childhood model that we are all very familiar with.

Melina BATH: I guess in that, if there is an important philosophy, which is that it is very helpful to be co-located on public school land, and you have talked about the double drop-off, noting that parents can be on a school committee or the school board et cetera, will there be any provision for that entity not to be included in – forgive me, I forgotten the word – a school parents group? Could that umbrella be extended to the ELCs?

Minister, the word I was looking for was ‘council’; I apologise. Could that be expanded to be in the school council?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Thank you. I was going to ask for further clarification around where you were going there. The bill, as I said in my previous answer, does not provide for the establishment of school council type governance bodies, but it does not preclude it. That said, and to go to your point about co-location, you will not actually hear me overuse the phrase ‘double drop-off’, because I take some of the points you made earlier. Avoiding double drop-offs can be logistically helpful for families, but they are also not the guiding principle, if you like. The provision of the service itself and of course child development are first and foremost the main objectives, and in supporting that we know that co-location is often best, in terms of both providing the best possible service as well as providing the transition through early learning and kindergarten into school. It is obviously not the only way, and in communities such as yours it is not the way very often, because of distance and whatnot as well; we recognise that. So where they are co-located it is not precluded that they could be part of the school council arrangement, but certainly this bill does not do anything that sets up a school council governance type of arrangement.

Melina BATH: Minister – and I will not lead the witness – in relation to feedback and complaints about the mechanism that you will be establishing, what is put in place for parents and the community to provide feedback and complaints around the mechanism of establishing this? I am asking about feedback from whether it be school councils, parents or the community.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: In terms of if you are referring to a merit board or disciplinary appeals board, those types of matters, it is intended that they be addressed through departmental policy or ministerial orders that apply to the ELC workforce. But of course when we are talking about children, when we are talking about child safe standards and when we are talking about the regulatory environment that oversees these early learning centres, there is a range of measures and practices, depending on what the complaint might be about, that would be the most appropriate place to take that complaint. Without being more specific about the nature of a given complaint, whether we are talking about a workforce complaint, a quality complaint, a safeguarding complaint or whatever it might be, for all of those measures it is obviously intended that the early learning centres are operating at the highest possible standards with the highest possible levels of accountability.

Melina BATH: This is the last question from me for a little while, and I am happy to share it around otherwise. This probably goes to a point – and there is no accusation here – where there is concern about the standards being implemented. In terms of child safe standards, how does the bill ensure child safety with regard to employment of people who will be working with children? I hope we can all agree, and I am sure we do, that it is vital to have the best people in front of our children. How will this bill capture that, and what will this new subdepartment of the education department do to ensure those child safe standards are not only complied with but a total philosophy in the centres?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As I was saying, early childhood services in ELCs are obviously subject to the national quality framework and regulated by the state's early childhood regulator in line with all other centre-based services in Victoria, which means that they meet the requirements of the Education and Care Services National Law and the national regulations, which include things like ratios and whatnot, as we were talking about before; the quality of the educational programs; the safety, health and wellbeing of children; as well as the physical requirements at the premises, such as the required indoor and outdoor spaces. Those services are obviously assessed and regulated by Victoria's regulator of early childhood education services, the Quality Assessment and Regulation Division, or QARD, and it is responsible for regulating around 5000 services in Victoria at the current point in time, including outside school hours care. It is an independent regulator. Of course if we are to go specifically to child safe standards and how they apply and are managed, the safety of young children attending ELCs is obviously of paramount concern and importance to all of us in this place. An organisation delivering services to children under 18 years of age, including approved education and care services, maternal and child health services and ELCs, will be required to implement and comply with the 11 child safe standards and will be held accountable in the usual way for those.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Just on that note, with that explanation – and thank you, Minister, so much for it – my own background is with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and registration, so this is a new area for me. Your early childhood services regulator is an independent group, you have said, and an independent regulator, so this is obviously still under the function and oversight of the department, is that right? Even though it is an independent regulator, is it the department and you as the minister who oversee this particular regulator and the registration? We do not see it at any time becoming some sort of merger with VIT – is it going to remain an independent regulator which will have oversight for child safety and obviously the workers that work within the function of early childhood education? Could you just confirm that, explain that and maybe expand a little bit more on that, please?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Just to take a step back, and then I will come specifically to VIT registration, the early childhood services that will operate out of the early learning centres are subject to the national quality framework and regulated by the state's early childhood regulator in line with all centre-based services in Victoria, so that means they need to meet the requirements of the education services national law and the national regulations, including educator-to-child staffing ratios; staffing qualifications; educational programs; the safety, health and wellbeing of children; and physical premises such as indoor and outdoor spaces. That is national law. So that is something that education ministers around the Commonwealth obviously agreed to universally. The early childhood services in ELCs will be assessed and regulated by Victoria's regulator of early childhood education and care services, which is QARD, and QARD is responsible for regulating, as I said to Ms Bath, around 5000 services across Victoria and that includes outside school hours care. As an independent regulator, QARD is able to respond to any non-compliances identified in ELCs in the same way it responds to other non-compliances. Teachers within the early education setting obviously have VIT registration, and that will be sufficient for early childhood teachers applying to work in government ELCs in relation to their working with children checks and so forth, and it is also intended that such eligibility criteria be outlined in the ministerial orders which will follow the act.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: So the teachers have the VIT registration. The ELCs are all with the independent regulator as well – those who are not teachers staffed within them. I was just wanting to clarify that. Up until recently there have been an awful lot of local governments that have played a significant role on the administrative side of ELCs. Has any consideration been given to whether local government could play an administrative role in the operation of these centres in terms of how this is going to be rolled out?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: These are government owned and operated early learning centres. Our partnerships with local government and indeed partners outside of local government in the delivery of early years education, particularly when we come to talking about our Best Start, Best Life reforms

and kinder, are extremely important, but when we are talking about these 50 early learning centres, the commitment is very specifically that they are government owned and operated.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I know we have already asked the question in terms of child safety, and obviously that is always going to be a concern. In terms of ensuring that this bill is making sure that we have that child safety element, can you just clarify, because you have gone through everything else. I know with VIT there have to be police checks. With the other staff I am assuming that the independent regulator also makes sure that there are up-to-date police checks for child safety and that this is just somehow incorporated into this bill in some form. Can you confirm or clarify that, Minister?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: A person is obviously eligible for employment in a position in the early learning centre workforce if that person satisfies the eligibility criteria that is set out in the ministerial order, and the criteria will include all qualification requirements under the Education and Care Services National Law and Education and Care Services National Regulations, which does go to my point earlier. A person would not be eligible for employment in any position in the government ELC workforce if the person has at any time been convicted or found guilty of a category A offence in Victoria or equivalent offence in another jurisdiction or been given a working with children exclusion. A copy of all successful applicants' qualifications if applicable, their teacher registration if applicable, and of course their working with children check if applicable would need to be submitted during the recruitment process. And to go to the discussion we were just previously having in relation to VIT registration, since the schemes are aligned, VIT registration would be sufficient for early childhood teachers who are applying to work in the government ELCs, and such eligibility criteria is intended to be outlined in the ministerial order rather than in the act.

To go to the point again in relation to the child safe standards, these are of the utmost importance. The safety of young children attending ELCs is obviously something that we are all particularly concerned about. In my role as Minister for Children, having responsibility for child safety in a range of other forums, I am particularly interested in ensuring that the child safe standards are universally applied and absolutely upheld, and the 11 child safe standards will apply in these forums as they do in others.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: I note the bill provides for the secretary to restrict part-time employees from other paid employment that may conflict with their duties. What might be considered a conflict under new section 2A.1.7?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: It is not intended to be that a particular job necessarily creates a conflict but where that job or the undertaking of that other work may in some way impact on the capacity of the person to deliver those safety standards. If someone, for example, was working all night somewhere else and then turning up to look after small children the next morning, that type of arrangement might put a child at risk and so would not be suitable. It is not intended to necessarily restrict another type of particular job and name that job as it is about ensuring that the person who turns up to work to look after small children is fit and able to do so.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Regarding the requirement for employees to submit to a medical exam to determine their fitness, what are the likely criteria a prospective employee would have to meet?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Obviously, as we were just speaking about, it is important that any employee in an ELC is fit and able to perform their duties. As an employee in a government ELC workforce a person must follow a direction from the secretary. Where that does not happen normal procedures for failing to follow that direction may apply, but the intention is to ensure that the person is fit and able to look after the children in their care.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

*Members***Minister for Corrections***Absence*

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:01): Before we start question time I would like to inform the house that Minister Erdogan is on leave today. For the purposes of question time I will be accepting questions for the portfolios of corrections, youth justice and victim support.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements***Williams Landing planning**

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:01): (453) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Following the closure of a RAAF airfield in 1996, much of the land was sold and redeveloped into the residential precinct now known as Williams Landing, where thousands of families now live. The 2022 RAAF PFAS management area plan for the site indicates that there is a high likelihood of residual PFAS compounds in that soil due to the firefighting activities that took place there. The economic, environmental and health risks arising from PFAS contamination have been known since 2017, and as parts of Williams Landing were completed in 2018, my question is: did the government know about and take every possible precaution prior to allowing the redevelopment of this toxic site into residential housing so as to avoid the risk of PFAS adversely impacting the health and safety of the residents and the financial value of their homes?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:02): Thank you, Mrs Deeming, for that question. I will absolutely pass that on to the Minister for Planning. As I think we have discussed a couple of times in this chamber, there may well be an overlap with the Minister for Environment. But in the context of a response being provided to you under the standing orders, why don't we see if we can actually get a combined response that addresses the PFAS/PFOS issue and the planning rezoning issue concurrently.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:03): I appreciate it; Thank you very much. My supplementary is: could the Minister for Planning please provide information as to who made the decisions regarding any investigations undertaken in the rezoning of that land to ensure that it was suitable for a residential development, and if not, who made the decision that those investigations were not necessary?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:03): Mrs Deeming, that one does fall more squarely, I think, within the remit of the Minister for Planning, so to that end I will seek an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

Vocational education and training

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:03): (454) My question is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE. I refer the minister to the recent Productivity Commission *Report on Government Services*, which shows that Victoria is the lowest funded state for vocational education and training. Historic data shows Victoria has been the lowest funded state for a decade, except for one year during the pandemic when it was second lowest. Minister, is this what your government means when it refers to 'saving TAFE'?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:04): I thank the member for his question, and I do find it really interesting that they have a play on words with 'saving TAFE' given that they shut down 22 campuses and they sacked over 2000 workers and TAFEs were just hanging in there – it was just a matter of flicking the switch off. It was our government that was elected, and we were elected on a saving TAFE platform, which we have been able to do. Not only have we saved TAFE, we have rebuilt TAFE and we have rebuilt

the whole vocational education and training system. Four billion dollars has been invested into the Victorian skills and training system, and we have seen Victorians save something like \$436 million in tuition fees. So there is a lot that we are proud of, complete with a determination to ensure that there is an alignment between what is delivered and the jobs that are out there in the labour market. That is exactly what we are doing, and that is exactly what we saw at William Angliss Institute this morning with the Premier.

The fact of the matter is that the ROGS data showed Victorian growth in VET expenditure per hour had outpaced the national average since 2014. The real recurrent expenditure increase from 2014 to 2022 for Victoria went from \$11.65 to \$17.19; that is a 48 per cent increase. During the same period the national average only increased by 27 per cent – that is, \$16.39 to \$20.86 per hour. Since 2014, as I have said, this Victorian government has invested over \$4 billion in our TAFE system. That has been not just in terms of free TAFE, it has also been in the whole Skills First contract system, not to mention the capital works that we have invested in. You only have to go down to Collingwood and see that fantastic facility being built, which will be opened shortly. Member Sheena Watt will be with me shortly with respect to that. There is a fantastic new facility at Broadmeadows, three storeys high, which will complement the health and allied health courses that need to be delivered, particularly for our local Broadmeadows multicultural community. We have also built brand new campuses at Morwell and Sale. We have also undertaken massive refurbishments right across the state.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:07): Minister, does the government plan to increase its vocational education and training funding at all or at least in line with other states?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:07): I believe I have answered that question, because the supplementary is exactly the same as the substantive question. We have a proud record in terms of our investments in skills and training in this state. This is something that those opposite will never be able to attest to, because they have no interest in vocational education and training and they certainly do not have any interest in public provision or indeed TAFE.

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, it was a very simple question asking if the government would increase funding in line with other states.

Harriet Shing: On the point of order, Mr Mulholland, the very first sentence that the minister made in her response to the supplementary question was ‘I believe that I have answered that question in my answer to the substantive question.’ In addition to that, ministers cannot be compelled as to how they answer a question. It is in the standing orders.

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, Minister Shing is debating. It is not a point of order.

The PRESIDENT: I will respond to the original point of order. I believe the minister has been relevant to the question she was asked. It is not for the Presiding Officer to make the minister answer in a way that will make the person asking the question happy.

Ministers statements: women

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:09): I rise today to celebrate and recognise the extraordinary contribution of women across my three portfolios of housing, equality and water. In Victoria equality is not negotiable, and we know that all too often LGBTIQ+ women, which includes trans and gender-diverse women, are in fact at the heart of the work we are doing in our 10-year plan *Pride in Our Future*. This is about inclusion, engagement, safety, dignity, recognition and visibility. I am proud to stand with my LGBTIQ+ sisters around the state and indeed around Australia to confirm that we will stand with our communities to make sure that equality continues to be delivered under an Allan Labor government.

In housing we are determined to support opportunities for women in projects, housing programs and construction under our *Building Equality Policy*. We do know that one fantastic example is the Dunlop

Avenue redevelopment, supported by the Big Housing Build, in Ascot Vale. Forty-two per cent of the construction effort in that project was in fact provided by women.

We also know that there is a huge shout-out needed for women working across our social and community services sector, whose work value has been the subject of an equal remuneration order following the pay equity test case advanced and championed by the late great Linda White. I also want to acknowledge Sarah Toohey, Deb Di Natale, Caitlin Butters, Jennifer Beveridge and Juanita Pope from a range of different housing organisations who advocate tirelessly for residents for community services and for the sector.

Across water, there are so many wonderful examples of women in water from the technical and scientific space right through to the work of the corporations, agencies and authorities. It was wonderful to see that Barwon Water has increased women in technical support roles from 3 to 26 per cent. I am a proud supporter of so many of the women in water, and I commend them for their work ahead of this International Women's Day.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the next question, I acknowledge in the chamber a former member of the chamber, Marg Lewis.

Clyde North fire services

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:11): (455) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, senior station officer Geoff Baker has stated in the media today that if the Clyde North fire station had been built as promised there would have been significantly less damage caused by the fire at Spartan Avenue, Clyde North. Minister, will you apologise to the families and my constituents who are facing substantial damage to their homes and cars?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:12): I thank Mrs Hermans for her question. Mrs Hermans, I gave an answer on Tuesday which outlined the response to that fire. I also outlined that the first response came from a nearby satellite station, and I informed the house that they arrived within service delivery standard time lines. What I did not know at the time but had confirmed after I answered that question is that that satellite unit is 700 metres away from the fire. I thank that unit for responding to that fire. As I indicated, it was a fire that developed very quickly, but the response that it received was in line with service delivery standards and came from a variety of units, including the Berwick, Narre Warren, Hampton Park and Beaconsfield units. As I said and will repeat, the Clyde CFA tanker was the first on the scene, arriving from the satellite station that is 700 metres from the fire. In relation to the Clyde North fire station and the future of that project, the planning is well underway. But in response to that community, the government continues to ensure that the risks are addressed, and the satellite station and its response to that is a demonstration of that commitment.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:13): I thank the minister for responding even though there is no apology that has been given to these families on behalf of the government. Whilst I have heard your response – and I want to shout-out to all those CFA volunteers; they do a great job – the emergency response to the scene took 10 minutes. As residents stood outside their properties watching them burn, they could see the empty site where your government promised them a new fire station. Why has no work commenced on this site, Minister?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:14): Mrs Hermans, there is a lot wrong with your question, including your assertion that it took 10 minutes. I would like you to provide some evidence to back up your claim, because it is wrong. I also have answered much of your question, and I have indicated to you that planning for that fire station is underway.

Ann-Marie Hermans: On a point of order, President, the question was not whether there is planning underway. The question was: why has no work commenced on this site?

The PRESIDENT: The minister was relevant to the question.

Age of criminal responsibility

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:15): (456) My question is to the Attorney-General in relation to the age of criminal responsibility and progressing youth justice reform. Attorney, you have shared that the government chooses not to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 sooner than your announced time line, as First Nations, legal and human rights stakeholders have been calling for. Those stakeholders have made it very clear that much policy work for alternative service models has already been completed, outlined in reports such as those from the Koorie Youth Council, the Commission for Children and Young People and of course the Yoorrook Justice Commission. As well, many alternative service models are currently operational on the ground, and they just need more support and funding. Attorney, what is your response to these stakeholders that believe it is disingenuous to claim to need years to develop alternative service models before raising the age of criminal responsibility to 14 when those models are in large part already developed?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:16): Sorry for the delay; I was just conferring with the Minister for Children. Much of your question goes to the development of the alternative service model, and the Minister for Children and the Minister for Youth Justice have carriage of that area of policy development. But obviously we work very closely, so I can provide you some information, particularly as we have an independent review panel that is undertaking that work. They are very active in their consultation with stakeholders, multicultural groups and health and education departments, and I can assure you that all of the material and bodies that you referenced have been fed into the work that this review panel will do. That panel consists of chair Patricia Faulkner, former secretary of the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and also chair of Jesuit Social Services, and Andrew Crisp, who I think is known to everyone in the chamber. He is really excited about his next venture in terms of contributing to government policy, particularly that which supports young people. Andrew Jackomos was a member of the panel, and he has recently gone off to the Treaty Authority. He has been replaced by a really impressive young Koorie woman, Bonnie Dukakis, and she is from the Koorie Youth Council. Her input is invaluable. We also have Father Joseph Caddy, a former prison chaplain and vicar-general of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne and former chief executive officer of CatholicCare, and Lisa Ward, who is the deputy chair of the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council and director of the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders.

It is a really impressive group of people who are going to provide advice to government on not only the evidence and research that you have indicated but how to indeed make that a reality for government policy in relation to ensuring that more and more people are diverted away from the youth justice system. Question time is not the opportunity to legislate, but I reaffirm the government's commitment to bringing in legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12 this year, and we will have an opportunity to review and debate that bill in due course. At the same time government is concurrently developing the alternative service model, as I have indicated, to support that important work.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): I thank the Attorney for providing all of that information, acknowledging the work does span multiple portfolios. I appreciate that. Attorney, can you give some indication of when the independent review panel will conclude the consultation phase, the time lines around the provision of its recommendations to government and when those might be made public?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:20): Ms Copsey, I was trying to be really helpful on the first question, but this panel does not report to me. It is important work, it is ongoing and it will inform current and future policy development. We expect this to be a body that has genuine and continual access to both the Minister for Children and the Minister for Youth Justice, and I am really keen to engage with them as well. They are on the ground talking to a lot of people. If they have ideas and suggestions outside of just developing an alternative service model, we are all ears. I know that they are particularly interested in the intersection of health

and education and how those programs can support people to be diverted away from the justice system. I am excited about their work. I think it will be not just a final report but a valuable source of guidance and advice to government across the board.

Ministers statements: early childhood education

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:21): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is investing to build more kindergartens and places and modern early learning facilities through Building Blocks partnerships with local councils.

Last week I had the pleasure of attending the Langwarrin Community Centre and announcing a new \$14.25 million Building Blocks partnership between the Allan Labor government and the Frankston City Council, alongside the member for Frankston and the member for Hastings in the other place. The partnership will support three new kindergarten projects, creating up to 248 new three- and four-year-old places across the municipality. It includes up to \$6.75 million to deliver a new integrated children’s centre at the Langwarrin Community Centre, creating up to 119 kinder places for families, and it will also include services like maternal and child health and parent education programs, bringing together those early years services that are so important for families across the board. Bringing these types of services together makes it easier for parents to navigate those services in the early years for their children and creates a space that is safe for parents and families.

The Baden Powell kindergarten will be redeveloped to create a new three-room kindergarten, with a separate room for maternal and child health services, again bringing together those important early years services in one location. Opening in 2025, this facility will deliver an additional 85 kindergarten places for the local community.

With the addition of the Frankston partnership, the Labor government has now entered Building Blocks partnerships with 13 local councils since 2021. Across the state this means 82 new and expanded kindergartens and more than 10,214 extra kinder places where they are needed most. These projects continue our massive program of building, modernising and expanding kinders across the state. It is the next step in our nation-leading reforms in early learning, which have already delivered two years of free kindergarten for every child. In addition, our Best Start, Best Life reforms are increasing the hours of kindergarten so that every three-year-old will now have between 5 and 15 hours of kindergarten. By 2029 this will be 15 hours for all three-year-olds.

Emergency communication services

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:23): (457) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. When storms lashed Victoria last month, many in communities like mine were unable to make calls to 000, and 39 Ambulance Victoria branches were without mains power. On 15 February the CEO of Bass Coast Health said on ABC radio that local residents were advised to drive themselves to emergency help. Minister, why are Victorians being told to drive themselves to hospitals and police stations because they cannot get through to 000?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:23): Dr Heath, I share your concerns about people’s inability to contact 000 during those emergencies, but what I want to clarify here is that it was not Triple Zero Victoria where the issue was. What it was was Telstra towers and other telecommunication towers where the power had gone out, and they either did or did not have appropriate backup systems, whether automatic ones or the ability to get generators to those particular towers to ensure that they could be activated for communication purposes. Separating out the fact that it is not a Triple Zero Victoria issue, it is a telecommunications issue, in my role in emergency services where that becomes more relevant is my role in helping the emergency management commissioner coordinate emergency response. The State Control Centre and the local ICCs in emergencies have representatives that are responsible for energy, telecommunications and a

range of things, whether it is agriculture or education. Everybody comes together and determines the response to an emergency.

When it comes to communications, it is a vital, critical service, and therefore action was taken to ask the telecommunications companies and the energy companies: what did you need from an emergency services response to help you ensure you could put power back on and telecommunications back on? What the emergency management commissioner did was create a power and energy deputy controller in conjunction with the roads portfolio because we wanted to make sure that any access to those towers that were without power, which were impacting the ability of people to call 000, or ring anyone actually – that was the issue; it was not just a 000 issue, no-one could use their phones because the communications tower was out and they were blamed because the power was out.

I know that the Minister for Government Services is in conversations with telecommunications companies just the same as the minister for energy is in conversations with the power companies about making sure that their emergency services mitigation measures are up to scratch, making sure that they have generators available. As I said, our response was ensuring that the emergency response was prioritising access, clearing roads and the like to make sure that vehicles that could provide generators could attend, for example.

We rely on advice from the telecommunications companies about their assets in a disaster area. For example, when I flew over the fire out in the Grampians the air desk had –

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am explaining the emergency response to protecting critical assets. So from the air you could see that the air desk had directed the planes to put retardant – *(Time expired)*

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:27): I thank the minister for her response. Minister, what impact did the loss of power and connections to 000 have on Ambulance Victoria's ability to attend to medical emergencies?

The PRESIDENT: I will let the minister answer if she wishes. I think the supplementary has gone to a bigger issue than the substantive, but I will let the minister answer as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:27): Dr Heath, I think my broad response was addressing some of the issues that you have raised. Coming back to your substantive question in relation to Bass Coast, probably where I left off was the engagement with local councils as well, and also I would like to thank them. A lot of them set up with their generators the ability for people to come and access information, have a shower – all of the issues that were a response to being without power. A lot of that included advice in relation to how long it might take for 000 to be reconnected et cetera. But I can assure you that across government we understand the importance of communication in an emergency, and that is a priority. That is why there is a response at the time and also after the event, bringing in the power companies and bringing in the telecommunications companies to make sure that in any future emergencies there is the appropriate response to ensure that communications are a priority for people in a time of need, such as every emergency.

Melbourne medically supervised injecting facility

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:29): (458) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. Last week it was reported that the Labor government is considering supporting a drug-checking program, potentially at the expense of proceeding with plans for a second medically supervised injecting room. Putting aside the stigmatising language and framing used in that reporting, MSIRs are a completely different harm reduction approach for a completely different public health concern, as I know the minister is aware. Does the minister acknowledge the need for both harm reduction measures in Victoria?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:29): Thank you very much for your question. These are really important issues. I think that the government has demonstrated in a number of different ways its ability to look at this complex set of issues in a way that responds to the particular needs of particular drug harms. I think that the strongest evidence of that is in some of the innovative programs that we have pursued, including the injecting service in North Richmond, which as we have discussed in this place many times, has saved a significant number of lives and continues –

A member: How many?

Ingrid STITT: Over 60 lives. Sixty-three lives have been saved to date at that facility. I thank the staff and the clinicians involved in that really important service for the work that they continue to do to try to help turn people's lives around.

We certainly are committed to making sure that we continue to invest in our alcohol and other drug services, including our AOD workforce. We are very cognisant of the fact that there are different interventions and policy responses required for different types of illicit drug activity. As you would have heard the Premier and me say in relation to drug checking and some of the issues that have arisen over this summer – for example, the Hardmission Festival, where a number of young Victorians were hospitalised – we have asked our health department for some contemporary advice around those issues, and we will continue to look at these issues and take a harm reduction approach.

In respect to the member's question regarding the second injecting service in the CBD, I think I was pretty clear in my answers in the house yesterday that the Lay report is something that the government is currently considering. We will be providing a comprehensive government response to that report in due course.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:32): I thank the minister for her answer. Yesterday in response to related questions about this report by Mr Mulholland, you stated that the government's decision about an MSIR would take into account changing patterns of drug use. Minister, by talking about changing patterns of drug use, are you preparing the ground for abandoning a second MSIR?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:32): I thank Dr Mansfield for her supplementary question. I think that you are probably drawing inferences from my answer yesterday. I think what I was actually saying was that the government had asked Mr Lay to update and provide further advice to the government, recognising that during the pandemic there had been changes to drug patterns in the CBD. In terms of the government's response in relation to those matters, that will be the subject of further discussion at cabinet level. The government will give careful consideration to Mr Lay's recommendations and will report that publicly in due course.

Ministers statements: TAFE funding

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:33): Today is a great day: we are celebrating five years since the introduction of free TAFE. Since 2019 more than 157,000 students have had the chance to get the skills they need for the jobs they want, while saving \$436 million in fees. At the William Angliss Institute this morning the Premier and I met with students undertaking free TAFE courses in hospitality and tourism. Three of the four new courses added to the free TAFE list for 2024 are delivered at the William Angliss Institute: kitchen management, hospitality management and tourism. William Angliss is providing the graduates for Victoria's world-class hospitality industry enjoyed by international visitors, including megastar Taylor Swift.

As of 2023, free TAFE has been expanded so all Victorians can upskill for in-demand jobs, regardless of their existing qualification level, and study additional free TAFE courses within the same priority pathway. In 2023 some of the most popular free TAFE courses were the diploma of nursing, the

certificate IV in training and assessment for the teacher shortage, the certificate IV in cybersecurity, the certificate IV in accounting and bookkeeping, the diploma of community services and early childhood education, just to name a few. All of these priority industries are facing current workforce shortages. At the William Angliss Institute today we heard that industry is seeking out TAFE graduates and many current students are already earning while they learn, because TAFE training is so desirable. The difference between us and those opposite could not be more stark. No matter how much those opposite try to denigrate TAFE, Victorians understand that only Labor supports TAFE, only Labor supports public provision – *(Time expired)*

Bushfire preparedness

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:35): (459) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. For 60 years the BOM used the McArthur forest fire danger ratings to provide fire weather warnings. Labor has now replaced this successful warning system with the fire behaviour index. Emergency Management Victoria now issues warnings based on the fire behaviour index. What evidence did the minister receive to advise this change?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:36): Ms Bath, you are conflating my role as Minister for Emergency Services. You have indicated practices from the Bureau of Meteorology, which is a federal government agency. It is great that we have them present in the State Control Centre, because they are invaluable in providing advice about weather predictions and fire index concerns, which then the fire analysers can use to inform operational decisions. It is not a decision that I make, and when you talk about the fire rating system, that is a national approach. It is not a Victoria-only system. Every state has bought into it. It is a national system. Given in the last three weeks we have had two catastrophic days and we have had extreme days that have resulted in emergency situations impacting communities, having that advice and being able to provide warnings to communities saves lives. I am very proud of the emergency services response and all of those that support it, from the BOM to the analysts to the planners to the logistics people. They are all there to protect Victorians, and I thank them for their work.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:38): Thank you, Minister. Minister, comparing the two models for the date of 28 February, according to Australian bushfire scientist David Packham, for Horsham on the 28th – the McArthur rating system was the warning system that Emergency Management Victoria put out to the public in the past – the new fire behaviour rating was forecast at 99. The rating of the previous one, the McArthur system, was 56 for that day – if it had have been issued previously. This day now was at 99, leading to a catastrophic warning. Under the same weather conditions, will there be more catastrophic warnings using the new system compared to the McArthur system?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:39): I am a little concerned about the framing of your questions and the foundation of your concern. Warnings go out to ensure that people are provided information and can activate their fire plans and make sure that they can make plans in relation to responding to hopefully what does not occur. But being able to warn people about these concerns is absolutely integral. We have had three catastrophic days in the last 10 years under the current system. If you trace back to the past 10 years, it is only three days under both the old system and the current system that were deemed catastrophic. I cannot tell you what the future weather patterns are. The BOM are very good at that; that is their expertise. But going forward we do know that there will be more frequent, more severe weather events. I am very glad that we have a predictive tool and those that can interpret the advice that we get from the BOM to provide appropriate warnings for fire, flood, storms, tsunamis and earthquakes so that the Victorian public can respond appropriately and our emergency services can prepare and protect.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Before I call the next question can I acknowledge in the gallery a former member of the Assembly, former Speaker of the Assembly and the toughest committee chair I ever worked with, Judy Maddigan.

Kialla West Primary School

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:40): (460) My question is for the Minister for Children. On Friday the minister announced that Kialla West Primary School will be the site of a new kindergarten built on the campus. The school is home to the most dangerous school crossing in Victoria, with children navigating the Goulburn Valley Highway morning and afternoon each school day. The crossing was the site of a horrific collision when a vehicle occupied by a school family was struck by a truck during school pick-up. Minister, what consultation did you or your department undertake with Kialla West Primary School, specifically the leadership, the school council and the wider school community, prior to making the decision to establish a kindergarten at the school?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:41): I thank the member very much for her question. As we were just talking about in discussion in relation to the bill that is currently being debated in the house, the consultation that occurs when we are looking for where we are rolling out the infrastructure for our Best Start, Best Life reforms from our kindergartens on school sites and upgrading kindergartens through to our new 50 government owned and operated early learning centres is indeed extensive. We consult with the community. We consult with the school. We look at where there is the greatest unmet need in terms of being able to ensure that children for their first 1000 days are getting the best start to life.

We know that an important part of that is co-located services, which is kindergartens on school sites. This provides the amazing opportunity to ensure that we can provide a kindergarten where there is also a school, where we can then ensure that families can build those connections and those communities within that kindergarten and school environment and that will lead to improved school readiness over time as well. The extensive consultation that does happen and the planning and strategy that the Department of Education undertakes is broad. It looks at unmet demand. It looks at other factors as well.

In relation to the queries that you raised in relation to roads and road safety, I can undertake to have those discussions with the minister responsible for roads and road safety, but that should not undermine the very objective of ensuring that where there is the opportunity we co-locate services. We know that families do not work in silos and neither should government. There should be early education, there should be maternal and child health and there should be the other support services that assist families and children located together so that families can not just ditch the double drop-off but can ensure that in one place they are better connected to the services that help their children develop and grow.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:43): I thank the minister for her reply. This will lead on from that. It has been nearly six years since the collision at the crossing, the physical and emotional effects of which are still felt by the family involved, yet no permanent safety upgrades to the crossing have commenced, let alone been completed. The only real solution is to build a pedestrian underpass under the Goulburn Valley Highway. Considering the new kindergarten could mean more than a hundred new families attending the site and using this crossing, will the minister commit to working with the roads and education ministers to get this underpass constructed to keep the students, families and motorists safe?

The PRESIDENT: I think the prime responsibility for that supplementary question would be with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, but I will allow the minister to answer as far as her consultation with them goes.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:44): Thank you very much, President, and again I thank the member for her question. Without undermining the very principle that we are operating by here, which is the co-location of services for the betterment of child development and also ensuring that we are building education facilities and maternal and child health facilities and service delivery for the entire family, that is the principal objective in terms of being able to deliver kindergartens on school sites. But certainly on the substantive matters that your question goes to about roads and road safety, I am more than happy to

ensure that those elements are included in the consultation and to discuss those matters with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, who would be able to more directly respond to your actual request.

Ministers statements: aged care

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:45): I rise to speak about our public sector residential aged care facilities and the highly skilled staff that run them. Last month I had the pleasure to join members Michaela Settle and Juliana Addison in visiting some of our fantastic facilities in the west of the state: Grant Lodge, operated by Western Health in Bacchus Marsh, and Steele Haughton and Talbot Place, operated by Grampians Health. It was a pleasure to meet with staff and residents and to hear about the day-to-day operation of these services. Our facilities would not be the high-quality services that they are without our amazing skilled care teams that run them: the nurses, the care workers and the administrative staff. I thank them for their work.

I would like to take a moment to make a special acknowledgement of the teams at two health services: Beaufort and Skipton Health Service and Maryborough District Health Service. During the fire events in the west last month, residents from Beaufort nursing home and hostel and Avoca nursing home were safely evacuated in accordance with their emergency management planning. Evacuating an aged care home is no small feat, and I want to thank everyone who contributed to making this an efficient and safe evacuation: the nurses, care workers, health service staff and of course our emergency services, including Ambulance Victoria. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Department of Health officials, who have worked closely with the public sector residential aged care providers to support that continued care. I am pleased to report that the residents are now safely back at home, at both the Beaufort and Avoca services.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:47): That ends question time and ministers statements. Minister Shing will get answers to both questions from Mrs Deeming.

Constituency questions

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:47): (730) My question is for the Minister for Jobs and Industry in the other place. The Victorian government's infrastructure investment over the past 10 years has paid off. We are building the infrastructure needed to sustain our growth as well as creating thousands of new jobs in the process. This investment in jobs is especially apparent in the regions. Victoria's regional unemployment rate of 2.8 per cent is half a percentage point below the national regional average. Moreover, a record 820,000 people in regional Victoria are in work, an increase of almost 25 per cent since a Labor government was elected in 2014. Talking to constituents has reiterated for me how important the government's regional investment has been to local communities. Well-paying jobs in regional areas, training the workforce of the future, all while supporting local communities – this is what I am passionate about. Minister, what projects is the government delivering to support local jobs, specifically in the Eastern Victoria Region?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:48): (731) This constituency question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. I believe that all sides of politics have been working very well on the recovery, noting that Hansen Yuncken is the recovery specialist lead contractor in my patch in Mirboo North and environs, where we have had 44 homes uninhabitable. The question I ask of the minister is: will she provide a statement to the community to elaborate on the parameters of the works plan, the number of subcontractors and the preliminary time lines for works for the rest of 2024, and provide communication to the community about what is going on with the lead contractor?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:49): (732) My constituency question is for the Minister for Racing. In November one of Northern Victoria's local wildlife rescuers stopped at a freeway in Wangaratta North to attend what he thought was a road strike incident. Instead he found not one but two dead dumped greyhounds. Why these greyhounds were killed is not yet clear, but authorities are investigating. What we do know is that new research by the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds has found that 31 greyhounds were killed away from the track in 2023 after being seriously injured, the most of any state in the country. My constituents want to know what the government is doing to investigate these off-track deaths in Northern Victoria.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:50): (733) My question is to the Minister for Women. Can the minister provide an update on how the Allan Labor government is supporting women in my local community across southern metropolitan Melbourne. Last week I met with Nickie, the CEO of St Kilda Gatehouse, to discuss the young women's program. St Kilda Gatehouse is a not-for-profit organisation that has historically supported street-based sex workers in St Kilda, but they have a new program they are running to support some of the vulnerable young women at risk of or affected by sexual exploitation, offering relational support to strengthen protective factors to help vulnerable women experiencing addiction, homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, abuse and isolation. They do amazing work across the southern suburbs of Melbourne. With International Women's Day this week, I would like to both congratulate them for that work but also reiterate that we must continue to reflect on ways that we can all support women's rights, support women at risk of abuse and promote gender equality.

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (734) The Minister for Energy and Resources is, at least in part, responsible for grants for those whose energy went off a few weeks ago – 530,000 households in Victoria and many of them in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan. Those in Southern Metro are in the municipalities of Monash, Glen Eira, Bayside, Boroondara and Whitehorse and a little bit of the City of Melbourne, Port Phillip and Kingston. What I would seek for the minister to do is to release the numbers of outages in those municipalities that occurred and the length of time that those outages occurred for. But what would also be useful in that process is to release the grants and support that have been provided to each of the municipalities and those who are connected in the municipalities. *(Time expired)*

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:52): (735) My question is for the Minister for Education. I have been contacted by a public school council in Western Victoria whose school cannot offer students the same suite of subjects as non-regional schools due to inadequate government funding. This is leading to student attrition in the senior years. Recently the Australian Education Union reported that government schools in Victoria are currently underfunded by over \$2000 per student per year, as against the school resource standard, which when translated to this school's context is at least an additional \$2.125 million a year. That kind of funding could go a long way to addressing the problem at this school, so will the government ensure that public schools are fully funded to the school resource standard so that students at this Western Victorian school have fair access to educational opportunities?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:53): (736) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Transport and traffic are raised as frequent issues in my electorate, but what concerns me is the report in the *Age* today that the proposed outer metropolitan ring road, which would create new links from Thomastown to Craigieburn in the growing west, could

actually be on the chopping block. We saw that a source said the government can fund the loop and the North East Link, but it would take up all money available for other projects. Can the minister confirm if the proposed outer metropolitan ring road will proceed, or is this just another case of the north and the west missing out because of Labor's reckless decision to proceed with the Suburban Rail Loop at all costs?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (737) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it relates to the upgrade of the intersection at Ryans Road and Wattletree Road in Eltham North. I have been contacted recently by a resident who lives near this intersection, and they are concerned about the amount of vegetation that is being removed as part of that upgrade. They have lived in the area for 20 years, and they are worried that, sadly, tree removal is becoming more and more frequent and that it will greatly affect the ever-diminishing wildlife in that area. Can you please provide me and this place with the justification for removing all 18 mature trees at the site rather than a lesser number and advise what impact that will have on visibility and safety at this intersection?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (738) The human impact of the 13 February storms and widespread blackouts continues to reveal the inadequacy of the government's response. There was one unnecessary tragic fatality, with a Victorian dying while their family was unable to call 000 for an ambulance due to Telstra's inactive towers. Dale from Drouin told me that several of his neighbours are elderly and struggled alone for several days from midday on Tuesday until Sunday at 11 pm with no power, no phone services and no welfare checks from authorities. Dale has rightly asked how a First World state prone to natural disasters is not prepared with basic disaster recovery plans that involve checks on the most vulnerable citizens. Will the Minister for Emergency Services commit to reviewing Victoria's emergency planning to ensure elderly and vulnerable Victorians are not isolated and forgotten?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (739) My question is for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. Last week Mr Davis and I attended the Monash Business Awards business breakfast, which was a fantastic event. The MBA's chairman Thomas Pewtress has created an incredible environment for businesses to share common interests and concerns. These business owners are the backbone of our economy and work tirelessly to keep the Victorian economy going. These business owners are ambitious and, like me, hope for a state that encourages small businesses. However, many were deeply concerned about the government's proposed WorkCover reforms. Their premiums have increased, and they have been hit hard when they are already doing it tough. Will the minister commit that, after these reforms take effect, WorkCover premiums will be reduced for these businesses?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (740) Public hearings for the parliamentary inquiry into the Commonwealth Games were held in Bendigo last week. It was evident that the community is still waiting for details in relation to the projects that were committed for Bendigo. My question is to the Premier and is in relation to the new exhibition space, the Bendigo showgrounds, the Bendigo Bowls Club redevelopment, the Bendigo Stadium court expansion and the social and affordable housing development at Flora Hill. I ask her to provide an update for the community on these projects and when works are due to be completed. It is nearly eight months since the Commonwealth Games were cancelled and a \$2 billion alternate funding package was announced, but the Bendigo community is still waiting.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:57): (741) My question is to the Treasurer, and I ask: given the fierce campaign by the South East Melbourne Manufacturers Alliance, or SEMMA as I shall now refer to it, against the substantial increases in land tax affecting Dandenong manufacturers, will the minister provide assurances that he will revisit the temporary changes to land tax rates and thresholds introduced as part of the COVID debt repayment plan and significantly reduce land tax payments to ensure a fair and equitable tax regime that supports the growth and sustainability of manufacturing businesses in Victoria? Reports indicate that land valuations have doubled and tripled in the past year, leading to land tax bills increasing by as much 1000 per cent over five years. With SEMMA representing many of the 267,500 people employed in manufacturing in the south-east region, which is 30 per cent of Australia's manufacturing output, land tax has a significant impact on local businesses, including job losses and hindered investment. Will the minister please also explain what measures the government is planning to take to alleviate the burden on manufacturers, particularly in the Dandenong area, the south-east region and Victoria?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:58): (742) My question is for the Minister for Police. Whittlesea is a growing community, and unfortunately the incidence of crime is growing too. Last year in the Whittlesea LGA criminal incidents went up by 8 per cent. The police officers at Whittlesea station work hard, but their work is made much harder by the disgraceful condition of the police station. The building is rickety, full of asbestos and lacks disabled access. Five years ago minor renovations that added some security features and replaced old doors were done, but that is not good enough. I have been advocating for a new Whittlesea police station for many years. The former member for Yan Yean admitted that the station does not meet modern standards and made a lot of noise about supporting upgrades, but her Labor government colleagues were not interested in delivering for Whittlesea. Minister, will you commit funding for a new police station in Whittlesea?

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

Bills**Education and Training Reform Amendment (Early Childhood Employment Powers) Bill
2024***Committee*

Resumed.

Clause 1 further considered (14:02)

Melina BATH: I only have a couple more questions from my angle. This relates to clause 11. If you do not mind, Minister, I will just ask them on this one – it is not too in-depth, I think. The bill provides for the secretary to restrict part-time employees from other paid employment that may conflict with their duties. What sorts of duties might be considered a conflict in this clause?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Yes, I think this is the issue we were discussing just before question time. It is proposed to restrict government early learning centre (ELC) workforce employees from performing other work, such as providing private services to clients or to the families of clients, due to the potential perception of favourable treatment of some government ELC clients and to reduce any risk to child safety. Full-time employees in the government ELC workforce will also require the express permission of the secretary to engage in any paid employment – which was the issue we were discussing before question time – or engage in conducting a business, profession or trade. Part-time employees may not engage in paid employment outside the department or government ELCs that conflicts with the proper performance of the employees' duties. This is consistent with the government teaching service, and it is really around ensuring that people are fit for work when they turn up to work. In the example in relation to the question that Mrs Hermans asked, we were talking about someone

doing not necessarily a type of work as opposed to potentially hours of work – for example, where someone might work all night and then be expected to look after small children the next day.

Melina BATH: Schoolteachers are employed under the Victorian government schools enterprise bargaining agreement. Is the government looking at a new brand of EBA for the government ELC workforce? How do you envisage the rates of pay in relation to the current Victorian Early Childhood Teachers and Educators Agreement or the Children’s Services Award? What sort of structure and rates of pay were you thinking on, Minister?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: The government ELCs will offer public sector jobs with wages and conditions that are commensurate with enterprise agreements covering similar early childhood services in Victoria. We recognise the importance of our early childhood workforce. Teachers are obviously central to the education of our littlest people and in the delivery of high-quality learning and care. The detailed employment framework will be finalised in 2024, assuming the passage of this bill, in time for the recruitment of staff in the centres that are opening next year. Certainly government expects there will be interest from unions to commence bargaining on an enterprise agreement once members of the workforce are employed in the first four of the ELCs in 2025. Obviously the purpose of this bill is to go to the operations around employing staff, so these are issues that following the passage of this bill will be worked through. But effectively they will be public sector jobs, and we do expect that relevant unions would be interested in establishing enterprise agreements once the new centres are open.

Melina BATH: One final question from me: how will ancillary staff, such as cooks and cleaners, be covered – will they be part of an EBA, or will they be covered by the relevant award already?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Employment in the government ELC workforce obviously will be subject to the relevant awards and terms and conditions of comparable workforces. Under the bill the minister would have the capacity to declare employment arrangements through the ministerial order. This goes to the terms and conditions of employment, including salaries, wages, allowances, as well as the categories of staff – so the different types of staff that are required, as we talked about earlier, going from the director of the centre through to educators, teachers, support workers, cooks et cetera. It is intended that there would be employment arrangements made for all of those employees to be public sector employees.

Richard WELCH: Minister, with the co-location, this will obviously take up real estate within the boundaries of the school. Do we have an understanding across the properties that are being proposed about what sort of attrition of open play areas might be a consequence of it? My concern is really simply that we find that as schools’ capacities get pressed, their actual available play space contracts. I am not talking about the rectangles between buildings; I mean the genuine green, open play areas. Do we know what the impact will be on those?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As we were talking about earlier, each of these – and I should say at the outset this bill does not really go to your question, but in the interests of being helpful we were talking earlier about the size of these centres, and they are obviously different. They range in number of places, and they are obviously on sites of different sizes, so that would be variable. But that said, the regulation around the types of services and the way in which services can be provided includes regulation in relation to indoor and outdoor spaces. It is intended that in each of these occasions we would obviously meet the necessary regulations without, I guess, impinging on the schools, where they are co-located with schools – with the schools being also able to meet those necessary regulations.

Richard WELCH: Just to reiterate, the early age group will need its own play areas as well. We see a death by a thousand cuts to open fields, where a lot of schools do not have the grounds for an Australian Rules football ground, which I think is a real tragedy. So I would express concern that we consider that or have mitigations for that.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As I said, the issue does not directly pertain to the bill, but I take the feedback, and I am happy to keep you updated.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 19 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:10): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (14:11): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill without amendment.

Firearms and Control of Weapons (Machetes) Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:12): I move:

That the debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:12): I am pleased to rise today to speak on the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. I will go through the purpose of the bill and then make some commentary on it.

The purpose of the bill is to make amendments to the Climate Change Act 2017, the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017. It makes amendments to the Climate Change Act to alter the act's title, to bring forward the long-term target for net zero greenhouse gas emissions from 2050 to 2045 and to legislate increases in interim targets from 28 per cent to 33 per cent by 2025, 45 per cent to 50 per cent by 2030 and 75 per cent to 80 per cent by 2035. The bill amends the Planning and Environment Act to require consideration of climate change when making planning decisions about the use and development of land under the act and for other purposes, which includes greenhouse gas emissions, reductions targets and increased climate

resilience, and it provides the minister with some discretion to direct planning authorities in meeting the above. It also increases the renewable energy target, introduces an energy storage target and introduces offshore wind targets by a said position in the bill.

This is a critical, critical issue. Electricity supply, power supply, in our state is probably one of the most critical issues facing the state. We saw under Daniel Andrews the closure of the Hazelwood power station in 2017 virtually without warning. At the time, speaking with not only workers but unions and indeed the company – those people based in the valley – they were blindsided by that. The Latrobe Valley Authority was set up with the mandate to transfer workers from the closed Hazelwood power station across to the other two remaining, Loy Yang A and Loy Yang B and Yallourn, and also then to ‘retrain’ people – upskill them and retrain them. That worked to a 60 per cent success rate, and that is very clearly defined in all documentation and even the LVA’s own reports and the like – a 60 per cent success rate – and over its course it has actually had around \$300 million to transition, to create new work opportunities for redundant workers and supposedly to create new enterprises in the valley. We hear all the time from the government benches how regional unemployment is at an all-time low, and it is. However, the valley is going through considerable change and considerable pain, and unfortunately this auspiced authority set up to transition workers and create new job opportunities has failed. It is a shambles, and it has largely wasted in the course of it that \$300 million. Unemployment in the Morwell region is at about 11 to 12 per cent, so right at the heart of where the closures started we are still looking at astronomical unemployment figures. To be fair, I will put on record that Morwell has always been a bit higher than the statewide average; however, it has also been a force for power generation and a force for employment over many, many years.

This government has had all virtue in the LVA but no results there. In fact the last and most recent report that has come out is nothing more than a puff piece. There was funding there. In the last couple of years the only funding that the LVA has had has been in relation to paying the wages of staff. There are no new internal projects that are going to deliver jobs in our region, and it is a very sad state of affairs. If you read that report, it sounds aspirational but it delivers nothing.

I know back a couple of years ago I instigated and we had an inquiry into the closures and what will happen when the closure of Yallourn comes in 2028 and ongoing. The LVA came at the time. Mr Chris Buckingham came and he spoke about all these jobs that were created, but when I asked him what ongoing jobs there were, he could not answer. Something like 4000 jobs were created, but some of them were around security people for sporting events in the valley. We want to see in the valley long-term sustainable jobs. We heard from the Premier at the time that SEA Electric would be a driver of electric cars in the valley, and what we have seen is no SEA Electric. Five hundred jobs were guaranteed to us – they spruiked it to the nth degree – and there is just all this content in a media release and no delivery on the ground.

We have seen the removal of the Hazelwood power station and we have seen a battery. Engie have put up a battery there, and that is certainly going to be part of the mix going forward if we are going to transition to renewables – and I do not believe anybody in here is against transitioning to renewables. We have seen the importance of the work done by others, including Star of the South, for offshore wind farms and the opportunities for local job creation in the servicing of those wind farms and also in the technology. But now we have seen the federal government and the federal minister, Minister Plibersek, coming up and canning the government’s cherrypicked Hastings port to be that terminal. She has put a wet blanket all over that, and Minister D’Ambrosio does not have an answer. They have gone very silent on this. So that is another part where this government is just botching up the transition. Rather than actually having a focused and sustained plan, it is picking winners and then casting losers. Where is this coal port going to be? Will it be in Port Anthony or not? So what is going to happen? Many of those renewable energy bodies such as Star of the South and the others have spent, I would say, close to six years in development, and we have seen government legislation come through from the feds to enable it. Well, they have got no home in which to embark on these new technologies.

We also know the importance of solar – solar on our rooftops and also solar plants in the right location – but there also has to be a balance around solar panels covering up large-scale agricultural land. There has got to be that balance where they are in the right location and they do not inhibit the ability of farmers to grow and very much produce our good food and fibre in this area. So we look at that.

We look at this government, as we move to all the required targets as specified in this bill, taking a backward step on the hydrogen project, the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, and indeed I just find quite it quite gobsmacking. I am sure the Treasurer Mr Pallas is quite frustrated with the minister for energy – and I know as I was there at the time – because he came down when the Japanese consortium came out, and there was a shovel put in the ground at Loy Yang A in relation to that HESC, which is a pilot program. So they took that pilot program, they showed that hydrogen could be manufactured from coal and then shipped across from the terminal at the Port of Hastings, funnily enough, through to the Japanese government and nation. So that proved that it could occur. Yes, the Japanese consortium, including the government, have come back and said, ‘We will invest \$3.2 billion into this pipeline to make this hydrogen from coal into a reality.’

Let me be very clear on this: as part of this whole transition and being responsible as Victorians and being responsible in terms of climate change mitigation and being responsible to meet targets to support the better protection of our environment, we need to have these sorts of inventions going, but this type of technology also needs carbon capture and storage. I know that the Greens gag every time I say that, but there has been a carbon capture and storage facility, a cooperative research centre, running near Colac for about 15 years, I think, and they have been capturing carbon dioxide and storing it very safely and inertly underneath. They have multiple players around the world – business, industry and also government – who are funding that to do those tests. We know of the sea basin in Gippsland and the very important work that they are doing out there to test that safe capture so that those geological deposits could then use that carbon and capture it inertly and safely in our Gippsland Basin. There is still a long way to go, and there is no doubt about that, but this government is crab walking back from that, which is really disappointing. I am sure the Treasurer has been quite frustrated by Minister D’Ambrosio and her attitude.

What we also want to see, and I fully endorse the flow-on, is the potential for green hydrogen. So when there is an excess in our wind-trapped electricity, when there is an excess of our solar, we can actually take that, store that and then convert that into hydrogen. We were speaking with Gavin Dufty recently. I have read a little bit of his work on the importance of making sure that if there was a hydrogen economy, from his point of view it is highly likely that it could be used in transportation and industry-based purposes. There is certainly going to be a use for it.

What this government has done, and we reject it entirely in this house – the Nationals and the Liberals – is ban gas. When the transmission lines fell over the other day, what happened? We lost power to somewhere around 400,000 homes. But what happened was the gas peaking plants all kicked in and were firing on all cylinders to provide vital energy to our homes and businesses and vital services, so we saw that there was a place for those gas peaking plants. We also know that gas is a feedstock and can be used and still is very important in a number of industries that are important to Victoria. What we have seen is this government go, ‘No, I’m sorry. We’re going to shut down all gas to new homes.’ That is going to create havoc. We have seen only recently in Albury–Wodonga there is a business that has shut down as a result of pressures in the lack of gas. Again, there needs to be a sensible transition.

I am very concerned that this government will lead Victoria to a cliff and we will not have the transmission lines in place. It very much shows a lack of proper planning, but it also shows that in walking towards these targets there still should be some green lights there – the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project continuing to use gas as a nimble productive energy source to literally keep the wheels turning when these disasters happen. We also want to see our coal stations working and taking up the slack that is occurring at the moment.

It was very interesting the other day when my colleague in the lower house Danny O'Brien put on record who actually privatised the power stations. I may be foreshadowing a guess that my colleagues across the way might like to raise. I was certainly most interested. I have always wanted to find that document, but it was a press release from 1992 from the then Premier Joan Kirner –

A member: Mission Energy.

Melina BATH: Mission Energy – welcoming a private company to take over and be part of that Latrobe Valley Loy Yang energy system. I have probably heard it more than 50 times in this house about Jeff Kennett, but it was actually Joan Kirner who started to privatise the industry.

A member interjected.

Melina BATH: Yes, and there have been others. There have absolutely been others, as my colleague said, and I am quoting him here. If it is on this side, if we feel it is necessary to continue the work of the time because Victoria was flat broke, if Kennett felt the need to continue what Kirner had started, that is bad. But when Kirner did it, it was fine. Also, when the government chooses to privatise other things –

A member: Tim Pallas with the registration branch.

Melina BATH: Correct. Absolutely. That apparently is good. We have this foggy stuff that is happening here. There is amnesia when it suits and not when it does not. As I said, it is important to continue to move and be responsible global citizens, but this government is botching this transition.

Before I conclude, the Essential Services Commission – we have seen electricity prices go up in the vicinity of 25 to 27 per cent over the past 12 months. We have also seen gas prices go up. This makes it more difficult to do business. There are many good people out there who have got great ideas around the transmission lines and where they should go and how they should be strengthened. In not opposing this bill, I call on the government to work with various entities like, as I said, the Japanese government – \$3.2 billion for the HESC as a start, to flow into green hydrogen in the future. Remove this absurd gas ban, enable us to not fall off a cliff in terms of our energy needs and support Victorians to get about their day and work meaningfully without being crushed by a huge burden on their shoulders.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:32): I also rise to speak on the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. This bill does a few things. Most significantly, it sets Victorian renewable energy targets of up to 95 per cent by 2035 and specifies minimum amounts of production of offshore wind energy and storage of energy – ‘energy’ being the key word, which we will come back to in the committee stage, where I will have some questions about what I think are some serious problems with this bill.

Firstly, let us state a couple of facts here. The objective of having this high renewable energy target or, as I say, weather-dependent energy target, is to decarbonise our electricity grid. If we look around the world, no-one has decarbonised a major, developed economy's electricity grid without using a combination of large-scale hydro-electric and/or nuclear energy. No-one has done it with renewable energy alone. It remains to be seen, in this experiment that we are conducting, under pressure from international forces and many within our own country, whether we are successful with that or not.

We also keep hearing about cheap renewables. Even though our power bills keep going up, we keep hearing about cheap renewables. One must wonder in a market where an option for delivering something is the cheapest why we need subsidies and targets. Surely if we let that market be free, then the cheapest option would naturally be selected. If it is in fact cheap renewables, then that would be the option that everyone would choose. We would have 100 per cent renewables because of course that is the cheapest option. Yet we have to set these targets, we have to subsidise the hell out of it and we have to prohibit other technologies. It is all rather curious.

If we look at why some of this infrastructure is cheap, there are a few things going on here. First, when they say cheap renewables, what they are talking about is the marginal cost, so the levelised cost of energy as it is being produced after the infrastructure – the transmission and other electrical infrastructure – has been built, which of course is not included in the integrated system plan, and we have no idea how much that is going to cost. We are going to see transmission lines and condensers and storage equipment all over the state, and we do not know how much that is going to cost over the long term. That is one of the reasons it is ‘cheap’.

Another reason this energy is cheap is a lot of this material, especially the source materials such as rare earth metals and many of the components, are imported from China. I have brought this up many times in Parliament. One of the components needed for solar panels are polysilicates. If you look, there have been many articles written about this. The majority of the world’s polysilicate supply chain is tainted with slave labour. Listen to that again: the majority of the world’s polysilicate supply chain is tainted with slave labour. This puts a very dark spin on the whole cheap renewables claim. Also, the rare earth materials that are used in the magnets that are used in wind turbines, ironically, create large amounts of radioactive waste, which is just dumped in a lake in China. Ironically, people worried about radioactive waste do not seem to worry about rare earth production.

Again, this market is controlled primarily by China. I know that the federal government in the last term, the coalition – and I am assuming that the new Labor government – did make some efforts to putting strategic priority on rare earth production in Australia. I note that Victoria has some excellent rare earth mineral deposits, which we cannot process in Victoria due to our nuclear activities prohibition – stupidly. We can mine them, but then we ship them off to China or we ship them to South Australia, who can produce them but much of it goes to China. Again, we are dependent on China.

Much of this wind and solar infrastructure lasts about 20 to 30 years if it is not damaged in the meantime. Its natural lifespan is about 20 to 30 years. That means that we are not doing a transition, we are committing to a perpetual renewal, making ourselves perpetually dependent on cheap renewables from China. Think about the strategic problems with doing this. Will it remain cheap forever? Who knows? A response I have heard to this is that maybe we will start making it in Australia. Guess what, it is not cheap anymore if we do that.

I think what we are doing here is a grand experiment where the goals have never been achieved before anywhere throughout the world, and it is a risk. We are going to have to not only massively increase the generation and storage infrastructure but also the transmission and other technical infrastructure like condensers and things like this. If you talk to electrical engineers, they will tell you about all the other things that you need because you do not have what they call a high momentum within the grid. But that said, I think that this is such a huge risk and if renewables really were the cheapest, it would be totally unnecessary to have this target.

Therefore the Libertarian Party will absolutely be opposing this bill. I hope that we do not get to the stage where the way that we discover that this was a bad idea is through blackouts and impoverishing our state. As I have said many times, I would love our state to have the cheapest and most abundant and reliable energy in the world. We had that at one point. We no longer have that. We are now one of the most expensive. It is going to make it very difficult for us to effectively re-industrialise, because we have already de-industrialised to a large degree. We cannot even produce white paper in this state anymore. What we should be doing in Victoria is looking at what really is the cheapest and allowing that to happen and allowing that market. As we know, the way that we get the cheapest and the most abundant supply of goods and services is through allowing that market to be as free as possible.

What we are doing here in the energy market is a terrible example of one of the most tinkered and interfered with markets that we could imagine, probably outside of maybe finance and medicine. The idea that we privatise things – I hear the Liberal Party complaining about privatisation, for God’s sake. Even with the supposed privatisations that happened, the regulations on top of that were so onerous

that the idea that we somehow had this magical free market that failed was just a fantasy. We have not had that. We have never had that, unfortunately, but I would like to see a free market. I want to see abundant energy that is cheap for Victoria because without it, it is going to be very hard for us to maintain our current standard of living and indeed grow prosperity in the future. I condemn this bill.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (14:41): I am delighted to stand and support this bill today, a bill that I believe the majority of Victorians absolutely support the principles at its core, and that is getting on and dealing with climate change while providing the energy that this state needs. The bill will set the new goals for this state of net zero emissions by 2045 and the interim targets on the way there, and the 95 per cent renewable energy target by 2035 and those interim targets as well.

Minister D'Ambrosio and everyone who has not just worked on our climate and energy targets and goals up until now but worked on implementing our renewable energy and emission reduction strategies should be commended. The fact that this state is 42.7 per cent below our peak in emissions is commendable, and 40 per cent of our electricity is coming from renewables. That is because on this side, much like whether you look at education, whether you are looking at health or whether you are looking at transport and infrastructure, we are getting on with delivering what Victorians need and what Victorians want. The easiest thing in the world is to throw your hands up and say it is all too hard, but that is not what this Labor government does. We identify issues. In this case – and I know this is difficult for those opposite to hear – it is science: we need to stop emitting carbon and other emissions into our atmosphere, because it warms our climate. We are seeing the consequences of that right here, right now. It is not something off into the future. I am sure Mr Limbrick would acknowledge what it is doing to insurance premiums, what it is doing to farmers and what it is doing to people in Victoria who go to the supermarket to buy their goods. It does not enable sustainability in an economic sense for our farmers. It does not enable sustainability from an environmental perspective of every living thing in this state. It does not enable us to ignore the economic conditions of climate change that the world is going to be setting, which we are already seeing being set around trade and dealing with other nations, particularly as an export nation and particularly as a nation with an incredible history, and I believe an incredible future, with manufacturing.

What we have on hand with an abundant source of renewables to power our manufacturing to export to the world is an absolutely incredible opportunity. With the targets, like the targets we have set since coming into government in 2014, we are a leading jurisdiction around the world. What Minister D'Ambrosio and this government have done to set the targets to here and set the targets today to continue that work around storage – the 6 gigawatts there and offshore wind, the 9 gigawatts around our onshore renewables and around everything we are doing, whether it is energy efficiency or reducing demand – saves home owners and saves businesses money. The power you do not need to consume saves you money; it reduces the demand on our grid and it reduces our emissions.

As I said, the offshore wind targets have driven an incredible amount of investment into this state. We have literally tens of billions of dollars of investment in offshore wind lined up. I am going to talk in detail, because those opposite would like to say, as we had Ms Bath saying, 'Oh, yes, offshore wind sounds really great. We support that. Now moving right along.' But I will come back to that in detail.

All of these targets that we are setting are acknowledging a problem, which is what a government has to do and which we as elected members of Parliament, representatives of our community, should do: acknowledge a problem, acknowledge science, acknowledge data and speak what are difficult truths at times, because we have got one of the most highly carbonised economies in the world and we have got to transition from that. So it is a big challenge. Nobody is denying it is a big challenge, but it is about who is willing to step up and deal with the challenge. By setting the targets, everyone has a clear understanding of what we want to do. We are setting the framework. That allows investment to come in, to invest in these industries, which then brings the jobs. That is why, through our prolonged investment in TAFE and other training and engaging with school leavers, we are ensuring that a pipeline of workers with the appropriate skills to deliver the projects that we need to power this state is there and ready to go.

Now we get to those opposite, the noalition – everything is no, no, no, even when incredibly important events are occurring. Let us take the last month. We have had communities in absolute distress because of fires and because of storm events. We have got MPs in this place who were running home to get a photo of their gas stove and saying, ‘Oh, my God. Thankfully I’ve got a gas stove.’ Look, it is fair to say it was good to have a gas stove at that time, but to link that to the idea of ‘They’re going to take away your gas’ is absolutely scandalous. Nobody is going to go into anyone’s home and take their gas burners. That is absolutely ridiculous.

That sits alongside the 20 years of inaction and stalling that those opposite have been about, whether it is state or federal. There have been no policies coming out from that side on energy. Well, let us say no sustained policies, because federally I acknowledge you had something like 16 to 20 policies in the 20 years – the rotation of the media adviser handing the energy minister of the day something that sounded good at the time. But very sadly, the policies on energy and climate from those opposite seem to have been driven by particular interests in a very, very small portion of their broader party, and that has driven the narrative for a very, very long time. Hence they have put their heads in the sand and have been unable to engage in this issue in any meaningful way. We have gone on and done it. That is why, as I said before, we have got 40 per cent renewable energy in this state, and we have had an over 40 per cent reduction in emissions from our peak. Ms Bath was talking about Hazelwood before. It is just a classic example of everything that the opposition do in this space: linking the closure of Hazelwood, which was privately owned and operated, to the broader discussion and linking a storm that took out powerlines to people – the powerlines running through bush where trees were coming down and taking them out.

Let us get serious and talk about the serious issues that are at stake to keep power connected to people’s houses. Rather than saying we need nuclear generators to resolve this issue, have a fair dinkum conversation with voters, because that is what they want. Let us say we get the regulatory framework in place – let us say a small modular nuclear reactor – and we can actually get the technology right. There is one built somewhere in the Western world – they exist. Let us say it is not the most expensive form of energy and somebody somewhere here decides we are going to fund building one. Then let us say we can get it done in a meaningful way that meets some of the goals and targets that we and the rest of the world need to meet to ensure a quality standard of living for people, great. But again, they have been in power for 10 years federally and have not talked about it, but hang on a minute, what is here in the back pocket? Nuclear energy. Because it is not about delivering anything. It is about coming in and muddying the waters and confusing people as to what is really going on. It really is shameful. I do not know how you on your side rest your heads at night knowing this is such a serious issue that should be above politics. Those opposite are talking about nuclear. They are spruiking it. Bring it to the people, but we know that is not what your real intent is. Your real intent is just to muddy the dialogue, to confuse people and to scare people.

There were other comments around unemployment. Unemployment is at its lowest in regional Victoria. I was up on a constituency question earlier talking about us being half a per cent below the national average, yet somehow this is getting tied in with renewable energy. Renewable energy is going to bring tens of thousands of jobs and tens of billions of dollars of investment, but you are selling out our people from the opportunities we are bringing, through scaremongering, because you cannot bring any ideas to the table. There are no solutions. When you have values and you believe in something, you sit down and you think, ‘All right, here’s a problem; we’re going to find a solution.’ And then you bring it to this place, you bring it to the people and you offer something they can consider, something that is deliverable, and we get on with it. But we know that is not what you lot are about. I will not even get into leadership conversations and whatnot because God knows where it is even at. By the time anyone gets to watch this we could be two leaders down the track.

There was conversation before from Mr Limbrick, conversation casting aspersions over things. To come back to the point, we are already 40 per cent of the way there. The whole way people have been saying we cannot do it, and we are connected to other states. Mr Limbrick talked about not being able

to do it without hydro; we are already connected to hydro. We are connected to different wind and weather patterns around the country.

I had better not go on too long because I get a bit worked up at times, but that is because this is such an important issue. It is not an issue we can just kick around like a political football and not take responsibility for people right here right now. As I said before, our farmers, our consumers at the supermarket, anybody who is trying to live in accommodation without an air conditioner, anybody who is trying to live in accommodation where they do not want water rising up underneath their house or anyone who has to pay insurance premiums. Anyone who has to pay insurance premiums is pretty live to this conversation and what inaction means. They are absolutely live to it.

I will finish by saying I am absolutely supportive of the minister and this legislation she is putting forward. The work that we have undertaken over the last decade has been a massive challenge. We are up to the challenge. We are putting the targets in place, we are bringing the investment, we are identifying the workers and we are training those workers. In every single place possible where we can transition workers from previous industries that have set this state up – which have given us the economic underpinnings to be what we are now and have driven our manufacturing sectors, powered our homes and powered our businesses – we want to bring those workers with us. It is not about saying the sky is going to fall in; it is about setting a plan, investing in the training, having the conversations and bringing them along.

With these targets Minister D'Ambrosio will be very, very well remembered as time goes by into history – as 10, 20 and 30 years go by – for what this state has done, for the leadership we have shown, for the energy we will provide for this state and for the net zero emission end point that we will end up with and that we enabled.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:55): I am rising to make a contribution to the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. The truth of the matter is the state government's energy policy is in chaos. The state government's energy policy arrangements are completely botched. We have seen a set of targets come forward here, and let us be clear, there are federal targets and there are internationally agreed targets. Both parties at a federal level have accepted targets, including the federal coalition, both before the last election and currently, so targets are accepted. We made announcements before the state election that we would put in place targets if elected. The point here is that the state government has got to deliver parallel with those targets. So it is all very well having some targets over here, but you have actually got to have in place the steps and the requirements and the –

Tom McIntosh: Exactly. We are ahead of our targets – 40 per cent renewable energy.

David DAVIS: Well, the bill seeks to increase these targets. It alters the title of the Climate Action Act 2017, it brings forward the long-term emissions target for net zero greenhouse gases from 2050 to 2045 and it legislates emission reduction targets of 28 per cent to 33 per cent by 2025, 45 per cent to 50 per cent by 2030 and 75 per cent to 80 per cent by 2035. It increases the renewable energy target for 2030 from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. This means the government will now aim to have 65 per cent of electricity generated by renewable energy sources or by converting renewable energy sources into electricity by 2030. It introduces a renewable energy target of 95 per cent by 2035. It introduces a storage target of 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2036. It introduces offshore wind targets of not less than 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040 in the offshore area of Victoria by converting wind energy into electricity.

There are a few points I want to make here. Victoria has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions principally by turning off a previous coal plant, a brown coal plant in the Latrobe Valley. That is the main reason that our emissions targets have been achieved to date. But it is getting harder and it is getting more difficult, and this government has no plan and no way forward. There are a number of areas where that is super clear. We saw in recent times the state government get itself into trouble with

its offshore wind targets. It set very, very ambitious offshore wind targets, and we had no in-principle objection to offshore wind; we think it can make a very significant contribution. We think that there is a clear set of parameters that will help offshore wind be successful, but the state government's offshore wind approach has not been successful. It decided it would establish an assembly and production plant at Hastings; that has been knocked back, just unceremoniously knocked back by the federal environment minister. You have got to ask: why did they think that was a good idea? Why did they think that would go through? Why did the minister not get involved and make sure that a proper set of arrangements was in place for the assembly and building of offshore wind plants? These are huge structures, massive structures, that are intended to be built, but the state government's approach is in tatters. It has no feasible or clear way forward as to where and how it will construct the offshore wind plants. So we are putting in place a target today – sounds a good idea – but there is no feasible way of achieving it. There is no assembly plant that is in contemplation. There are no assembly plant or planning arrangements in place to actually assemble and build the offshore wind capacity that is needed to achieve the targets.

We saw yesterday the federal minister make announcements about the scoping of offshore wind zones off the south-western coast of Victoria. The ones that were announced are actually about 20 per cent of the size of the initial announcement going back several years. This is going to mean that the viability of offshore wind in that zone is going to be diminished. It is going to be further from the main high-voltage powerlines, and it means that the scale of the offshore wind generated there is going to be significantly diminished. Even for individual firms that may get small zones allocated to them, they are going to have smaller zones rather than the larger zones, so the economies of scale that many had hoped would be achieved with the offshore wind look increasingly difficult.

Is the offshore wind going to be financially viable? That is the question. Are they going to actually be able to build the huge blades and the huge industrial structures that they are talking about? Are they going to be able to do this? It is all very well to nod and go on on a bit of a wing and a prayer and all of that, but actually the truth is you have got to be very hard-headed about what is going on here. If you are going to have these targets, you have actually got to do the work. You have got to do the homework and you have to do your due diligence to actually make sure that things are properly set in place, that the construction mechanisms are right and that the environmental approvals are all lined up. This is actually not rocket science I am talking about here. But this minister, Lily D'Ambrosio, has not done these things. In fact she has botched it and the offshore wind strategy is in chaos.

It is also clear that a number of the other aspects are not realistic either. But let us just suppose they are legislated and it all goes forward. How is the government going to achieve some of the actual sharp targets? Aside from the offshore wind, how are they going to achieve these storage targets? Where are they going to get this volume of storage? The batteries that are talked about now are a long way short of what is required. Clearly batteries will be part of the solution in the long run, clearly they have got a significant role to play, but the volume of what is being proposed here is far short of what is actually going to be required.

Then we have seen the government go to war with gas. They have gone to war with the gas industry. They are closing down gas manufacturing in Victoria – and in southern New South Wales in the case of Albury–Wodonga – but we saw the state government in 2017 actually fund a new facility in Wodonga for Seeley International. It was quite a good idea to get that business and secure jobs for Victoria. That was actually what the then Minister for Regional Development did in 2017. It is only a few short years ago now, and through the gas substitution plan they have actually forced the closure of that plant. That is what we are seeing – 120 people will lose their jobs. Some will go to South Australia, but for some there will just be less jobs. You have got a major group, Seeley, who produce a whole range of different air-conditioning and heating and other appliances, many in Australia, being clobbered – being absolutely punished by this government. That is just a strange attitude from a Labor government. This is actually a forced or unplanned deindustrialisation that is being driven here – a deindustrialisation of our manufacturing sector, a desire to close off our manufacturing sector.

What I also want to say today is that we will move a reasoned amendment. I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with ‘the bill be withdrawn and not reintroduced until the government:

- (1) guarantees secure and reliable energy for every Victorian, noting the recent system collapse which led to 530,000 people without power;
- (2) commits to energy being affordable, noting the 25 per cent price increase over the last year;
- (3) details how Victoria will have adequate baseload power, noting the state government’s ban on gas;
- (4) sets out a plan to upgrade 57-year-old transmission infrastructure, noting that almost one in seven of Victoria’s 13,000 electricity transmission towers is damaged and experts warned the government in 2020 of the risks in extreme weather events;
- (5) reveals to Victorians exactly how the new planning powers and ministerial directions will operate and why the Government is stripping communities from planning decisions;
- (6) explains what the impact will be on agricultural land, when analysis from the government’s offshore wind policy directions paper of March 2020 shows that to meet net zero targets, up to 70 per cent of Victoria’s land will need to host wind and solar farms;
- (7) provides an update on how Victoria will reach the 2032 wind target, noting the collapse of the flagship project in Hastings; and
- (8) provides public transparency on climate measures through a website with live measures covering emissions, renewable energy, battery storage and wind energy.’.

The reasoned amendment can be distributed now with the agreement of the President so that people can see it. It will look at guaranteeing secure and reliable supplies for Victorians. We know that the recent event is an important wake-up call – 530,000 households lost power. All of our electorates were affected. We know so many people have been impacted – and businesses.

The second point commits to energy being affordable, noting the increase in price. This is a 25 per cent price increase listed on this. That refers to the default offer, but some of the actual prices paid by families and businesses have gone up much more than that, so it is a significant increase.

It asks for details of how Victoria will have adequate baseload power. This is the thing about the renewables: even with the best will in the world for renewables, you have to pair it with very substantial storage and significant baseload power. I am quite clear here today that the opposition sees that there will be a significant role for storage, but there will also be a significant role for gas peaking power to actually firm the network and to actually provide the support for the inherently intermittent nature of some of the renewables. We need more storage and need more batteries, but we think there will be a role for peaking gas used in a way to firm the network.

We also want to see a plan set out to upgrade the 57-year-old transmission infrastructure. We have seen in the last few years, as recently as February but also earlier in 2020, that old towers that were not built to sufficient standards are actually very vulnerable. We have seen that trip some of our major power stations and result in a very significant loss of power. Where is the state government’s plan to upgrade the existing pylons, the existing electricity transmission network? Where is the state government’s plan to do that? We see no sign that the state government is going to replace aged and weaker towers. We see no plan to properly monitor them. If you are going to bring renewables to the city, you need long-term transmission capacity and you need to have towers of a viability and security that the community can rely upon. We have indicated our concerns with this bill through the reasoned amendment. It is the case that the state government is in chaos. The state government does not have a proper way forward here. Targets are one thing, but the delivery of those targets is quite another.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:06): I rise to speak on the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. Much of the Greens position was covered in the lower house, and I will try not to repeat it, but in short we support the two main objectives of this bill: (1) putting Labor’s renewable energy and emission targets into law and (2) ensuring that new planning schemes and planning scheme amendments consider climate change.

On the latter, I want to join my lower house colleague in congratulating Victorian Labor on a policy their federal colleagues recently effectively rejected, a climate trigger. This change in our planning laws means climate change must be considered when land is rezoned or amendments are made to planning schemes. Restricting it to planning scheme changes means it may not go as far as we in the Greens would like. For example, it would not apply to a new coal or gas mine located in a zone where that is already allowed, but it is still a really good start and the kind of next-generation climate legislation Australian governments really should have introduced decades ago. Our hope is that it deters new dangerous fossil fuel developments as well as developments in those locations subject to climate extremes such as flood zones, crumbling coasts and high bushfire-risk areas. We urge the Premier, the Minister for Energy and Resources and everyone else involved in this excellent plan to raise it with their federal colleagues in the Albanese government, who just rejected a very similar Greens proposal. Federal Labor just knocked back a bill for a climate trigger on the basis that their so-called safeguard mechanism, a frankly embarrassing Tony Abbott era policy that has already allowed new several new coal and gas mines since it is passing, is good enough protection against the existential climate threat.

Onto the other main change in this bill, once again the Greens welcome Victorian Labor's plan to improve Victoria's renewable energy and emissions targets along with legislating energy storage and offshore wind targets. However, I would not be doing my job if I did not say you need to be going further and faster. Unfortunately, given the time frame climate change presents us with and given the massive transition we still have to undertake, these targets still fall short of what the science says governments must do to stay within 1.5 degrees of global warming.

We will be proposing improvements on this. First and foremost, we propose lifting that 2030 target to 100 per cent, which is the Greens policy and which Victoria can still achieve. Emerging research has shown that Victoria can achieve coal-free electric power generation and possibly 100 per cent renewable power by 2028. Six years gives us plenty of time to gradually close down our remaining ageing coal-powered plants and deliver a renewables blitz that our incredible landmass and interstate transmission infrastructure would enable. But if that fails, we propose that Victoria at least match the ambition of the federal government and legislate an 82 per cent target by 2030. It is an odd thing to have a far more conservative federal government with a more ambitious renewable target than us. While they include states already further along than Victoria, like South Australia and Tasmania, they also have to include the laggards like Queensland. Either way, we feel that matching that ambition is a decent compromise.

Finally, I want to speak on a small but potentially quite important proposal the Greens envisaged and now understand Labor would have no problem in accepting. As it stands, section 6 of Victoria's Climate Change Act 2017 allows for both carbon offsets and carbon capture and storage, or CCS, to be counted towards meeting Victoria's new target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. This could potentially be a massive issue for Victoria's decarbonisation, given we know both dodgy offsets and inefficient carbon capture and storage projects have ready been accepted by official federal and state agencies and used by fossil fuel companies to keep polluting coal and gas projects in business. This is not even to besmirch the Victorian government. Just look at what has happened with the maligned Australian carbon credit units (ACCUs) system or Chevron's Gorgon project over in Western Australia for examples of what companies and governments say these technologies will mean for emissions reduction versus what scientists later confirm actually happens in real terms. The spoiler alert – real emissions went up both with broken CCS projects and projects accredited under that fraudulent carbon offset system.

Unfortunately, there is an additional loophole here that future potentially less progressive Victorian governments may seek to exploit. Section 7 of the act specifies that for those same purposes of determining net zero:

... the Premier and the Minister must determine the amount of total greenhouse gas emissions attributable to the State.

Essentially the energy minister alone gets to determine how offsets or CCS contribute to net zero. This creates an opportunity for current and – more pertinently – future governments that may want to use dodgy accounting tricks to get Victoria out of its climate responsibilities. Again this is not to suggest that the Victorian government would use this loophole, who with this bill have shown real leadership in lifting our targets and inserting climate change into our planning laws. What we propose is a way of ensuring that leadership is not devalued down the line with crooked carbon accounting. Our amendment on clause 5A means that the minister would simply be required to get expert advice on how much offsets and CCS contribute to net zero as well as their likely effectiveness in actually reducing emissions. The advice must then be made public by the department's website. I now ask if the amendments could be circulated, please.

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

Sarah MANSFIELD: On that, I would like to commend this bill to the house, and I look forward to continuing discussions with the government about the sensible amendments we have proposed.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:13): I rise today with a sense of hope and excitement about the future of Australia's climate action. We Victorians pride ourselves on being first to achieve things and, well, the best. We are once again the first – the first jurisdiction in Australia to implement and legislate a whole-of-economy pledge model based on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris agreement, the first state to set a 75 to 85 per cent reduction target by 2035 and the first state in Australia to power all government operations with 100 per cent renewable energy by 2025, including all metropolitan trains and trams.

The great state of Victoria is unequivocally the nation's leader in climate action. We are one of 20 worldwide governments, state or federal, that will have legislated climate action targets, a chance to take the world stage and lead from the front on climate action – and we are not done yet. The work is ongoing. We have started the process and are getting on with it. On this side of the house we are committed to taking decisive action and to making the hard choices to help secure Victoria's economic prosperity and competitiveness in a net zero emissions future. That is what this bill does. It continues to set world-leading climate action, renewable energy, offshore wind and energy storage solutions while cementing climate consideration in land use planning decision-making.

But those opposite have continued to oppose our agenda at every step of the way. They have stood on the side of climate change deniers in voting against the Climate Change Act in 2017. Not only that but they have also voted against our Victorian renewable energy target legislation. At a certain point it just becomes, well, predictable. Since 2014 the Victorian Liberals have voted against or tried to gut the following energy bills in our Parliament: the Climate Change Bill 2016, the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Bill 2017, the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Amendment Bill 2019, the Energy Legislation Amendment (Licence Conditions) Bill 2020 and the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Fairness) Bill 2021. Will they vote against this bill and keep the record going?

By opposing Victoria's renewable energy target, the opposition continues to risk thousands of jobs in the renewable energy sector and beyond. What will the opposition say to the 59,000 workers they will be putting out of work, and what will they say to the 6000 apprentices who will be denied future careers? In 2018 then opposition leader Matthew Guy described renewable energy targets as detrimental to Victoria's economy, but only four years later they suddenly supported renewables and emissions targets. It is funny what happens when they are trying to get elected. Deputy Liberal leader David Southwick claimed that solar rebates for Victorians were government intervention and red tape and that market intervention, not energy companies, was responsible for energy price increases. Solar rebates are bad? Suddenly it did not seem to matter when they were trying to win an election.

The opposition then released their \$8 billion solar plan, one to revive the hugely successful Solar Homes program rolled out by our government, saying it would lead to the installation of 1 million homes with solar and batteries. I wonder what ever happened to that program; they simply never spoke

about it again and moved straight on to, well, nuclear. The opposition is not being honest with Victorians. The Liberal Party has no plan for renewable energy and instead wants Victoria to be saddled with an expensive and dangerous nuclear reactor. I am asking myself some questions, like will the Liberal Party rule out building nuclear reactors in the backyards of Victorians? In September of last year their federal leader indicated the old Anglesea coalmine would be an appropriate place to put a reactor with a nuclear exclusion zone that covered most of Greater Geelong. Wow, just wow. The only thing unpredictable about this is whether or not they will be in favour of renewables this week or stuck in what I can only describe as a 1980s nuclear fantasy land.

For me, this bill is a test for the coalition to prove whether they are ready to get with the program, to shed their climate-denying friends and start believing in the science of climate change and whether we want a Victoria with a prosperous economy and a net zero future. We are well on our way there. This government has been taking ambitious actions to reduce greenhouse emissions, which is essential to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. Victoria is a part of the major global energy transition, with renewable energy centre stage of this change. Victoria is acting now to embrace this transition and seize the significant benefits for current and future generations of Victorians. We have cut emissions by more than any other state in the nation and intend to build on this significantly.

We have brought forward our target by five years to 2045. This bill will make amendments to the Climate Change Act 2017 to legislate our updated net zero target for 2045. In doing this the bill sets in stone an emissions reduction goal that puts Victoria at the very forefront of global climate action. This bill will also legislate interim emissions reduction targets of 28 to 33 per cent below 2005 levels by 2025, 45 to 50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, and when we get to 2035 we are looking at 75 to 80 per cent below the levels of 2005. These interim targets have been informed by independent expert advice which considered the latest climate science, Victoria's position in a rapidly decarbonising global economy and of course community expectations of climate action.

Expert advice and community expectations go hand in hand when it comes to determining the future of Victoria's climate response. I myself have met with many climate organisations. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action, I would like to acknowledge the work of these fantastic organisations. It is hard to single out any, but I will acknowledge the work of Climatedworks, who have done such fantastic work in informing this government and presenting their expert advice to help shape these targets. I also see this in my community of Northern Metro, where during the Sydney Road festival, which I spoke of yesterday, I fielded concerns from my constituents about Victoria's energy future in the wake of storms as well as continued impacts of climate on the energy sector.

Climate action is about creating a better future for all Victorians; it is as simple as that. This bill legislates our ambitious climate change targets, providing clarity and certainty around the state's direction and vision for our future. This clarity and certainty helps everyone – businesses, investors, households and governments – to play their part in transforming Victoria into a net zero economy. This bill supports this certainty with some other small changes. It updates the delivery dates of the emissions reduction sector pledges and the climate change strategy for better efficiency and updates the title to Climate Action Act from Climate Change Act to reflect the imperative of taking real action on climate change. Real action is the real thing, and that is exactly what we are doing with this bill before us.

Victoria is a part of the major global energy transition, with renewables forming the backbone of this change. The Allan Labor government, through the work of the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, is embracing this change and seizing the significant benefits that this transition represents. This transition will require investment in a diverse mix of renewable energy electricity generation and renewable energy storage, supported by upgraded electricity networks. Over the last nine years Victoria has established itself as a leader nationally and globally in the development of renewable energy, and over the last four budgets we have committed more than \$3 billion to drive forward our renewable energy transition. In 2023 over one-third of Victoria's energy generation – 39 per cent – was from renewable energy sources.

To manage Victoria's renewable energy transition and ensure reliable and affordable electricity supply is maintained for all Victorians, this bill amends the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017 to legislate the following targets: increase the Victorian renewable energy target for 2030 from 50 per cent renewable electricity generation to 65 per cent; set a new Victorian renewable energy target of 95 per cent renewable electricity generation by 2035; set new energy storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts of energy storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035; and lastly, set new offshore wind energy targets of at least 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. Legislating these targets sends a very clear signal to the market of Victoria's ambition and commitment and gives confidence to the community that Victoria's energy transition is being well managed. Legislating our renewable energy and storage targets will help provide reliable and affordable energy to Victorians as Victoria's ageing and increasingly unreliable coal generation is replaced with new electricity capacity.

I spoke earlier about those opposite, but I just want to also talk about the impact on the Victorian economy and include some economic data. Victoria achieving these targets delivers \$9.5 billion in net present value terms to the Victorian economy. It delivers 59,000 two-year jobs to the Victorian economy from 2023 to 2035. The renewable energy target achievements will place downward pressure on Victorians' electricity bills by bringing forward low-cost renewable energy capacity and will sufficiently firm up capacity as well. Can I just say there are of course a suite of programs that we are getting on with delivering to help us achieve these targets. They include our Solar Homes program, the Victorian Big Battery and the 100 neighbourhood batteries program. And of course we are bringing back the SEC – the 100 per cent renewables powered SEC. The facts are these: in 2022–23 over 38 per cent of electricity generated in Victoria came from renewables, more than three times the 10 per cent we inherited in 2014. Since 2014, 59 projects providing 4471 megawatts of new capacity have come online, and there are currently nine projects – nine – under construction, which will provide 1300 megawatts of capacity. We have created over 5100 jobs in large-scale renewable energy since this government inherited the mess left by those opposite, and also, proudly, I think Victorians should share that we have smashed our 2020 emissions target of a 15 to 20 per cent reduction with the achievement of a 29 per cent target. There we go. In 2021 we achieved a 32.3 per cent reduction.

We are decarbonising at the fastest rate in the country, and since this government was elected in 2014 we have cut emissions by more than any other state. Victoria continues to be a leader in climate action. The Victorian government remains committed to taking the serious and far-reaching action that has made us a state for others globally to follow, and with that I commend this bill to the house.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:26): I rise to speak on the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. This bill does reflect the intention to set the net zero emissions target to 2045, five years earlier than the government's previous commitment. The bill also updates the title of the Climate Change Act 2017 to the Climate Action Act 2017. I think that all sounds great, but it is certainly what this government does like to do: just get headlines. We need to see action.

There is lots of talk about targets, but people do want to see reliable and affordable energy in Victoria. People are facing rising energy bills, and the cost of living just keeps going up. We have seen that this government is very keen on closing down coal and gas, which is placing significant pressure on our energy system, and I want to thank my colleague Melina Bath for her earlier comments about this issue, because eastern Victoria has certainly felt the impacts.

Power outages are very real in northern Victoria, not just with storms. They are a regular occurrence. There have been energy blackouts, and that has had a big impact on communities like Euroa. It impacts small businesses, it impacts people and households who rely on energy for all sorts of different reasons, and it really causes them to stop in many areas. There have been meetings that Annabelle Cleeland has held in Euroa, Longwood, Nagambie and Violet Town, and hundreds of people are coming to talk about the challenge of energy and power outages continually happening in their area. There were 17 unplanned power outages in two months for Euroa. Wild weather explains some, but for many of

those outages there has been no explanation. This government has been aware of these issues for years – for years. In fact, we have had one term, and there have been about 20 years of Labor government in this state. So when you look at the issues that we have with our energy today, I would say they do need to take responsibility.

They have brought back the SEC – again, sounds fantastic, but it has achieved very little. SEC is more accurately ‘soaring energy costs’, because in Victoria a recent study shows electricity prices have increased by 28 per cent compared with the prices in July 2022. In Victoria gas prices have increased by 169 per cent compared to the 2009 crisis, so under this government we see prices for energy continue to go up, up, up.

Renewable energy is an exciting space. We are certainly seeing lots of development, but we need to get the balance right. Parliament hosted an information session recently on energy, and they talked about batteries. They talked about reaching the targets for the batteries required, for which an incredible amount of mining is going to be needed. We need energy in Victoria. We have a rapidly growing population. I note the big battery at Hazelwood is 150 megawatts. It only powers 75,000 homes for 1 hour. Now, we have 2 million homes in Melbourne and we have a growing population, so that demand for energy is only going to increase. We have a very long way to go in Victoria.

We need a range of energy sources. This government likes to label certain energy good and other forms of energy bad, but all energy has an impact. All energy has an impact. So if you have a mobile phone, if you have a car, if you support solar panels, if you support wind turbines, then you support mining. We need to be open to a range of energy, and we have a state that has significant resources – resources that we seem happy to export and for other people to use. But this government has shut the door on some of those. I know Tom McIntosh earlier was saying that on this side we say, ‘No, no, no.’ Now, I had to laugh, because I feel that it is actually the government that is saying ‘No, no, no’ to a number of different things. We had the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023 recently, and at the minute that is restricted in this state, so this government has said no. So we are not able to have things like particular types of medicine worked on here by the manufacturing industry and we cannot have a number of space exploration activities that occur in other states like South Australia because this government is not permitting that to happen here. They are also saying ‘No, no, no’ and banning gas in new house developments, so I think this government needs to actually look at their own actions, because they in fact are the ones saying no to reliable and affordable energy in this state.

At the federal level we are also seeing a number of challenges. Just recently they have introduced a cap on emissions targets for vehicles. I was speaking with a car dealer from Bendigo just yesterday, and they were talking about the incredible impact that that will have on their industry. They calculated what their particular brand of vehicle had sold in a year, and they said it would put an additional cost – this extra cap – of \$323 million on their business. These businesses employ people, and we also all purchase cars, so it does have an impact. They felt that it was going to cause more people to be buying older cars and in the end be less efficient down the track. You have to question why these decisions are made.

We have to stop the labels. Energy is energy. We need to work with industry to not only generate electricity but to develop innovative products that reduce energy use, because our businesses, our manufacturers and households need reliable and affordable energy. I was very disappointed when I asked the minister recently about some challenges that farmers were facing in northern Victoria who were sort of bordering solar farm projects. They had raised a number of concerns about the issues with insurance and how challenging it is for them to be able to afford insurance when they are next door to incredibly large projects. I mentioned to the minister the need for further action in this state because it is a policy black hole, but unfortunately the minister’s response was incredibly disappointing, because it just says that they should:

... carefully consider the cover they need and source multiple quotes from different insurers to ensure they are getting the best price available.

And:

They should also consider contacting an insurance broker for advice ...

Again, they are not taking action to actually address the issues that exist in our communities to ensure that we can have developments that consider the impact on the local communities. It is just, again, pushing it away. The amendments that have been put forward I think clearly outline some of the challenges that we have. It says that:

... “The bill be withdrawn and not reintroduced until the government –

- (1) guarantees secure and reliable energy for every Victorian, noting the recent system collapse which led to 530,000 people without power –

and also the need to commit to energy being affordable. It talks about as well the need to set out a plan to upgrade the 57-year-old transmission line infrastructure. I know that the VNI West development has been incredibly challenging across the state, and the government’s handling of that has been appalling. I know the government likes to set targets, but they are consistently missing the target. There are less than a thousand days until the next state election, and Victoria needs a change of government so that we can make the changes needed to ensure Victorians can access reliable and affordable energy.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (15:35): I rise today to speak on the government’s Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023. First and foremost, One Nation will not be supporting this bill. There are far too many unanswered questions as to how the government plans to achieve these targets in such a shortened time line – unless of course you can get a hold of the now-hidden-from-public-view *Offshore Wind: Policy Directions Paper – March 2022*, that is. This document outlines that should offshore wind not be available, 70 per cent of Victoria’s prime agricultural land would need to be covered in so-called renewable energy farms. Considering the federal environment minister Tanya Plibersek threw a spanner in the Allan government’s offshore wind plans earlier this year, the findings in this report are a very real possibility, which for the farming communities in my electorate of Northern Victoria is a terrifying prospect. How does the government propose to protect our vital agriculture industry if this is their plan? How do they propose we feed Victorians and the rest of the world if more and more of our prime agricultural land is to be taken up by so-called renewable projects? Why is it that when the city-centric governments have ideas, it is the regional areas that pay the price? But we are saving the planet, right?

If you take a look at the Energy Victoria maps of the renewable energy zones, not a single zone is in the Melbourne area – not in the inner suburbs nor the outer suburbs, none in fact for kilometres. I guess the inner-city do-gooders do not want to look upon the industrial wasteland that these absurd net zero targets will create. Well, neither do Northern Victorians, who seem to be bearing the brunt of this renewable push.

This bill plans to increase the renewables target for 2030 to 65 per cent and 2035 to 95 per cent, then net zero by 2045. My question to the government is: how? Without covering our prime agricultural land with renewables and turning my electorate into what can only be considered an industrial wasteland, how do they propose to do this?

We know they will not even consider nuclear as an option, even though the rest of the world has been using this emission-free and affordable form of power production for decades. The backwards Labor governments would rather push on with unreliable, expensive-to-build and destructive so-called ‘renewables’ that other countries, such as the United States, are shutting down – not to mention the toll these energy production facilities take on wildlife and farm animals. Eagles and other large birds with their wings cut off by turbines, goats dying from sleep deprivation due to the noise, whale and fish migrations disrupted by offshore wind turbines and sheep with what can only be described as

radiation burn from grazing under solar farms are just a few examples of the devastating impacts on our wildlife and livestock these renewables have. But we are saving the planet, right?

Now what about the human toll of these invasive renewable projects? Simone and her family have spent three years living under these giant wind turbines. It has affected both their physical and mental health. Sleep deprivation, which is an outlawed torture method, earaches, headaches, chest pains, depression and anxiety have all been brought on by the noise and constant pressure coming from the turbines. Her children are in therapy to cope with the constant disruptions to their lives, and Simone's story is not isolated. These symptoms were documented back in 2006 by French paediatrician Dr Nina Pierpont.

We have also heard from many different people who have been subjected to these facilities without any avenues of recourse. The government just tells them to go away. The authorities tell them to get over it. If communities stand up and speak out against these projects, they are told, 'Too bad, it's happening.' This, according to the Labor government, is community consultation. But we are saving the planet, right? Last but not least, what happens to these solar panels and wind turbines when they come to the end of their life cycles? Are they recycled or re-used elsewhere? No, they are either buried, dumped or left to rot in landfill. But we are saving the planet, right?

In conclusion, One Nation Victoria will not be supporting this bill as the risks to my constituents, my electorate and the wider Victorian community are too varied and great to blindly follow along with this agenda.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:40): We may debate in this chamber more important pieces of legislation, but there would not be too many like this – a piece of legislation which seeks to set the framework for how this state not only meets its future energy needs but also does its part to ensure that the very real effects of carbon pollution that we are seeing on our environment are curtailed. In politics and in public policy there are often a lot of choices that we have got to make, and I want to touch on some of those choices and how we confront them over the course of this speech.

But the first choice we have got to make is whether we accept that climate change is real. Do we accept that there are changes occurring in our climate and in our environment? Do we think the fact that last year was the hottest on record, the fact that coming into even this weekend we face quite significant temperatures which are not normal for autumn and the fact that extreme weather events have caused havoc across our state in recent months, recent weeks but also recent years are being affected by the changing nature of our climate? The first choice you have got to make is whether you accept that science. We do.

The second choice we have got to make is: what are we going to do about it? Are we going to say there is nothing we can really do about climate change and that we have just got to accept that our environment is going to be degraded by its effects and that the way we live is going to be fundamentally changed forever? We can make the choice to say we want to try and do something about it. We want to lead the nation as a jurisdiction in taking carbon-intensive energy generation out of our energy market and out of our energy systems and to prioritise and put our state on a path to generating our energy from renewable sources, doing our part to make sure that we can continue to have the lights on but not burn in the process. And that is what the choice that confronts us in this legislation is fundamentally all about. What you see from the Allan Labor government is not only acknowledgement that climate change is real, that climate change exists and that climate change is something that needs to be at the forefront of our policy considerations, but you are seeing, through the leadership of both the Premier and the Minister for Energy and Resources, a drive to transform our state's energy sector from one that relies on some of the most polluting forms of energy to some of the cleanest forms of energy. And that is exactly what this government is doing.

The legislation before us today amends the Climate Change Act 2017 and, with the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987, legislates the targets

that we need to achieve as a state in order to do our part to decarbonise our energy sector and to ensure that we as a globe do not keep burning the way we are. That is what we have today: the legislation to both increase our renewable energy target from 50 per cent to 65 per cent and set a new target of 95 per cent of energy generated in Victoria to come from renewable sources by 2035; to implement and set our energy storage target so we have got dispatchable power available to us, when we need it, of at least 2.6 gigawatts by 2030 and 6.3 gigawatts by 2035; to set our offshore wind generation targets, an incredibly important new part of our energy mix; and most importantly, I think, to bring forward the date of Victoria's long-term target for net zero emissions from 2050 to 2045 and to legislate a series of interim targets to help us get along the path. There is no point waiting until 2045 and figuring out that we are not going to make our targets; we have got to have interim targets to help us get there on the way.

This is incredibly important because it is a fundamental part of ensuring that we will have a future in Victoria that equates to the past that we and our parents and their parents have enjoyed. It requires the kind of policy leadership that you have seen from this government. It requires the kind of dedicated action that has made Victoria a leader in the energy transition and has made Victoria a leader in decarbonisation. We are decarbonising our energy sector faster than any other state in the nation. We are not only meeting but exceeding our emissions reduction targets. The policy agenda that this state Labor government is pursuing and has been pursuing since it was elected is demonstrating success in reducing carbon emissions. It is setting this state on a path to an energy transition that will ensure that we are doing our bit to tackle the very real challenges associated with climate change.

But it is not just the changing nature of our energy sector, it is also the changing nature of the wider Victorian economy that the government is clear about and clear about supporting. It is about sector-wide transformation. It is ensuring that jobs are being created in these new energy industries and that we have got the number of electricians that we are going to need to help facilitate the exceptionally important increase in solar generation. For example, as the federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy said, solar is now the cheapest form of electricity production that we have ever seen as humans. So when people come into this Parliament and talk about energy costs, what we are seeing from this government is the prioritisation of future electricity generation that is built on the back of the cheapest form of electricity generation – renewable energy – and not the most expensive.

That is the other part of the debate that we are seeing right now in this country. What the Liberal Party wants to do is to lock Australians, lock Victorians, into the most expensive and dangerous form of energy production that we have, and that is nuclear power. I had the opportunity in debate last year, at quite a degree of length, to go into all of the problems that we have with nuclear energy and why it will saddle Victorians not only with one of the most dangerous forms of energy production but also the most costly. No-one who is an advocate for nuclear power can explain how much more the power is going to cost. They cannot explain where the reactors are going to go, and they cannot tell us how we are going to mitigate against the risks of nuclear meltdown, which we have seen again and again in other parts of the world.

There are choices. The choice that this bill presents is one to support a transition of our economy and of our energy sector away from one that pollutes our environment with greenhouse gases and with carbon emissions towards one that is built on cheaper and cleaner renewable energy, and the choice that those opposite would have us advocate would take us away from a renewable path and would take us away from a renewable future and put us on the path to a radioactive future. That is not one that I want to advocate, and I do not think it is something the people of Victoria want either. This is an incredibly important piece of legislation, and it is an incredibly important policy agenda that is going to set up this state's economic and energy future. I encourage all in the chamber to support it.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:50): We all want cleaner energy, we all want renewables to succeed and we all want to see cheap baseload power. However, I represent an area that has been obliterated by Labor's policies. Decisions that have been made within these four walls have absolutely devastated rural and regional communities – and I mean devastated. I believe that this is another one.

I represent a region that has not recovered from the job losses from the closure of Hazelwood. Up to 1000 jobs were lost, and we were promised a transition, and we have transitioned to absolutely nothing. Then there was the closure of the native timber industry, which has devastated even more communities. Again, there has been no transition. I have spoken to businesses who say the only support that they have received has been advice as to how to close down their businesses. Last year I attended a rally in Traralgon, and one of my constituents said that they were feeling completely abandoned and they had nowhere left to go – no jobs and no prospects. They were concerned that the next attack would be levelled at farmers, and I think that this is that predicted attack.

These targets are completely unachievable. I believe that we should be ambitious. I believe that there is nothing wrong with that, but this is not ambition. This is misleading. In order to reach these targets we would need to install 22 solar panels per day, build 41 wind turbines per month and build the transmission infrastructure to support this. This is completely unachievable. It means upping the present installation rates 100-fold in a market for rooftop installations that has been absolutely saturated. Not only that, it will have dire unintended consequences.

Observations here in Australia and overseas show that replacing controllable electricity supplies with the necessary intermittent wind and solar has catastrophic effects on costs. The fact is that the higher the share of renewables in the electricity supply, the higher the prices, and we have heard the complete opposite from those opposite. But this is a case of fact versus fiction. The nations with the lowest share of wind and solar renewables are Russia, Saudi Arabia, Korea, India and China, and they have the lowest electricity prices. Those with the highest renewable share are Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and Spain, and they have the highest energy prices. So why are we misleading the public and saying that this is going to deliver savings? I do not think anybody has a problem with having cleaner energy – I certainly do not. I want to see that. What I have a problem with is the misleading narratives that are putting out a false sense of security and targets that we just cannot deliver on.

There is no coincidence with these prices. Wind and solar can only be commercially successful when they are the recipient of a subsidy. But how can a state that is broke offer a subsidy? For Australia as a whole this amounts to some \$10 billion a year in terms of the regulations requiring increased quantities of wind and solar to be injected into the energy supply; the increased cost of transition for this less concentrated intermittent form of energy; and direct subsidies, extravagant government power purchase agreements and grants and soft loans. The Victorian government is an active participant in these policies. Indeed Minister D'Ambrosio is even more extreme than her federal counterpart Minister Chris Bowen, who at least recognises the frailties of the renewable-dominant system and its need to be compensated by some dispatchable power in the form of gas. Gas must be in the mix. Chris Bowen knows it and the coalition knows it, and that is why we will repeal this ridiculous gas ban. But in addition to these subsidies adding costs to bills or through taxes, the subsidised renewables force established generators fuelled by brown coal in Victoria to operate suboptimally because wind and solar receive a subsidy of at least \$40 per megawatt hour and they can bid at negative prices.

This subsidised competition forces the commercial generators to back off, and this undermines their profitability. Eventually this forces what would be highly competitive generators to close. We saw this in South Australia in 2015 with the closure of the Northern coal power station, we have seen it recently in New South Wales with the closure of the Liddell coal generator and we saw it in Victoria in 2016 when the Labor government compounded the effects of its subsidies to wind by adding the straw that broke the camel's back in my electorate's Hazelwood power station by massively increasing coal royalties. The government did have a part to play in that, despite what Mr McIntosh says.

What has been the effect of this? Well, energy prices at the wholesale level have more than doubled. We have not reduced costs; that is a complete mistruth. We have doubled the cost. Before Hazelwood's closure in 2017 this state's electricity wholesale prices averaged around \$45 per megawatt hour. They shot up with the closure, and after being subsidised during the low-demand COVID period remain at more than twice their previous levels. Yet in the face of all of this evidence, the government maintains that renewables are the cheapest form of electricity. Well, they may be

cheap if you take their power whenever the elements allow wind and solar generators to operate, like sail ships harnessing the wind might have some cost advantages over ships powered by hydrocarbons, or dare I say nuclear, but it is clearly not cheap in terms of their transport economics, and the same is true with wind versus coal, gas or nuclear power.

As I said before, I represent a region that has been obliterated by Labor's policies. The closure of Hazelwood cost locals up to a thousand jobs. The closure of our native timber industry has cost the region and areas around the state more than 4000 jobs. Our region is hurting, and this is going to have a detrimental impact on farmers. These harmful effects on farmers will be intensified by the proposal of the state and federal governments to just completely override property owners' rights to object to obtrusive powerlines and wind facilities being constructed on or near their land.

These are productive jobs that are being lost, not jobs created on the back of tax and regulations. Might I reiterate the state government's own findings that without offshore wind its wind and solar policies will cannibalise 70 per cent of the state's farmland, and even the Commonwealth recognises Victoria's disastrous approach. The jobs that the government is eradicating and the farm businesses it is sacrificing are those that supply goods and services and exports – businesses that provide the very finances that allow the state and federal governments to pay for the policies that are destroying them. That, I believe, is a tragedy.

This bill is like signing an economic death warrant on Victoria. Nowhere is it more evident than with the irony that the government, having introduced wind and solar subsidies, are now forcing the state's coal generators to the brink of insolvency, then having to subsidise the high-profile firms that are adversely affected. This can be seen with the government subsidies to Yallourn to allow the generation to continue supplying competitively priced fuels to the Portland aluminium smelter. Without this the smelter, an icon of the nation's fading industrial prowess, will be forced to close. So Minister D'Ambrosio's policies are destroying the aluminium industry's viability with one hand and holding it above the water with the other, but such compensating measures cannot be afforded to the vast majority of disadvantaged businesses and households.

We are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis – everyone is talking about it – a cost-of-living crisis that was first and foremost created by the state and federal governments' energy policies and exacerbated by their excessive spending and job-destroying industrial relations policies. Last sitting week the Greens put a motion forward to inquire into supermarkets' price gouging. They have even spoken about price caps. But if they want to achieve cost-of-living relief, this bill will do the opposite. It will drive up costs, it will eliminate jobs and it will accelerate the downward economic spiral into which this government has propelled this state. We need to start putting our constituents, the people that put us in this place, back at the centre of our policies and our decision-making.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (16:01): I rise to oppose this bill. My problem with this government's approach to clean, green energy, which by the way has unanimous support across all parties, is that the whole, entire point of the project seems to have been lost. Ultimately it is human flourishing that we are here to promote – the targets and the measurements and the vectors and the economic statistics themselves are just ways to measure our success. We have a responsibility to be good stewards of our natural resources because the people that we are supposed to be serving here, as well as their children and grandchildren and their great-grandchildren and on and on, are entitled to live in a healthy environment and enjoy its benefits. People matter just as much as the environment.

This bill states that two people – the Premier and the minister – must ensure that Victoria achieves the long-term emissions reduction targets. Although there are provisions for setting more of these targets, there are no actual sanctions in the bill to make it enforceable. What does that mean? I am not voting to make it law that two single powerful people have a mandate to make this happen with no caveats at all. If you think that is scaremongering, the only other option is that there was no need, other than virtue signalling or perhaps wasting time, for this document to even be a piece of legislation. Nothing

becomes illegal or legal. There is no legislative sanction or other mechanism that makes this bill materially different to an elaborate press release.

Victorians deserve better than this sloppy, panicked, virtue-signalling nonsense from government. We owe it to Victorians to do this properly and to do it in a way that does not crush them with skyrocketing bills. Whatever we do, we should not destroy the economic viability of the energy sources that we have now before we have cultivated alternatives. If you do not want coal, that is fine, but you do not shut down coal plants unless and until you have replaced them with energy from another source. If you do not want gas, fine, but you do not strangle the gas industry out of existence until you have replaced it with energy from another source.

I am so glad that I can say with a clean conscience that I voted against the three bills that destroyed the economic viability of gas in this state. If you want green energy, that is fine, but even though your Hastings offshore wind generator project was tanked by your own federal counterparts, you still brought this pointless bill to be debated here today. If you want solar energy, that is fine, but you did not plan for it, and now people all over this state are having their properties quite literally bulldozed and taken away from them and their rights trampled in your mad scramble to back-end a dog's breakfast of energy storage facilities and transmission towers across this state.

This bill is a farce. It is a waste of our time. It solves nothing. Victorians are suffering, and they deserve better.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (16:04): I thank the house for the opportunity to sum up, and I will also make some comments about Mr Davis's reasoned amendment. The Victorian government is proud to be leading the nation when it comes to climate action. This bill is all about strengthening our position at the forefront of this critical transition. Upon passage of this bill, Victoria will become one of the very few state or federal governments anywhere in the world to have legislated a net zero date of 2045 or earlier. We know that we can achieve this ambitious aim, because we have beaten every one of our emissions and renewable energy targets so far. Despite what we might have heard from some in the chamber today, we smashed our 2020 emissions reduction target of 15 to 20 per cent, achieving a 29.6 per cent reduction. In 2021, from the latest data available, we cut emissions by 32.3 per cent below 2005 levels. During this period Victoria's economy had grown by 42.8 per cent.

Our climate and energy agenda will continue to create jobs and grow the economy, and by legislating our suite of targets we are providing industry with the certainty it needs to continue investing in new, clean technology. I guess that is where I disagree with a number of members in the chamber when they say, 'What is this for? What will it actually do?' Well, driving investment in new, clean technology is an absolutely critical purpose of this bill. We know that by meeting our 2035 emissions reduction targets we will unlock more than \$63 billion in value for the Victorian economy, while our 95 per cent renewable energy target will create 59,000 jobs by 2035. Our 95 per cent renewable energy target by 2035 is critical for ensuring energy security and cheaper power for Victorians. This government is committed to building the cheapest new-build energy generation on the market – renewables – and putting downward pressure on prices while cutting emissions.

As the old unreliable coal-fired power generators exit the market, bringing more renewable energy into the system is the only way to ensure our power grid works for all Victorians. Our energy storage and offshore wind energy targets complete the picture by ensuring we maintain firmed renewable generation 24 hours a day. These targets are supporting the creation of whole new industries in this country, and Victoria is proudly getting on with delivering big batteries and the nation's first offshore wind generators. We are also further integrating climate change into planning systems through a new objective in the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and creating a new head of consideration for planning authorities to consider climate change when preparing a planning scheme or planning scheme amendment. These changes will help Victorian households and communities by increasing resilience in climate-related natural hazards and reducing their emissions. We have heard from local councils

that they want to be empowered to take stronger action on climate change, and we look forward to working with them on these changes. Climate change is a critical challenge for our state and our planet, and the Victorian government is tackling it head on. The bill further raises Victoria's ambition as a world leader on climate action and will further catalyse our renewable energy transformation.

In respect to Mr Davis's reasoned amendment, I will make a few comments. In respect to the desire of the reasoned amendment to secure reliable energy for every Victorian, noting the recent system collapse, building renewable energy is critical to not only reducing our emissions and taking action on climate change but also ensuring energy security and grid reliability into the future. The extreme weather events on 13 February only highlight this fact as during the evening on that day renewables were supplying 50 per cent of Victoria's electricity. It was because of renewables that we had enough power generation. No-one lost power as a result of insufficient generating capacity; people lost power because the infrastructure was literally torn down.

In relation to committing to energy being affordable and noting a 25 per cent increase, renewable energy is the cheapest form of new-build energy generation on the market. In fact it is five times cheaper than the coalition's nuclear power fantasy, and that is before you consider the costs of dealing with nuclear waste. Victorians are better insulated against the global energy price rises caused by a number of factors, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine, due to our investment in cheaper and more reliable renewable energy. Victoria has consistently had the lowest wholesale price on power in the National Electricity Market over the past year. I will not go into all the default offers, but people would be very familiar with those supports that the government is providing. In terms of adequate base power and noting issues around gas, the coalition are actually showcasing their lack of understanding about the energy system in bringing forward this reasoned amendment. Victoria's transition to 95 per cent renewables by 2035 will ensure our system is secure and reliable while reducing emissions and putting downward pressure on prices. There is no ban on gas. Gas peaking plants will make up the remaining 5 per cent of generation when we reach 95 per cent renewables by 2035. The move to all-electric new homes is helping Victorians save money each and every year on their power bills – around \$1000 a year or up to \$2200 if the household has solar as well.

In terms of the plan to upgrade 57-year-old transmission infrastructure and the coalition's views about transmission towers being damaged, I just want to make a few quick points. New transmission infrastructure is obviously critical to get energy from new areas where it is generated to homes and businesses where it is used. VicGrid is leading the development of the Victorian transmission plan and facilitating engagement and benefits for traditional owners, local communities and landowners. The collapse of transmission towers is extremely rare. In a storm event most of the damage is caused to the smaller poles and wires in the distribution network. We certainly saw a lot of that as a result of those storms. In 2020 six towers collapsed near Cressy. A subsequent investigation found that the towers failed in winds in excess of 125 kilometres an hour, and it came in severe convective downbursts, similar to a situation you would get in a tornado. The towers were built in the early 1980s, and the standards at the time did not account for such downbursts. What we will see with climate change and dangerous weather patterns is that these sorts of unusual weather events will only become more common. Energy Safe Victoria, the independent safety regulator, will conduct a thorough investigation into the incident.

In terms of the new planning powers and ministerial directions and the assertion that this will strip communities from the planning decisions, I would argue that the exact opposite will be the case. The amendments to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 will help futureproof Victorian households and communities by increasing resilience to climate-related hazards and reducing their emissions. The first is a new objective to be provided for consideration of climate policies and obligations, including emissions reduction targets and climate resilience when decisions are made about the use and development of land. The amendment supports existing planning climate action objectives – for example, reduction of fossil gas use, increased energy efficiency and increased use of active and public transport.

In terms of the view that somehow our offshore wind policies and the government's plans around renewable energy will impact 70 per cent of Victoria's agricultural land, I just want to put a few comments on the record. The figure being referred to is out of date. It was a modelling scenario in which more than 60 gigawatts of onshore renewables were being installed in the absence of offshore wind energy. It is worth noting that the biggest threat to agricultural land is actually climate change, and our farmers are at the forefront of the impacts of climate change. Many of them understand exactly what the threat is. If emissions continue to rise, Victoria is projected to experience double the number of days over 35 degrees, double the number of high fire danger days, a decline in cool season rainfall and more intense storms.

In terms of updates on how Victoria will reach the 2032 wind target, the Allan Labor government is working diligently on a way forward for the Port of Hastings and the Victorian renewable energy terminal. Work is continuing by both the Minister for Energy and Resources and the Minister for Ports and Freight, and they have both been working closely with the Commonwealth on the next stages of their Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 determination and will work closely with the Commonwealth on each step required by the government's major projects. We are undeterred, and we are going to keep going because we know that we have to have this in our energy mix. In 2023 renewables generated 38.6 per cent of Victoria's power, more than double the share five years ago. This continues to grow as we work towards our target of 95 per cent renewable energy generation by 2035. We deliver, and we are going to continue to deliver for climate action, for energy bills and for energy security.

In respect of the final point in Mr Davis's reasoned amendment, reporting on Victoria's emissions reduction and renewable energy progress is available on the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action website – I encourage him to look – and the minister tables reports in Parliament on progress every year. I am happy to take many questions, as I am sure I will, in the committee stage of this bill, but I commend the bill to the house.

Council divided on amendment:

Ayes (13): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (19): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Katherine Copsey, 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 (28): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, David Davis, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Noes (3): Moira Deeming, David Limbrick, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

*Committee***Clause 1 (16:27)**

David LIMBRICK: I will just ask all of my questions in clause 1 if that suits the minister. My first question is: what is the unit of measurement for energy?

Ingrid STITT: Mr Limbrick, there are a number of different measurement terms used depending on what you are referring to. Do you mean generally?

David LIMBRICK: Within the bill.

Ingrid STITT: Okay. We have targets that are set out in the bill that talk about percentages of energy and emissions reductions reached by certain years, and we have references to kilowatts and gigawatts throughout the bill. But if you want to be more specific about where in the bill you want to take me to, I am happy to answer.

David LIMBRICK: You mentioned kilowatts and gigawatts. Maybe my physics education is a bit rusty, but they are actually measurements for power. I was wondering if the minister could provide the unit of measurement for energy that we are referring to.

Ingrid STITT: The bill expresses gigawatts of electricity.

David LIMBRICK: It is my understanding that gigawatt is not a unit of measurement for energy; it is a unit of measurement for power. These are two separate concepts. For example, if I have a heater at home that is a 1000-watt heater, that is the power of the heater. If I use that heater for 1 hour I get charged on my electricity bill 1 kilowatt hour, and that is the unit of energy. So these are the two separate concepts that I am trying to understand here, because when I get an electricity bill I get charged in kilowatt hours. I think everyone gets charged in kilowatt hours, so I am trying to understand the unit of energy that we are talking about when we are referring to this bill, because this is a very, very important concept, especially to the electrical engineers that are going to be doing this.

Ingrid STITT: I think I have tried to clarify for Mr Limbrick what the bill deals with.

David LIMBRICK: I do not think we have clarified that, because my understanding of a unit of energy expressed as it would be in this bill would be gigawatt hours. One gigawatt is the amount of power that an energy infrastructure produces, and the amount of energy is 1 gigawatt hour. These are really important concepts, I would have thought, for this bill. Can the minister clarify that when we are talking about energy, we are talking about gigawatt hours, not gigawatts?

Ingrid STITT: How the electricity is transmitted through the grid is gigawatt hours, but when we talk about the storage it is gigawatts. If you are referring to what you see on your power bills, this bill does not deal with those matters at all. This bill sets out clearly the targets for both storage and emissions reduction.

David LIMBRICK: I thank the minister for her answer. My understanding is storage is indeed measured in terms of energy and gigawatt hours, not gigawatts. If I have a battery of 1 gigawatt then that indicates that it can output a maximum of 1 gigawatt, which is a very powerful battery. But 1 gigawatt hour is the amount of energy that that battery can store. That means that it can provide 1 gigawatt for 1 hour before the battery is depleted. These are two totally separate concepts, and with energy storage my understanding is that it is in gigawatt hours, not gigawatts. Gigawatt is the level of power, not energy, and the formula for energy is watts multiplied by time.

Ingrid STITT: I have given Mr Limbrick the answer and the advice I have been given on this matter.

David LIMBRICK: One of the targets in clause 24(7A), where we talk about the energy storage targets, specifies in (1)(a):

by 2030, for energy storage facilities in Victoria to have the combined capacity to store and dispatch at least 2.6 gigawatts of electricity at any time ...

Are we talking about gigawatts, which is the maximum power, or are we talking about the amount of electricity stored in those batteries, which should be gigawatt hours? These are two totally separate concepts in the field of physics.

Ingrid STITT: I am certainly not going to profess to be an expert in those matters, but I will seek some clarification from the box. I am trying to be helpful and answer your questions, Mr Limbrick. I can see that you are passionate about this, and I will do my best to clarify it. But there is no need to shout at me about it. Mr Limbrick, what you are talking about are concepts of capacity versus output, and that is not how the targets have been expressed in the bill. We could go around and around in a few circles. Maybe we can move on to another question. We can certainly see whether there is anything additional we might be able to provide you in the committee stage, but I think we are talking about different concepts here.

David LIMBRICK: No, I dispute the assertion. We are not talking about different concepts. It is my belief that this is an error in the bill and that for the storage it should be talking about gigawatt hours, not gigawatts. This target, as implied, does not actually talk about storage of energy; it is talking about maximum output of the batteries of 2.6 gigawatts, which is enormous, and up to 2035, 6.3 gigawatts. Does the minister concede that there is potentially an error in the bill and that this would need to be changed to gigawatt hours?

Ingrid STITT: No, I do not concede that. The bill has been drafted taking expert advice, as you would imagine with this sort of technical bill. No, I would not accept that proposition, Mr Limbrick.

David LIMBRICK: I thank the minister for her answer. The government may be able to tell me that this is wrong, but other people are going to look at this. Surely the advisers can tell the difference between power and energy. Many eyes must have looked at this.

Ingrid STITT: Yes, they did.

David LIMBRICK: Surely they can explain. In the energy storage target there is no measurement of storage. It is talking about gigawatts, which is power, and I am sure the advisers can tell you that what we are talking about here is power. It is the same as my 1000-watt heater at home. The heater does not store energy, it consumes energy. It consumes 1000 watts, and if I had a battery to power that for 1 hour, then that battery would hold 1 kilowatt hour of energy. These batteries that we are talking about here are also intended to store energy. It is my understanding that the target is intended to say, 'We are going to have this amount of battery storage.' If the batteries are going to store an amount of energy, then they must store energy in the form of 2.6 or 6.3 gigawatt hours. This is not a matter of opinion, this is science.

Ingrid STITT: Mr Limbrick, I have gone back to the box a couple of times and I have offered to see what additional clarification might be able to be sought while we are in committee, but I have already given you the answer – the advice that I have been given from the box.

David LIMBRICK: Okay. Let me put it another way. The 2.6-gigawatt target, whatever that might mean to the government – what is the actual meaning of that target? What does it actually mean?

Ingrid STITT: Clearly what it means is that that is the target that the government will legislate to capture energy storage capacity by 2030 – 2.6 gigawatts.

These are capacity targets. They are all about making sure that we are firming up the energy capacity in Victoria. They are part of a broader suite of reforms, as you are aware. The priority of the government is to make sure that we are building capacity for storage in a circumstance where we know

that renewable energy projects are going to be fanning out over the state in particular ways. I think in that sense this is about really providing a bit of certainty for our renewable reliability and also providing some certainty for investors. The targets are for those purposes, Mr Limbrick.

David LIMBRICK: I appreciate the reason why the targets exist, because there is an aspiration to have something in the future, but what we are not clear on is what that something is. The 2.6-gigawatt target implies that there is something on the network that can produce 2.6 gigawatts of power. If we have a battery which wants to store things – which is what I think we are talking about – then the battery would store 2.6 gigawatt hours of power. These are two different things. It is like the difference between kilometres and kilometres per hour in your car – they are related but they are separate concepts. If we are setting a target, it at least should be universally understood what that actually means. We are talking about batteries, and yet the unit of measurement that we have got here does not refer to anything about energy storage.

Ingrid STITT: I think that was you putting your view on these matters as opposed to a specific question, but again I will just reiterate that the energy storage targets have been set on a gigawatt basis because a range of different storage technologies with different durations will be required to ensure the reliability of the energy supply across the state.

David LIMBRICK: The minister makes a good point that there will need to be different energy storage for different durations, which brings in the other variable here, which is time. If we have a 1-gigawatt battery that lasts for 1 hour, then the capacity of that battery would be 1 gigawatt hour, which is a storage target. If we had a single battery that could run for 1 hour outputting 2.6 gigawatts, then the capacity of that battery would be 2.6 gigawatt hours. That is my understanding. I do not know. I feel like I am being gaslit by the government here. I majored in physics at university. This is year 11 physics. Maybe the government can say that I am an idiot, but I do not know, maybe the people of Victoria can look at this and actually some people might agree with me. It just seems like the unit of measurement here is not an energy storage unit. It is a power unit.

David DAVIS: I was just going to say that I think he is right, these are not energy storage targets. It is 2.6 gigawatts of electricity at any time to store and dispatch, so I think from a storage aspect 2.6 gigawatts is not a storage matter.

David Limbrick: That is what I am trying to get to the bottom of.

David DAVIS: You are. But I think they would argue it is the dispatchable amount that is coming out. With respect to the heading ‘Energy storage targets’, what does ‘combined capacity to store and dispatch’ mean? A single unit of power, as Mr Limbrick has correctly pointed out, is not an entirely satisfactory measurement for that.

Ingrid STITT: The energy storage targets have been set on a megawatt basis, because a range of different storage technologies with different durations, as I said earlier, will be required to ensure the reliability of the energy supply. That is why they have not been set as megawatt-per-hour definitions. Perhaps it would help if I gave you some details about what types of energy storage are going to be included in the energy storage targets, Mr Limbrick? I am happy to do that if you want me to, and I am certainly not trying to be difficult at all here. I defer to your higher knowledge of physics, clearly. I am trying to get the clarification that you have been seeking.

The energy storage targets will include short-, medium- and long-term zero emissions energy storage systems. Short-duration storage of less than 4 hours storage will include grid-scale batteries and household batteries that are aggregated to operate as virtual power plants, and medium- and long-duration storage exceeding 4 hours storage could include longer duration battery systems and other technologies.

David LIMBRICK: Let us say that this is correct. This is saying that at any time we have a goal that the storage facilities can output 2.6 gigawatts of power onto the network. Is that what this target

is saying – that we want to have a peak of 2.6 gigawatts onto the network at any time and then by 2035 we want 6.3 gigawatts, and not gigawatt hours because we are not talking about storage, we are talking about how much dispatchable energy we want on the network?

Ingrid STITT: It is a target, Mr Limbrick.

David LIMBRICK: In that case, if we are talking about the power being able to be output by these batteries, that would say that we are not talking about storage capacity targets at all. Is that correct?

Ingrid STITT: I am not sure that that is quite right. We are setting energy storage targets so that we can ensure that we have the reliability that we need for our energy supply. The targets are clearly around 2030 and 2035. As I have said previously, Mr Limbrick, this is all about making sure that not only are we setting emission reduction targets and renewable energy targets but storage is part of the mix and part of the government's overall plan to ensure reliability for Victorians in a decarbonised economy.

David LIMBRICK: I do not feel like we are making any progress on this. I will move on to a related target which also had me confused. This is new section 7B, 'Offshore wind energy targets'. New section 7B(a) says:

by 2032, Victoria is to have the capacity to generate not less than 2 gigawatts of electricity in the offshore area of Victoria by converting wind energy into electricity ...

With those 2 gigawatts, are we talking about the peak capacity output or are we talking about the amount of electricity that is generated over a year? Again, I would have thought that if you were going to set a target, you would not set it on the peak capacity, you would set it on the amount of electricity that you wanted to generate over a year, which would imply that again it would not be gigawatts, it would be gigawatt hours over a year. I would like some clarification on that. Are we talking about peak capacity or are we talking about the amount of energy generated over a year?

Ingrid STITT: It is set as peak capacity, Mr Limbrick.

David LIMBRICK: In that case it makes sense for new section 7B. Just to clarify, in new section 7A, are we also talking about peak capacity there and therefore we are not actually setting storage targets, we are talking about peak capacity? For example, by 2035 we want to have 6.3 gigawatts peak capacity into the system and we want to ignore the amount of storage that is there to produce that 6.3 gigawatts.

Ingrid STITT: It is peak capacity. The same answer as for your last question.

David DAVIS: Can I just begin by making a comment about Mr Limbrick's points. I think essentially some of the points he has made are correct. I think there is a kind of colloquial approach to how it has been described in the bill, and it might be that the government would do better to stick with some strict physics in how it describes these points. But I think with respect, for example, to those energy storage targets, you cannot store a unit of power like that; you have got to store something that has got a time-related thing in some way to it. In any event, that is not my main set of questions. My main set of questions relates to the issues in the bill around amending the emissions reduction target. The truth is, Minister, the Premier and the minister have the ability to amend the targets, don't they?

Ingrid STITT: I sought some clarification on this point because I knew it was something that you wanted to go to in committee. Clause 8 of the bill removes the power of the Premier and minister to amend the interim targets that are being legislated – that is 2025, 2030 and 2035 – as the 2045 target is now the long-term target date and not an interim target. This target can no longer be amended by the Premier and minister as well. The power to amend the 2040 interim target will remain in place, and that is certainly not unusual in terms of these sorts of clauses. It could be amended in exceptional circumstances, which have not been set and do not need to be set for another four years. I guess the point I am making here is that every target that we have set is being enshrined in law through the bill.

David DAVIS: What are those exceptional circumstances, Minister? They have not been set, is that what you are saying?

Ingrid STITT: No, they have not. I think what I have tried to give you is a sense of comfort that there are changes that, as a result of the bill, will mean that we no longer require a provision for the Premier and minister to amend targets.

David DAVIS: But the longer term targets, Minister, can be changed.

Ingrid STITT: Technically, yes, but I think that the point I am making is that we are very confident with the targets there we are setting, and they will be the primary driver. It would have to be something completely –

David DAVIS: Just let it record that the minister is confident and the government is confident. I just want to put it on the record that I am less confident that the government will meet these points. What will happen if the government does not meet its targets? What is the consequence?

Ingrid STITT: The primary driver for setting these targets in legislation is to make it really crystal clear for communities and for business but also for investors. We think that backing our targets in through legislating them actually sends a really powerful message about the direction that the government is going when it comes to energy capacity storage and clean energy into the future. That is the primary reason, and we are not taking a deficit frame to this, Mr Davis. We are powering ahead, and we are determined to meet our targets.

David DAVIS: I wish I shared your confidence, but I do not. At clause 25 it talks about the report to Parliament. I am just following through the targets and so forth, but at clause 25(2) it says:

the progress made towards meeting the energy storage targets; and
the performance of schemes to achieve the energy storage targets; and
investment and employment ...

and then progress made towards meeting the offshore wind targets. Do these, Minister, have to be reported numerically? Or let me put it in a nice way: could they have a more homespun sort of best endeavours short report – ‘We’re trying hard to meet the targets’ – or must it be a numerical reporting annually?

Ingrid STITT: Just let me get some clarification for you, Mr Davis.

Mr Davis, for the current reporting that the government provides in relation to our emission reduction targets and our progress against those, the VRET – so the Victorian renewable energy targets – we report numerically, and whilst the bill does not specify how the reporting will be provided, I think you can be confident that it will be consistent because the government do want to be transparent about how we are going in respect to these important targets.

David DAVIS: Minister, I accept it might be the government’s best endeavours and it might be its intention to report like that, but that is not what it actually says. My concern is a future government. In four years time or five years time, for example, your government might not be successful in reaching its targets and it might decide it is not going to report any numerical targets. It might just report that the government is trying very hard, like one of those school reports, if I can be unkind. In that sense, it might be a little bit self-defeating for the objectives of the act. I do not think that is counted out is my question. I think that could happen, and these clauses do not prevent that occurring.

Ingrid STITT: I think you can look at our track record. We have met every target and we have reported transparently on those efforts. Perhaps when we deal with some amendments from the Greens you might take a little kinder view of this. I think that we have got the track record of providing transparency. Not only that, we have got a track record of reaching our targets. These targets are not plucked out of thin air, Mr Davis. They have been tested, and of course expert advice has been

provided to the government about our energy transition because it is just so important for the state, for the economy and for the wellbeing of Victorians.

David DAVIS: I will accept that in the spirit it was intended. It was well meaning. The government might mean well, but I just do not think it actually says that. Leaving that aside – and I refer to the offshore wind energy targets – where will the offshore wind farms be assembled or built?

Ingrid STITT: Mr Davis, there is an area around Bass Strait and off the coast of Gippsland that has been –

David DAVIS: No, no – built, not set.

Ingrid STITT: Sorry, the manufacturing of the wind turbines – is that what you are talking about?

David DAVIS: The assembly and the associated structures.

Ingrid STITT: Okay. Just one moment. Not that the bill deals with these matters, but I will seek to get an answer for you.

Mr Davis, can I clarify with you – is this a Port of Hastings related question?

David DAVIS: It could be. These offshore wind targets are going to require the construction, assembly and transportation of massive offshore windmills. These structures are huge. They float there or they are anchored to the seabed, and they have got massive blades. This is a massive industrial operation that is going to have to happen somewhere either in Victoria or near to Victoria. It could happen in northern Tasmania or it could happen in southern New South Wales. You are correct to point out that the government has got into terrible trouble with Hastings, but maybe the government has a place that they can tell me now where these will be built and then floated out to sea.

Ingrid STITT: Of course I did not say that at all. I asked you whether your question was related to those matters that have been reported publicly about the Port of Hastings. What I can indicate is that both the Minister for Energy and Resources and the Minister for Ports and Freight are working very closely with the Commonwealth. We are going through the process of each step of that environmental assessment process that the Commonwealth is undertaking, and we will continue to push very hard for a good outcome for Victorians.

David DAVIS: Minister, when will that process of engagement with the Commonwealth be completed, and when will construction start on a facility?

Ingrid STITT: Mr Davis, aside from the fact that the targets are eight years away –

David Davis interjected.

Ingrid STITT: Indeed these are large projects that we are talking about here. There have been a series of bilateral meetings with the Commonwealth that have included representatives from across the Victorian government. What I will reiterate is that Victoria is absolutely determined to continue to be Australia's offshore wind leader, and we have worked to build very strong investment interest. We will have a successful multicompetitive auction, and this auction will start in the next year. We will continue to work closely with the Commonwealth to settle these matters.

David DAVIS: Just to be clear, there is no date in that for the construction to start, and there seems to be no location and no date for the completion of the first of the wind farms.

Ingrid STITT: The point I would make is that the government is setting out a very clear plan. We intend to meet not only those targets contained in the plan but also, if this bill passes the house today, the legislative targets that are set out to ensure that we have got that certainty for both investment in clean energy going forward.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, line 12, omit “65%” and insert “100%”.
2. Clause 1, lines 13 and 14, omit all word and expressions on these lines.

I spoke on these amendments during the debate on the second-reading speech, but just to refresh everyone’s memory we are moving to change the target to 100 per cent renewables by 2030. This is consistent with what we have been calling for for a long time. This is possible. There is emerging research that has shown that Victoria can achieve coal-free electric power generation and possibly 100 per cent renewables by 2028. We acknowledge that, given decades of delay, 100 per cent by 2030 is very ambitious. It will require significant investment, but we believe we must be ambitious when setting these targets. That is why we are moving these amendments to this piece of legislation today, and I would encourage all members to support them.

Ingrid STITT: Just responding to Dr Mansfield’s amendments, in relation to the amendment of the Victorian renewable energy targets to increase the 2030 target from 65 per cent to 100 per cent and the 2035 target from 82 per cent to 100 per cent, the VRET 2035 target of 95 per cent renewable electricity generation reflects a balance. We are leading Victoria through the accelerating renewable energy transition and capturing the benefits this transition will bring while also maintaining reliable and affordable electricity supplies for all Victorians. It recognises that while renewable electricity generation and energy storage will supply the vast majority of Victoria’s electricity following the closure of coal generation, Victoria’s gas-fired electricity generators will play an important role in providing peak capacity at times of high demand or low renewable energy generation. Continuing to utilise our gas capacity at these times will support system reliability over the medium term while allowing time for the development of more cost-effective zero-emission alternatives that could meet this need over the longer term.

The Commonwealth government’s 82 per cent renewable target by 2030 naturally takes into account states and territories that have had historically different challenges to decarbonise and are at different stages in their transition. Victoria, due to its historical reliance on brown coal and its large economy, is starting from a very different place. Our targets of at least 65 per cent renewable energy by 2030 and at least 95 per cent by 2035 represent a high level of ambition, and they are key for delivering our target of net zero by 2045. So we will not be supporting that particular amendment.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (7): Katherine Copey, David Ettershank, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam

Noes (24): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Gaele Broad, David Davis, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Amendments negatived.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, line 12, omit “65%” and insert “82%”.
2. Clause 1, page 2, line 14, omit “95%” and insert “100%”.

I spoke to these amendments during my second-reading contribution. We are disappointed we have not agreed to change the 2030 target to 100 per cent, but we feel that 82 per cent by 2030 is a reasonable compromise. It aligns with the federal government’s targets. This amendment would also lift the 2035 target from 95 per cent to 100 per cent, which again we feel is quite reasonable and aligns well with other goals that are being set in other jurisdictions.

Ingrid STITT: For the reasons already outlined, the government will not be supporting Dr Mansfield's amendments.

David DAVIS: I just record the opposition will not support these amendments.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The question is that Dr Mansfield's amendments 1 and 2 on the sheet SMA07C, which tests the remaining amendments on that sheet, be agreed to.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (7): Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam

Noes (24): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Gaele Broad, David Davis, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Amendments negatived.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 5 agreed to.

New clause (17:25)

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

3. Insert the following New Clause after clause 5 –

'5A New section 7A inserted

After section 7 of the **Climate Change Act 2017** insert –

"7A Independent expert advice in relation to determination for net zero greenhouse gas emissions

- (1) In determining the amount of total greenhouse gas emissions attributable to the State, the Minister must obtain advice from one or more persons who are appropriately qualified, in the Minister's opinion, to act as an independent expert.
- (2) The advice obtained under subsection (1) must include an independent assessment of the amount of total greenhouse gas emissions attributable to the State.
- (3) In forming the advice, an independent expert must consider –
 - (a) the demonstrated effectiveness of any proposed activities for the removal of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere; and
 - (b) the likely effectiveness of any eligible offsets.
- (4) The Minister must publish any independent expert advice obtained under this section on the Internet site of the Department as soon as practicable after the advice is received by the Minister.'.

Again I spoke to this amendment during my second-reading contribution. This amendment effectively closes a loophole that existed within two sections regarding the determination of net zero emissions. It addresses section 6, which allows for both carbon offsets and carbon capture and storage, or CCS, and section 7, which leaves the sole responsibility for determining attributable greenhouse gas emissions to the Premier and the energy minister.

This is a safeguard, really, against future governments who may potentially want to use dodgy accounting tricks to get Victoria out of its climate responsibilities. It ensures that the minister must seek expert advice on how much offsets and CCS can contribute to net zero as well as on their effectiveness, and really importantly, that advice must be made public via the department's website. We think these are very sensible amendments. They increase transparency and accountability, and we would urge all members to support them.

Ingrid STITT: The government will be accepting this amendment to require independent expert advice be obtained when we reach net zero emissions in Victoria. Under the current act and regulations, reporting on greenhouse gas emissions is aligned with the Commonwealth, state and territory inventories, and this process will continue. When we reach net zero by 2045, it is critical that we ensure the integrity of our net zero declaration. While the state and territory inventory is a robust process, independent expert advice will provide additional assurances to Victorians that we have met our targets. I thank the Greens for engaging in productive conversations with the government in relation to this amendment.

David DAVIS: The opposition does not support this amendment, although we understand the spirit with which it has been brought in and see that there is some merit in it.

New clause agreed to; clauses 6 to 31 agreed to.

Reported to house with amendment.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:28): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:28): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

The PRESIDENT: The question is:

That the bill be now read a third time and do pass.

Council divided on question:

Ayes (28): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, David Davis, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Noes (2): David Limbrick, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Question agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, a message will be sent to the Assembly informing them that the bill has been agreed to with amendment.

State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

The PRESIDENT (17:35): I have a message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **State Electricity Commission Act 1958** to abolish the State Electricity Commission of Victoria established by that Act, to make related amendments to that Act and other Acts and for other purposes.'

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:36): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Ingrid STITT: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Statement of compatibility

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:36): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the **Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 (the **Bill**).

In my opinion, the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *State Electricity Commission Act 1958* (the SEC Act) to abolish the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (the **SECV**) and transfer the SECV's functions and powers to the Minister and the SECV's property, rights and liabilities to the State. A reference to SECV in any Act or instrument is to be construed as a reference to the State, in so far as it relates to a period after the abolition of the SECV, if not inconsistent with the subject matter.

The Bill also changes the name of the SEC Act to the *Former SEC (Residual Provisions) Act 1958* and any reference to the SEC Act in any Act, regulation, subordinate instrument, or other document is to be construed as a reference to the *Former SEC (Residual Provisions) Act 1958* unless the contrary intention appears. The Bill also amends the *Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993* and 21 other Acts to reflect the amendments made to the SEC Act.

Human Rights Issues

The human right protected by the Charter that is relevant to the Bill is the right to property in section 20 of the Charter.

Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill

Property rights

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers conferred by legislation which authorise the deprivation of property are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

The *State Electricity Commission Amendment Act 2023* will, among other things, transfer all of the SECV's property, rights and liabilities to the State. The new Part X of the SEC Act – to be known as the *Former SEC (Residual Provisions) Act 1958* upon the Amending Act becoming operational – deals with the transfer of property, rights and liabilities of the SECV to the State. Section 112 of Part X defines **property** to mean 'any legal or equitable estate or interest (whether present or future and whether vested or contingent) in real or personal property of any description', **liabilities** to mean 'all liabilities, duties and obligations, whether actual, contingent or prospective', and **rights** to mean 'all rights, powers, privileges and immunities, whether actual, contingent or prospective'.

Further, section 113 of Part X provides that on the commencement day of this Part, the State is substituted for the SECV as a party in any proceedings, contract, agreement or arrangement commenced or made by, against or in relation to the SECV and the State must continue and complete any other continuing matter or thing commenced by or against or in relation to the former SEC.

The transfer of the SECV's property, rights and liabilities to the State is relevant to the property rights of natural persons who hold an interest in the property or liability transferred. However, the transfer of the property or liability from the SECV to the State will not limit the property rights of persons holding the interest as they are not being deprived of their interest in the property or liability, but rather the property or liability is transferred without altering the substantive content of that property right or liability.

Insofar as a cause of action in relation to any potential liability held by the SECV may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, the Bill may engage this right. However, in my opinion, the Bill does not affect a deprivation of property as it does not extinguish any cause of action which a person may have against the SECV. Rather, liability is transferred to the State.

Finally, even if the Bill could be considered to deprive a person of property, any such deprivation would be 'in accordance with law' and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property. In particular, Part X dealing with the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from the SECV to the State is drafted in clear and precise terms, and is sufficiently accessible to allow persons to regulate their own conduct in relation to it.

Accordingly, I consider that the transfer of the SECV's property, rights and liabilities to the State is compatible with the property rights in section 20 of the Charter.

Conclusion

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Hon Ingrid Stitt MP

Minister for Mental Health

Minister for Ageing

Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Second reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:36): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

This Bill supports the Government's commitment to bring back the State Electricity Commission (SEC) as a new state-owned supplier of renewable energy and to enshrine it in the Victorian Constitution.

The Bill does this by amending the *State Electricity Commission Act 1958* (SEC Act) and related legislation to make the name 'State Electricity Commission' available to the new SEC.

Bringing back the SEC

The global momentum for decarbonisation is already well underway, and all levels of government have a significant role to play in driving and accelerating this global shift to reduce emissions and minimise the impacts of climate change.

The Victorian Government has taken up this challenge, committing to world leading renewable energy targets of 65 per cent renewable electricity generation by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035.

Reaching these targets requires bold and decisive action. That is why the Government has committed to revive the SEC. The new SEC's role in the energy transition presents an enormous opportunity to accelerate the decarbonisation of our economy, attracting more investments and creating thousands of jobs, while also reducing energy bills and emissions.

The new SEC is a government-owned renewable energy company, focused on:

- Investing in renewable energy and storage projects that accelerate the transition and deliver commercial returns
- Supporting households to go all-electric to reduce their energy bills and emissions
- Building the renewable energy workforce our energy transition requires

It will partner with industry to transform the energy sector, opening the state up for further innovation and investments in renewables, including through an initial \$1 billion in funding that will be used to deliver 4.5 gigawatts of power through renewable energy and storage projects.

The Bill will abolish the pre-existing State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) that is constituted under the SEC Act to avoid confusion with the new SEC entity.

Following privatisation of Victoria's electricity supply industry in the 1990s, legislation was enacted that has effectively limited the old SECV's role to managing any residual property, rights and liabilities from its previous operations.

Currently the SEC Act provides that the old SECV consists of an Administrator. This office holder, currently the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, is responsible for the administration of residual assets and liabilities of the old SECV. The old SECV has no staff and for practical purposes is no longer an operating entity under the *State Electricity Commission Act 1958*. Abolishing the old SECV will allow the new SEC to operate without causing confusion between the pre-existing entity and the new SEC.

The new SEC will invest with industry to accelerate our transition to more affordable, reliable, renewable energy.

Key amendments

I now turn to the provisions of the Bill.

Firstly, the Bill amends the *State Electricity Commission Act 1958* to abolish the old State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV).

The Bill makes further amendments to the *Electricity Industry (Residual Provisions) Act 1993* and other Acts, to remove or clarify all remaining references to the old SECV.

By abolishing the old SECV, the Bill will avoid any confusion between the pre-existing entity and the new SEC in the statute books.

As outlined earlier, currently the old SECV's role is limited to managing any residual property, rights and liabilities from its previous operations. The Bill will transfer the small number of remaining assets and liabilities to the State for these to be managed by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with the Minister for the State Electricity Commission as the responsible Minister.

Finally, the Bill also amends the name of the *State Electricity Commission Act 1958* to make it clear that it is not associated with the new SEC.

I commend the Bill to the house.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:37): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023

State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023

Cognate debate

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:37): I move, by leave:

That this house authorises the President to permit the second-reading debates on the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 and the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 to be taken concurrently.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:37): I just want to say something briefly. The opposition will agree to the cognate debate, noting that they are obviously voted on separately, but I do want to put on record again the behaviour of the Minister for Energy and Resources and her office in providing –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: No, no, I just want to put it on the record so it is known. These bills were tabled in the Assembly back on 16 November, and briefings were provided to the opposition at 10:30 on Tuesday this week. So whilst we have no difficulty with it being a cognate debate, I just want it recorded that in future there needs to be a fair arrangement where briefing by departmental officials is provided in a timely way to the opposition and indeed other parties.

Motion agreed to.

Statute Law Revision Bill 2024*Introduction and first reading*

The PRESIDENT (17:38): I have a further message from the Legislative Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council ‘A Bill for an Act to revise the statute law of Victoria.’

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:38): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Ingrid STITT: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Statement of compatibility

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:39): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Charter), I table a Statement of Compatibility for the **Statute Law Revision Bill 2024** (Bill).

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

Overview

The Bill makes minor and technical amendments to a number of Acts to correct typographical and grammatical errors and to update references.

In particular, the Bill makes minor and technical amendments to the:

- *Building Act 1993, Docklands Act 1991, Eastlink Project Act 2004, Forests Act 1958, Gas Industry Act 2001, Heritage Act 2017, Impounding of Livestock Act 1994, Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009 and Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013* to correct typographical and grammatical errors;
- *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007* to repeal the second occurrences of mistakenly duplicated items in tables in sections 56 and 56B;
- *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995* to substitute the words ‘building designer’ for the word ‘draftsperson’ in sections 6(1)(e) and 54(1)(c)(ii), to reflect the change to the definition of ‘building practitioner’ in the *Building Act 1993* made by the *Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023*;
- *Safety on Public Land Act 2004* to remove a reference to another provision of that Act which was repealed by the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) and Wildlife Amendment Act 2014*; and
- *Road Safety Act 1986* to update a reference in section 84(2)(ea) to a provision which has been moved by the *Transport Legislation (Amendment) Act 2004* and remove definitions of terms which are no longer used either in the Act or in regulations made under the Act.

I consider that the amendments under the Bill do not engage any rights under the Charter.

Hon Jaelyn Symes MP
Attorney-General
Minister for Emergency Services

Second reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:39): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

The Bill before the House, the Statute Law Revision Bill 2024, is a regular mechanism for reviewing Victoria's statute books and is required in order to ensure Victorian statutes remain clear, relevant and accurate.

The Bill makes minor and technical amendments to various Acts, including updating references and correcting typographical errors. This serves the broader purpose of ensuring these Acts remain relevant and accessible to the Victorian community.

The Bill:

- corrects typographical errors in various Acts, including the *Building Act 1993*, *Docklands Act 1991*, *Eastlink Project Act 2004*, *Forests Act 1958*, *Gas Industry Act 2001*, *Heritage Act 2017*, *Impounding of Livestock Act 1994*, *Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009* and *Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013*;
- repeals mistakenly duplicated items in the tables in sections 56 and 56B of the *Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007*;
- updates the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995* to reflect a change to the definition of 'building practitioner' in the *Building Act 1993* made by the *Building Legislation Amendment Act 2023*;
- amends the *Safety on Public Land Act 2004* to remove a reference to another provision of that Act which was repealed by the *Sustainable Forests (Timber) and Wildlife Amendment Act 2014*; and
- makes various updates to the *Road Safety Act 1986* (*Road Safety Act*), including amending a reference in section 84(2)(ea) to a provision which has been moved by the *Transport Legislation (Amendment) Act 2004* and repealing definitions of terms which are no longer used either in the Act or in regulations made under the Act.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:39): I move:

That debate be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Private Security and County Court Amendment Bill 2024*Introduction and first reading*

The PRESIDENT (17:39): I have a further message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Private Security Act 2004** to provide for a new licensing system for the private security industry and to amend the **County Court Act 1958** and the **Sentencing Act 1991** to extend the operation of the Drug Court Division of the County Court and for other purposes.'

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:40): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Ingrid STITT: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Statement of compatibility

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:40): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Private Security and County Court Amendment Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the Private Security and County Court Amendment Bill 2024, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Human Rights Issues

No human rights protected by the Charter are limited by the Bill.

In drawing this conclusion, I have considered the potential engagement of the right to be free from forced work in the context of amendments in this Bill which are designed to discourage sham contracting.

In one sense, sham contracting could be considered a form of forced work where a vulnerable private security licence holder is engaged improperly by an employer who directs the worker to obtain an ABN so that the employer does not have to pay them a wage covered by the Industry Award, or afford them other employee entitlements such as superannuation, leave and Workover insurance.

Provisions in the Bill which seek to deter sham contracting by requiring the worker in this situation to obtain a business licence if they are engaged under an ABN are intended to work by making it largely impossible for the worker to become engaged under an ABN because obtaining a business licence requires a full set of business plans, and financial information. While there are various Commonwealth and State laws that prohibit sham contracting, the proposed amendment is a practical way of deterring employers from engaging in sham contracting because the people they seek to engage in this way will not be able or willing to comply.

I also note that the right to privacy may be engaged by the new requirement under the Bill in relation to the requirement for a person sub-contracting security work out to provide the name and licence number of the individuals who will be carrying out the work. However, this information will only be available for the purpose of ensuring that the client and head contractor are aware of the name and licence number of the individuals carrying out the work. The purpose of the amendment is to increase accountability and transparency for clients who need to know who is carrying out the work. This would be expected by those working in a regulated industry. Accordingly, the right to privacy is not limited by the Bill.

Further, Part 5 of the Bill is compatible with the Charter. Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to have the charge decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing.

Section 24(1) of the Charter is relevant to Part 5 of the Bill to the extent that it extends the operation of the County Court Drug Court Division, which operates alongside the mainstream criminal court. The Bill promotes the right to a fair hearing by providing a specialised court that is targeted to the complex needs of offenders with a drug or alcohol dependency.

Hon Enver Erdogan MP
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Youth Justice
Minister for Victim Support

Second reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:40): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

Almost 20 years ago to the day, the Private Security Bill 2004 was introduced to the Victorian Parliament by then Minister for Police, the Hon Andre Haermeyer, going on to pass the Legislative Council on 25 May 2004. That Bill replaced the *Private Agents Act 1966* and was the first formal recognition in this jurisdiction of the importance of a robustly regulated private security industry.

One of the drivers for the establishment of the *Private Security Act 2004* was the tragic death of cricketer, coach and broadcaster David Hookey during an altercation with a crowd controller outside a nightclub. This tragedy brought to the fore the importance of seeking to ensure that those entering the private security industry are properly trained and vetted by police to engage in these important, high-risk roles. While the crowd controller in that matter was ultimately cleared of any wrongdoing, the events of that night highlight the serious risks and potential consequences inherent in private security work and the need for better training and regulation. Together with a decision of the Council of Australian Governments to require people applying for private security licences to undergo probity checks, the *Private Security Act in 2004* was a robust and progressive piece of legislation. Over the past 20 years, we have seen a much better regulated industry emerge, together with a vast improvement in matters such as the infiltration of organised crime into the security industry, which has been a huge step forward.

However, a great deal has changed over those 20 years and the private security industry is no exception. Over time, the industry has grown and diversified. This along with social and technological developments, has required increasingly complex skills. Over that time, issues have also emerged with the way some members of the industry are prioritising profit over fair pay and work conditions, leaving a highly casual, mobile and vulnerable workforce in its wake. Key industry advocates have identified serious concerns about the rights of workers, the barriers to healthy business competition and the behaviour of some trainers and workers that bring down the reputation of the entire industry.

This is not to say that there are not many highly skilled security guards operating in our jurisdiction who make a significant contribution to keeping our community safe. My attention has recently been drawn to the remarkable skills of guards at a medical organisation who were able to use high level verbal de-escalation skills to take someone intoxicated by methamphetamine, and who was agitated and in possession of a weapon, from being an imminent threat to workers and patients to having a calm conversation and being able to be removed from the environment before harm came to anyone. We do not hear about these sorts of situations in the news. Nor do we hear about highly skilled security advisors, organisations and employees who plan, manage and work with police to ensure the safety of participants and members of the community at public events.

This Bill is not aimed at the type of individuals I have just been speaking about. It is aimed at employers who do not pay fair wages and do not afford workers genuine flexibility and access to legal entitlements such as superannuation, leave and insurance. It is aimed at training organisations who do not deliver the required training and who sign off on untrained and wholly unprepared workers as being qualified to obtain a private security licence. It is aimed at those workers who do not understand the importance of their role and do not have the skills needed to deescalate and address emerging threats.

These are the workers about whom we often hear anecdotes: crowd controllers deliberately leaving the scene of a physical altercation between patrons on nightclub premises, training organisations failing to deliver even half the required hours before certifying a person as competent to provide security services, and inept or unlicensed workers seeking to provide security services.

Other matters, such as uncontrolled and unrecorded sub-contracting and poor training and supervision of security staff were brought starkly to light following the inquiry into the COVID19 hotel quarantine failures. The Inquiry was not directly critical of the guards involved, but noted that the issues relating to sub-contracting, training and supervision needed to be addressed.

Industry leaders have raised these issues with Government over time, and in 2018, the then Premier, the Hon Daniel Andrews made an election commitment to undertake a full review of the industry should his Government be re-elected for a further term. That review was managed by the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Industrial Relations Victoria over 2020–2021. It included a discussion paper written in consultation with key industry stakeholders, which was the subject of public consultation in mid-2020. The final Report on the review was published with Government's endorsement in late 2021, containing 21 recommendations. This Bill addresses the 11 recommendation of that Report which require legislative amendment.

The aim of the Bill is to improve worker access to fair pay and other legal work entitlements, as well as to improve the professional standards across the industry so that it can continue to play a positive, significant role in contributing to community safety right across the state.

One area of particular growth, in line with advances in access to technology, is what is known as the technical sector which consists of security installers and security advisors. When the *Private Security Act* was enacted in 2004 these roles were more limited, with this part of the industry much smaller and dominated by very small businesses. At the time, this led to them being treated differently under the private security licencing scheme – instead of requiring a licence, they were only required to be registered. Registration requirements

are of a lower standard and lower cost than licence requirements. The key differences are that registrants do not need to prove their competency or provide their fingerprints to obtain registration.

The Bill recognises the growth and expertise of the technical sector, as well as the importance of proof of identity including fingerprints, and proof of competency by replacing the now outdated two tier licensing and registration system with a single licensing system that treats all sectors of the industry equally.

The Bill also addresses significant concerns across the industry, including sub-contracting. Until recently, sub-contracting of security work in Victoria was un-regulated. Following the report on the Inquiry into Hotel Quarantine, Government contracts now limit sub-contracting. The Bill follows suit by making it clear that if a person or organisation signs a contract with a security provider, they must approve any sub-contracting by that provider in writing. In addition, providers must supply the name and licence number of each worker hired under a sub-contracting arrangement. Penalties attach for failure to comply.

Another key amendment is the introduction of refresher training for private security workers in high-risk roles, such as crowd control, bodyguards, or static guards. Under the current legislation, the only training requirement applies at the time a person applies for their licence. The licence expires in three years, and the person can then apply for a renewal without further training. For many workers, this is not particularly problematic: they will have acquired and practiced their skills in the field. However, for many others in higher risk public facing roles, there are potentially significant consequences of not keeping up to date with skills such as first aid, verbal de-escalation and safe physical restraint. The Bill addresses this by requiring refresher training at licence renewal. The training requirements will be confined to those who need them most and will be set by the Chief Commissioner, taking into consideration the need to keep costs low for employers or already lowly paid workers.

The Bill provides for the greater involvement of people who hire private security – the ‘client’ – in working out their security needs before handing the job over to hired security. This is not for people hiring a security adviser in-house, who can do that assessment for them, but for those who own businesses or intend to host events. It is too often the case that no real consideration is given to the actual security risks or to important matters such as evacuation plans. Security staff walk into these situations without necessarily knowing the layout of the facility, or what to pay attention to. For example, is there a blind corner in a club where drug deals are suspected to occur? Is there a door that does not lock properly so minors can sneak into licensed premises? If it is a large teen party at a private home, what has been done to guard against gate crashers, and how will admission to the premises be handled? How will the hosts deal with a minor who is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs? All of these are important matters that need to be clarified to help security staff do the best possible job. The Bill therefore requires clients to prepare a risk management plan which must be provided to security staff before they start work.

While there are genuine expert sole traders with ABNs and private security business licences offering expert services under contract, sham contracting is a significant issue in the private security industry. Sham contracting is where would-be employers ask individual licence holders to obtain an ABN and act as a sole trader, rather than taking them on as an employee. By doing this, the employer does not have to pay the costs associated with hiring the person under a genuine agreement – they do not have to pay an Award wage, provide for superannuation or Workcover insurance, and they do not have to provide for leave. As we all know, sham contracting is unlawful under Commonwealth and State Industrial Relations laws. However, the problem persists. The Bill seeks to assist in deterring sham contracting by making it far less likely that a worker will agree to such an arrangement. The mechanism for this is requiring anyone offering security services as a sole trader with an ABN to also hold a private security business licence. This will add a cost and an administrative barrier – as to obtain such a licence, a fee must be paid and financial information and business details must be produced.

To close out in relation to the private security components of the Bill, I want to emphasise that Government recognises the very important contribution our private security workforce makes to keeping our community safe. We remain committed to raising professional standards across the industry and ensuring that all workers are paid appropriately.

In relation to the drug courts amendments, drug courts are specialised courts that provide a therapeutic approach to addressing the complex needs of offenders with drug and alcohol dependency. Traditional sentencing options can fail to adequately address the needs of drug offenders. By contrast, the drug court model seeks to address underlying causes of offending by providing intensive drug treatment services to offenders. Addressing these underlying causes will ultimately enhance the wellbeing and community connectedness of participants by improving their relationships, housing stability and life skills, and reducing reoffending.

The County Court Drug Court Division was established as a three-year pilot program in 2021. The Bill will amend the *County Court Act 1958* and the *Sentencing Act 1991* to extend the operation of the Drug Court

Division within the County Court of Victoria for a further two years. This will preserve the benefits that have been derived from the Drug Court's operation for as many eligible people as possible. These benefits include reduced reoffending rates and reduced substance use. It will also ensure that the lessons learned from recent evaluations of Victoria's Drug Courts can be implemented to enhance the operation of the Drug Court.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:40): I move:

That the debate be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Adjournment

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:41): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Australian Paralympic and Olympic teams

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:41): (769) Victoria truly is the home of sport, and on Tuesday night we had a selection of Victoria's finest athletes right here in Parliament to tell us about the upcoming Paralympic and Olympic Games. Victoria being the home of sport is not reflected more than in the Allan Labor government's announcement of a \$1.5 million investment into our Paralympic and Olympic teams, to be split evenly between the two. Victoria has always been the home of sport and will continue to invest in and cheer on our state's superstars.

Having so much sporting prowess in the halls of Parliament was just sensational, with Victoria producing some of the best athletes the Australian team has to offer. We are not short in the talent department. Jaryd Clifford's story about realising his childhood dream of becoming a long-distance runner and champion while having a vision impairment was one of awesomely fierce determination and incredible courage. Jaryd just keeps on breaking down those barriers, and as he said on Tuesday, 'You planted a flag, and it is our job to catch up.' Thank you so much, Jaryd. I will be watching your journey and cheering you on, and I hope to see that gold medal around your neck.

I also had the honour of hearing from Shae Graham, a trailblazing wheelchair rugby superstar who taught me that the other name for that sport is murderball. I am not too sure what to expect from this team, but judging from its nickname and what Shae was saying, and I have got to say my experience is limited, I am very much looking forward to Paris. Before that, though, I was very generously and graciously invited to come and see the headquarters and have a tour of the facility and even watch a few practice matches, so it seems like that might be a sport to watch come Paris time.

My question to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events is will he attend this tour with me and get stuck into wheelchair rugby, and is he open to having a go at the sport himself? From Parliament to Paris, from marathons to murderball, the Allan Labor government will be cheering on our Victorian superstars.

Transport infrastructure

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:43): (770) My adjournment is directed towards the Treasurer, and it concerns today's reports that transport infrastructure in the north is at risk because of the ballooning state debt. According to reports in the *Age* today, the commitment to remove eight level crossings on the Upfield line by 2027 is under a cloud, with the state yet to release designs and begin consultation scheduled for last year, which is funny because I remember seeing big billboards around Brunswick saying that the Upfield line was going to be level crossing free – 'Vote for Mike Williams, the Labor candidate, because we are going to have a level crossing free Upfield line' – which did not happen.

Several groups in my electorate say they have yet to be consulted. Merri-bek Bicycle User Group convenor Faith Hunter said initially consultation was planned for a year ago – that was definitely the expectation. Upfield Urban Forest convenor Jo Connellan said all community groups she was aware of had not been consulted, which was quite different to the contributions of a Labor member for Northern Metropolitan Ms Watt, who said that:

These level crossing removals ... create four MCGs worth of open space and a dedicated bike path to the city.

This will be a huge change for the area, and I will ensure ... the community is properly consulted so that this project can meet the demands and needs of as many people as possible.

Several sources were reported in the *Age* as saying they can do the North East Link even with the blowout to \$26.1 billion and they can do the Suburban Rail Loop but other projects in the planning phase might be under a cloud – such as the Upfield line level crossing removal project and the outer metropolitan ring-road, which is definitely needed for my constituents in the north and the north-east, connecting Thomastown up to Craigieburn and Wallan and to the western suburbs as well – a vital infrastructure project. These and many other infrastructure projects are under a cloud.

This is one case of a direct broken promise. Yes, I accept that the Liberal Party is not always the most supported party in the seat of Brunswick, but integrity is important in politics. At the last two elections I fronted up to the public transport forums in Brunswick, when I was a candidate in 2018 and when I was a candidate in 2022. It is not a flash place to be a Liberal sometimes, but I show up because that is the right thing to do as a person putting themselves forward for office. I have always been very clear that I am a big supporter of public transport, as I have proven in this house with my advocacy on bus frequency and public transport to parts of our growth areas that miss out. This is a clear broken promise. The action I seek from the Treasurer is to explain the government's plans or admit that this is a direct broken promise.

Youth crime

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (17:46): (771) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Police, and it concerns funding for the youth crime prevention and early intervention project. Last week I had the great privilege to meet the amazing team at the youth crime prevention and early intervention project. This project is making a difference, keeping children and young people in the inner west from that initial contact with the criminal justice system, which we know can lead to a lifetime of adverse outcomes. It does so by using police cautions and diversions for minor offences and linking those young people with a youth services coordinator to assist them to access the supports they need to stay on the right side of the law.

The project was founded by Angus Woodward from Westjustice and Steve Turner, a Victoria Police sergeant working the beat in Melbourne's inner west. They were both frustrated by the traditional approach to youth crime, which criminalised too many children and young people while failing to address the factors that might influence these young people to commit crimes in the first place. Most of their clients are over-represented in the criminal justice system, including young members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and African–Australian, Māori and Pasifika communities as well as children in residential care. The multidisciplinary team operates out of the Visy Cares Hub in Sunshine. Having legal assistance and youth services operating out of one site is critical as it means that kids can get timely support rather than being referred to somewhere else to meet with support services in a couple of months time.

The project has led to a drop in the number of arrests and court appearances and has reduced rates of recidivism. Evaluations of the project have been overwhelmingly positive, and it enjoys strong support from key stakeholders including Victoria Police, who, frankly, love it. Funding for the project runs out in May, so the team are seeking money to continue operating out of the current site as well as funds to expand the project to four more sites across the state. This will be money well spent. The reduction in court costs and use of police resources alone more than covers the cost of funding the project. I would like to thank Angus Woodward, Sergeant Steve Turner, Chantelle Gianinotti and Ellie Serour for their

time. This is the sort of good news story we need in the western suburbs, and I urge the minister to support this fantastic project.

War Widows Day

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:49): (772) Throughout the veterans' calendar numerous days are devoted to the commemoration of our veterans, from Anzac Day to Remembrance Day, acknowledging the sacrifices made in service to our nation – and rightly so. War Widows Day provides focus for our community on the sacrifice of widows whose loved ones gave their lives for our country. This reaffirms our commitment to honouring the sacrifices of our war widows and amplifies our support for their rightful recognition. In recent years there has been a nationwide movement advocating for the recognition of War Widows Day, with Queensland and New South Wales pioneering this acknowledgement in 2022. My request for the Minister for Veterans is for her to commit to recognising War Widows Day in Victoria with a date of 19 October.

Women's health and family violence services

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (17:50): (773) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Women. My ask is that she ensures specialist women's services are properly funded in the next state budget. In particular I ask the minister to retain the 2023–24 uplift funding for specialist family violence and women's health services and to boost funding for primary prevention and multicultural services. The uplift funding will lapse in June 2024, and I have heard from many services that the sector desperately needs this funding to stay afloat. I have heard from the family violence service sector too that their waiting lists are months long, posing a safety risk for women and children. Without adequate funding it will be difficult for them to meet the demand and retain workers. Services are seeing high levels of burnout and staff turnover. This has been exacerbated by broader service system failures, particularly the lack of available housing. Services are saying they have not seen this level of need from clients before. Demand for services is far outstripping supply. Family violence services need to retain the uplift funding so their situation does not become even more dire.

I have also spoken with specialist women's health organisations, which do invaluable work to provide place-based specialist primary prevention services. They are similarly reliant on the uplift funding for the provision of core services. The government must fund these services if it is serious about addressing the health inequalities women face. The Premier has announced an inquiry into women's pain, but what is the point of having this inquiry if the various services that would respond to its findings are underfunded and unable to do the work? Providing proper funding for these services is not only the right thing to do but the economical thing to do. Every dollar spent on primary prevention means fewer dollars spent downstream on more acute and chronic conditions. The government has been vocal about how constrained the budget is going to be, but responsible economic management means investing now to save money in the future.

I also want to note the importance of adequately funding multicultural women's services. The Orange Door service has been an incredible presence in the family violence sector. We are hearing that women from refugee and migrant backgrounds are being referred to specialist multicultural organisations for case management; however, these services do not have adequate funding or staff. Volunteer-run services are being inundated with casework requests far beyond their capacity. Volunteers are nonetheless persevering in providing services because they care about the women in their community and they can see there is nowhere else for migrant women to go.

Similar trends are present in the women's health sector. The mainstreaming of multicultural women's services has not been working. The research plainly tells us that specialist multicultural women's services are essential to providing culturally safe services. We need them to support the growing diverse Victorian population. Specialist women's services are fundamental to the pursuit of safety and gender equality, and this includes specialist refuges for women from culturally diverse backgrounds escaping family violence. Minister, I ask you to sustainably fund women's health and family violence services in the next budget.

Greater Shepparton bus services

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:53): (774) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it concerns the failure of the state government to provide reliable, efficient public bus services for the Greater Shepparton community. The action that I seek is for the minister to conduct a review of current bus services within the Greater Shepparton municipality, including the frequency, location, accessibility and consistency of services.

My office constantly hears from constituents about the inadequate public transport services offered in the area. One of the most common complaints is that there are no buses running on Sundays or public holidays and only limited runs on Saturdays. Things are even worse if you do not live in the Shepparton township. Residents of Kialla do not have any services at all on a Saturday or Sunday. On weekdays Tatura residents only have two buses to Shepparton and two buses back home, but because of the timing of the services this effectively provides only one return service for Tatura residents. On Saturday there is a bus from Shepparton to Tatura in the morning and one from Tatura to Shepparton in the evening but no return service starting and terminating in Tatura. There are no bus services for Mooroopna residents on Saturday afternoon or Sunday. The Mooroopna train station has bad lighting and unstable pathways, and it is a long walk from the nearest bus stop.

Since the last review conducted of Greater Shepparton bus services, in 2009, there have been significant shifts in the demographics of the region, with growth expected to continue and accelerate across the municipality. Public transport is particularly important for specific groups, such as the elderly, youth or people with a disability, who often do not have access to a motor vehicle. A lack of weekend buses means some residents are forced to walk long distances to their centres of religious worship on a Saturday or Sunday. It is clear that the bus network in the Greater Shepparton region does not adequately cater for the area's growing and diverse community, and a review and update is long overdue. When the state government released its 2021 bus plan, Labor declared that it was committed to delivering bus services that better match public transport needs. The minister now needs to back that statement up by conducting a proper review of the Greater Shepparton bus network.

Dental services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:56): (775) The action I am seeking from the Minister for Health is a reduction in the government's public dental general care wait time targets in the upcoming state budget. Last year Victoria's state budget set its target wait time for those accessing public dental care at an embarrassing 23 months. This government thinks it is aspirational to aim for someone to wait 23 months to see a dentist. But in truth the real wait time for everyday people in the community is in fact another 12 months on top of that, because once you have been seen by a dentist in the public system you have to wait a whole year until you are placed back onto the waitlist, and each time you get a new problem or even just need to access routine care you go to the bottom of the waiting list. While some very urgent problems may be seen a bit sooner than others, pain is not used to determine urgency, because as one public dentist told us, everyone on the waiting list is in pain.

Most people in this place will have experienced dental pain at some stage. It is awful, even just for a few days or weeks. Imagine being in that pain for years. This is the reality for many thousands of Victorians right now. In the three years that this government is happy for people to wait in pain to access dental care a whole raft of health problems can emerge. Let us not forget, just like your tibia or humerus or vertebrae, teeth are bones. They are part of the body, and when your teeth are not healthy, the rest of your body can get sick too. Periodontal disease – the gum disease that can result from poor oral hygiene – can lead to bone deterioration and teeth loss, but when high levels of bacteria from this disease enter the bloodstream, it can cause a whole host of other complications: heart disease and stroke, kidney disease, depression and even dementia. Not to mention the impact of chronic pain on sleep, eating, mood and general functioning or the social impacts of poor dentition, like shame and stigma, reduced employment opportunities, reduced housing opportunities and reduced confidence.

While the government is content with a 23-month target for the public dental waiting list, thousands of Victorians are suffering immensely, and avoidably, for years. It is time to put teeth back in the body, and that means a commitment to timely access to public dental care.

Hindu community

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (17:58): (776) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to allow the Indian community at Melton's Harkness cemetery to have a space at the new cemetery in Melton to conduct open-air funeral pyres in accordance with their religious tradition. Traditional Hindu funerals are designed to cleanse the soul and prepare for the spiritual world in reincarnation. The traditional practice requires the deceased body to be cremated on top of a pyre of wood. Currently our cremation practices do not allow or permit the Hindu community to conduct their religious practice, so our Indian Australians must fly their deceased family member overseas to be cremated in a dignified way. The Harkness cemetery is being designed to embrace changing community attitudes and beliefs about funerals. However, the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust has stated they will not seriously consider a proposal for another 10 years because there is no precedent. I am not sure from what century the board of the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust delivered their reasons. It was certainly without any consultation with the community, or engagement. It does not reflect modern society, and it is not embracing changing community attitudes and beliefs. The Hindu community are only asking for a small space within the vast 128 acres of the cemetery, which will be one of the largest cemeteries in Melbourne. With the cemetery still in the planning and development stages and set to open in 2026, the cemetery trust must at least consider its support of Hinduism, the largest and fastest growing religion. As a state that prides itself on multiculturalism, the minister should intervene and respect the Hindu rituals and beliefs. I ask the minister: could he give the Hindu community some respect and allow them to conduct and honour their traditional burial of their loved ones?

COVID-19 vaccination

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:01): (777) My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Health. Victoria's health system is continuing to struggle under the weight of multiple issues that are resulting in labour shortages, particularly of experienced, skilled frontline workers. Perhaps the shortages are a result of an increase in the number of graduates and students entering the workforce, who require more attention and supervision from existing trained staff, or the growing tendency towards part-time hours, meaning that full-time staff are taking on excessive overtime hours or leaving gaps on work rosters.

The Queensland Supreme Court has recently overruled the legality of vaccine mandates for police and ambulance services for reasons which may not be relevant to Victoria. However, the decision in Queensland has shown that it is possible and perhaps necessary to revise our approach to vaccine mandates. It is imperative that the Victorian government consider the continued impact of these mandates not only on the individual rights and bodily autonomy of Victorians but also on the efficacy and sustainability of our healthcare services. The mandates have sidelined experienced and skilled professionals who are otherwise ready and willing to contribute to our healthcare system. I have been contacted countless times by nurses and other healthcare workers who are still forced to travel in a fly-in fly-out style to states like South Australia to get work, some after serving 30 years in Victoria's healthcare system, because of our continued requirements that are not enforced elsewhere.

Removal or modification of the COVID-19 vaccine mandates for health workers will open the doors to allow these experienced and skilled professionals to return to the industry and use their experience to help Victorians. I call on the minister to request a review of Victoria's COVID-19 vaccine mandates as a measure to remove the mandates so that we can re-engage experienced health professionals who have been excluded from the workforce in Victoria.

Huntly flooding

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:02): (778) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water. Can the minister please advise who is the lead authority responsible for the maintaining and clearing and the health of Bendigo Creek and Back Creek, which run through Huntly near Bendigo? Huntly residents who have been repeatedly flooded have been handballed from one authority to another without any work being done. This buck-passing has left residents feeling frustrated and distressed. They want to ensure that works are done to remove sediment and clean out the creek to reduce the impact of further devastating floods in the Huntly area.

Huntly resident Mick Allen wants Back Creek cleared so property is not flooded when it rains. Mr Allen recently contacted the City of Greater Bendigo and the North Central Catchment Management Authority, but they both referred him to the state government. But when the *Bendigo Advertiser* contacted the department they were told that the City of Greater Bendigo manages Back Creek. This constant handballing of responsibility means that no works are getting done. It is not addressing the problem, and the local community continue to experience repeated flooding. Long-term residents say Back Creek has flooded seven times since 2010.

I draw the minister's attention to her answer to my question on 7 March last year, exactly 12 months ago today, regarding major issues with the flood levee along Bendigo Creek. The minister then advised that the City of Greater Bendigo had received funding to progress detailed designs for the Bendigo Creek levee, as well as cultural heritage management plans and vegetation, geotechnical and soil contamination assessments. This work was due to be completed in early 2024. Well, it is now early 2024, and there is an urgent need for this work to be finalised as soon as possible. I would appreciate the minister's update on this work and advice as to who is the lead authority for the Bendigo Creek and Back Creek in Huntly to ensure that works are done to prevent further flooding.

Sustainability

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:04): (779) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action that I seek is for her to abandon her privatisation agenda. Right now it really feels like everything is terrible. The cost of food is out of control, rents are at record highs and Labor is letting companies search for new oil and gas by blasting the sea floor with giant air guns. They are literally deafening the whales – this is cartoon villain stuff. It feels like we are heading into a dystopian future. But I would like to point out in this place that it does not have to be this way. We can choose a different path. We can live in communities with solar panels on every home, where everything you could need is within walking or cycling distance. We can build a world where everyone has access to a high-quality public home, a world where everyone has access to food, where people do not have to struggle for the basic necessities. We can build a society that respects the ecology of the planet, where biodiversity is restored, and climate change goes backwards; where everyone works less and enjoys a higher standard of living; and where everyone has a real say in how their community is run. I know this sounds like a fantasy, but we already have the tools to do this and more. We have the technology and the resources. We can build a better world if we choose to – and seriously, what is the alternative? As social ecologist Murray Bookchin said, we must start thinking utopian:

'Be practical, do the impossible', because if you don't do the impossible ... we're going to wind up with the unthinkable – and that will be the destruction of the planet itself.

Responses

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:06): There were 11 adjournment matters this evening for nine separate ministers, and written responses will be provided in accordance with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:07 pm.