



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 2 May 2023

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

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Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Bronwyn Halfpenny,
Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

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Daniel Andrews

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Jacinta Allan

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60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren	South Barwon	ALP	O'Keefe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Fowles, Will ¹	Ringwood	Ind	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Home, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Wayne Farnham	Narracan	Lib	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ ALP until 5 August.

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

CONTENTS

CONDOLENCES	
Terence Richard Norris	1297
Hon. Graeme Weideman	1297
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Government integrity	1302
Ministers statements: kindergarten funding	1303
Government integrity	1304
Ministers statements: health system	1306
Home building industry	1307
Ministers statements: Get Active Kids voucher program	1307
Rental support	1308
Ministers statements: vehicle registration fees	1309
Member conduct	1310
Ministers statements: power saving bonus	1310
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Polwarth electorate	1311
Lara electorate	1311
Gippsland South electorate	1312
Mordialloc electorate	1312
Kew electorate	1312
Glen Waverley electorate	1312
Richmond electorate	1313
Narre Warren South electorate	1313
Nepean electorate	1313
Albert Park electorate	1313
BILLS	
Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023	1314
Introduction and first reading	1314
Gambling Taxation Bill 2023	1314
Introduction and first reading	1314
ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Victorian Electoral Commission	1315
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Scope of debate	1315
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	1315
DOCUMENTS	
University of Divinity	1315
Annual Report 2022	1315
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee	1315
Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022	1315
Alert Digest No. 3	1315
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	1316
BILLS	
Heritage Amendment Bill 2023	1318
Council's agreement	1318
Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2023	1318
Heritage Amendment Bill 2023	1318
Royal assent	1318
JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT	
Victorian Health Promotion Foundation	1318
Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation	1318
COMMITTEES	
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	1319
Membership	1319
MOTIONS	
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission	1319
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	

Program	1319
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Father Bob Maguire	1325
Regional roads	1325
Frank Cherry	1325
Princes Highway, Yambuk.....	1326
Anzac Day.....	1326
Barwon Heads 13th Beach Surf Life Saving Club.....	1326
Single-use plastics	1326
Ainslie Park Cricket Club	1327
John Attwood.....	1327
Euroa electorate shadow ministerial visits	1327
Anzac Day.....	1328
Prader-Willi syndrome.....	1328
Hampton Rovers Football Club	1328
Hampton post office	1328
Jack Levy Pavilion	1329
Armstrong Creek library.....	1329
Rental support.....	1329
Footscray electorate planning.....	1329
Anzac Day.....	1330
George Collins Kokoda Award.....	1330
Pascoe Vale electorate.....	1330
Noela Rose	1330
Victoria's Big Build	1330
Brimbank mental health and wellbeing local	1331
Whitehorse City Council	1331
Steven Tougher.....	1331
Ramadan.....	1332
Mary Queen of Heaven Primary School	1332
Eid al-Fitr.....	1332
ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT	
Governor's speech.....	1332
Address-in-reply	1332
BILLS	
Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023	1339
Second reading.....	1339
ADJOURNMENT	
Homelessness.....	1366
Broadmeadows electorate road safety	1367
Country Fire Authority Morwell station	1367
Box Hill Central post office.....	1368
Pest control.....	1368
Blind Creek	1369
LGBTIQA+ health care	1370
Monbulk electorate events.....	1370
Meals on Wheels	1371
Dawoodi Bohra mosque	1371
Responses.....	1372

Tuesday 2 May 2023

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Condolences

Terence Richard Norris

The SPEAKER (12:04): I advise the house of the death of Terence Richard Norris, member of the Legislative Assembly for the districts of Noble Park from 1982 to 1985 and Dandenong from 1985 to 1992. I ask members to rise in their places as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased.

Members stood in their places.

The SPEAKER: I shall convey a message of sympathy from the house to the relatives of the late Terry Norris.

Hon. Graeme Weideman

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (12:05): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Graeme Weideman and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Assembly for the districts of Frankston from 1976 to 1982 and from 1992 to 1996 and Frankston South from 1985 to 1992 and Minister for Tourism from 1981 to 1982.

Graeme Weideman was born on 6 November 1934 to parents George and Hazel Weideman, potato farmers from the proud Ballarat region. The Weidemans would uproot their life in Ballarat when the Great Depression hit in the 1930s. The family moved to Melbourne and purchased a grocery store on Station Street in Fairfield. They lived behind the shop, where Graeme and his brother Murray, a future Collingwood star, shared a room. The brothers helped out in the shop, serving customers and stacking the shelves. It was just the start of his long life of chipping in and doing his bit for those around him.

Graeme pursued a career as a pharmacist, eventually opening his own business in Frankston. Like all community pharmacists, Graeme Weideman was a person who lived his life in the service of others. He ran a small business, but it was so much more than that: it was about the provision of health care, advice – one of the most trusted professions in our entire Victorian and Australian community. It is not surprising that he worked tirelessly in that role and then in subsequent roles for the people of the mighty City of Frankston. On top of running his pharmacy seven days a week, Graeme volunteered whatever spare time he had to local committees, to causes and to boards. Of course that culminated in 1976 with his preselection and his election to the Legislative Assembly as the member for Frankston.

In his first speech in this chamber Graeme reflected on his considerable experience serving his community in such a trusted and critically important role as a community pharmacist and in many other ways. He highlighted the importance of small business of course, and he called for greater support in the fight against drug addiction. In his pharmacy and in this place he dedicated his life to it, that most worthy of causes, his local community and those who are vulnerable, those who are in the grips of addiction and those who are in need of the very best health care, particularly primary health care, which is so much better than being failed by that system and finishing up in hospital at considerable cost to you and those around you.

Graeme served on a number of different boards and committees, as I mentioned, appointments which he took very seriously. He was one of the first board members of VicHealth when it was established in 1987. Rhonda Galbally, a fine Victorian and someone who many of us know and have worked with, the former chief executive officer of VicHealth, once said, and I quote:

The ebullient Graeme Weideman, representing the Liberal Party, was so enthusiastic a Board member that we had to assign a staff member to respond to his multitude of suggestions and ideas.

That is the best type of person that any electorate, any committee or any cause could ask for. He was a hard worker. He was somebody with vision, with drive and with a real passion to get things done at a local level and more broadly.

Graeme was someone who knew and deeply understood Frankston. He respected its history and its people. He was also acutely aware of its promise – what it might be in the right circumstances with the right investments and with passionate advocacy. He also looked forward, seeing that potential with a real sense of hopefulness. He was very positive about his local community. He also understood, though, that there are many people in Frankston, many families, who did it tough and who needed a champion. They needed someone to stand up for them. That is perhaps why he was re-elected on so many occasions, albeit with a small hiatus away from this place.

I am told that Graeme was a lively parliamentarian and someone who served his local community with enthusiasm as a local councillor and as a member of this place. He was also a devoted healthcare professional – someone of principle, someone of purpose, someone who lived a meaningful life so often in the service of other people. That is something to be revered. That is something to be remembered and celebrated, and it has been in terms of his farewell and the many tributes that have flowed. Hopefully, they have been some small comfort to his family at what is a very difficult time.

On behalf of the Victorian government I extend our deepest condolences to his wife Barbara and his family. They can be proud of all that he achieved. They can be proud of the person that he was and the fondness and affection with which he is remembered. We also extend our sympathies of course to the community of Frankston – so many individuals and families, so many businesses, so many worthy causes. So much of the fabric of Frankston was influenced positively by Graeme in his leadership and his service. There can be few more meaningful compliments paid than to say that he was a champion for his community, he was of his community, he loved his community and he made it better through his service. Vale, Graeme Weideman.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (12:11): I am very pleased to be able to join in support of this condolence motion for George Graeme Weideman. The passing of the Honourable Graeme Weideman on 13 April of this year marks the loss of a respected community leader and a highly regarded former member and minister of this Parliament.

Graeme had an interesting early life, being born in Ballarat on Melbourne Cup Day in 1934 to a farming family who had a potato farm at Waubra, not far from Ballarat. The Weideman name is obviously well known. Graeme's younger brother Murray, who was born some 15 months after Graeme, later became Collingwood Football Club captain and in 1958 a premiership hero and an all-round Magpie legend. But Graeme made his own way as well. During the 1930s potato farming was not very profitable, and the family purchased and moved to a grocery store in Station Street, Fairfield. In Graeme's early years he attended Northcote Boys High School, playing clarinet and saxophone amongst many other passions that he developed through his life. He was very community minded from a young age, joining the school cadets at 14 years of age and being very active in the Scouts at nearby Alphington. Following high school, Graeme went on to attend the Victorian College of Pharmacy. Prior to his time as a member of this Parliament and a minister Graeme was a very well-respected pharmacist, commencing his practice in Preston for a short period before moving to pharmacies located in Frankston, Hastings and later Mount Buller.

Graeme's passion for upholding the spirit of community involvement and volunteerism was reflected over many years via various roles with a range of community and professional organisations. His active community involvement commenced in 1964 as a 30-year-old when he joined the Frankston Lions Club, where he held various positions and was active in the community. Not long after, Graeme became president of the Frankston branch of Liberal Party, and in 1966 he became co-campaign manager for his good friend Sir Phillip Lynch in his first election win in Flinders. He also became secretary of the Flinders electorate committee for Sir Phillip. He was always a strong supporter of education and served on school councils over many years. From 1966 Graeme was an active member

of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, and he joined the Pharmacy Board of Victoria in 1975. But it was his passion for his community that saw him turn to politics as a profession for himself as well.

Graeme was first elected to this Parliament as the member for Frankston in 1976 with 60 per cent of the primary vote and a swing of more than 7 per cent. In his maiden speech to Parliament Graeme highlighted the difficulties for small business at the time, the impact of drug use within the community and alcohol as statistically the most serious and dangerous drug of all. Graeme was re-elected as the member for Frankston in 1979 and became the Minister for Tourism and Assistant Minister of Health in 1981. At the 1982 election he lost by a mere 76 votes, but he did not give up. He fought back and returned to the Victorian Parliament in 1985 as the member for the rezoned seat of Frankston South, a seat he won again in both 1988 and 1992. In 1987 he became an inaugural parliamentary member of the board of VicHealth. Graeme also went on to chair the important parliamentary Public Accounts and Estimates Committee from 1992 to 1996. He retired at the 1996 state election at 62 years of age but continued to be very active in his community. In all Graeme served 17 years as a member of this place – a very good innings by any stretch.

But with the sadness that comes from Graeme's passing, so too come our appreciation and gratitude for his contribution to making Victoria a better place. Graeme was a supportive and loving family man to his wife of 63 years, Barbara; father to Prue, Caroline and Nicholas; father-in-law to Andrew, Zoran and Melissa; grandfather to Isabella, Jesse, Sarah, Ned, Scarlett, Milla and Harriet; and great-grandfather to George. At his funeral late last month Graeme's family spoke of a great family and community man and a life so well lived. On behalf of this side of the house, I convey our great appreciation for the Honourable Graeme Weideman's distinguished and honourable service to this Parliament and to the community he so loved, and we extend our sincere condolences to his family and friends. May he rest in peace.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (12:16): I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this condolence motion for Graeme Weideman, who passed away peacefully at age 88. Graeme was a devoted husband to Barbara for 63 years, and he led a life dedicated to serving Victoria – as a politician, a pharmacist and a community leader. He was a kind and well-respected gentleman who was much loved and will be sadly missed.

I did not meet Graeme. I had to do a bit of research, and I asked around – some of our old political heads in Frankston on both sides of the major parties – and he was definitely well respected. I find it curious that he was part of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia, which is kind of in the territory of the current member for Frankston, being a trade unionist, I guess, but I think we would have got along. He was elected in 1976 as the member for Frankston, and he went through some changes in the election boundaries through that time. He was still in as the member for Frankston in 1982, then lost to Jane Hill from the ALP, as we have heard, by 76 votes, but he was re-elected in 1985 as the member for Frankston South and then in 1992 as the member for Frankston. He served as Minister for Tourism and Assistant Minister of Health from 1981 until the fall of the Liberal government in 1982.

I have absolutely no doubt that despite our political alignments or the different political alignments, Graeme and I would have got along over a cup of coffee through our shared passion for Frankston and moving Frankston and Victorians forward through our custodianship as state members. I was in the car this morning, and it raised a question in my mind that perhaps a blind spot of new members is not searching out members from the other side and other parties to have a discussion about their passion and their vision for their state and their communities as well, because we certainly have much more in common with our passion for our communities than what actually divides us at times.

And on this point I got onto *Hansard*, as we all love to do, and I had a look at some of the adjournments that Graeme brought up. On 30 November 1994 Graeme raised the issue of asbestos in schools in an adjournment. On 27 October 1992 Graeme raised an adjournment matter on supporting Frankston TAFE's expansion, via some land on Ballarto Road, for agricultural apprenticeships. On 15 September 1993 Graeme spoke on an adjournment concerning a lack of affordable kindergarten places for four-

year-olds and a need for kinder for three-year-olds, and on 15 November 1994 Graeme raised an adjournment and asked for more public transport parking and bus services around the Frankston station. So I think it is safe to say that Graeme and I would have got along pretty well. He would be pleased, I think, that some of these issues have been carried on into the future despite the politics and the political nature of Parliament.

By all accounts all of the people, bar none, I have spoken to in the community of Frankston held Graeme in high regard as a good friend and a loyal colleague, and those who served with Graeme in Parliament say the same thing. So my deepest sympathy from the Frankston community to Barbara and her family. On behalf of an appreciative and grieving Frankston community, who are grateful for his contribution and a life well lived, we say thank you. Vale, Graeme Weideman.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:19): I rise to join the condolence motion for Graeme Weideman. If you read about Graeme's career, he had the perfect community involvement to be a good member of Parliament. When you go through the things that he did both in his parliamentary time and in his career before Parliament there was involvement in school councils – the Toorak College council and the Baxter Technical School council – and involvement in community health in Frankston, the peninsula unemployment action group, the peninsula road trauma and safety committee and the peninsula drug and alcohol committee. He had a real involvement in his community, which brought him to this place with a very good understanding of his community and the needs that needed to be served by the Victorian government.

People would wonder why there are so many Weidemans in the Wimmera. I read the history of the family. The Weideman family came to Australia through Adelaide in 1847 and then some of them moved to the Wimmera in 1850.

Daniel Andrews interjected.

Peter WALSH: No, you can't. If you look at when they set up at Rupanyup, Graeme's grandfather was one of 15 children, his own father was one of 13 children and an uncle was one of 11 children, so I think we understand why there are so many Weidemans either in the Wimmera or who have moved out of the Wimmera. If you think about the Wimmera soil and Andrew Weidemann, who is still farming there, people would have seen the ads where it does not grow barley for beer, it actually grows Crown Lager stubbies – it is that good in the Wimmera.

Graeme came to this place, as I said, with a proud history. I look through the fact that he had time as a minister, but the thing that intrigued me was that he had time on the Public Bodies Review Committee. If you go to the Public Bodies Review Committee under the Cain and Kirner governments, that is probably what brought me to this place and my involvement in politics and the long debates I used to have with Ian Baker, who was then the Minister for Agriculture, about the things that he wanted to do or undo to the tomato industry, which I was involved in in that time. The Public Bodies Review Committee did a lot of work in simplifying legislation here in Victoria.

If you go through his maiden speech, as has already been mentioned, Graeme had a great interest in small business and the fact that small business actually drives the economy with the employment that small business creates. The figures he used were that 42 per cent of the state's workforce is small business, and in regional areas 90 per cent of the workforce is employed by small business. He spoke about the woes of small business at that time, with increasing costs and small margins. I think that is no different to what we see today, particularly post COVID.

The other thing that he talked about obviously was the scourge of drugs, the impact that had on people and the need to do more, and I think that is still the case. He spoke about the Premier's policy speech at that particular time, when he was elected, about examining ways of simplifying the existing legislation and lessening restrictions on the community. I think we can all take lessons from that as to what we can do to help small business prosper by reducing the red tape. He spoke about the fact that it was good to be elected as a pharmacist and that it was the first time that there were two pharmacists

CONDOLENCES

Tuesday 2 May 2023

Legislative Assembly

1301

in the house since the 1890s – there were actually five pharmacists in the Parliament at that particular time. So he was very proud of the fact that there were pharmacists in there.

Graeme Weideman was a very passionate Collingwood supporter, as we have talked about. His brother was captain of Collingwood. So if you look at his inaugural speech, I am sure he would have been thrilled to bits that that great son of Geelong Neil Trezise was actually the member that spoke after him.

Members interjecting.

Peter WALSH: Here we go. Neil Trezise was a champion and a great person, a great politician, and I am sure a Collingwood supporter –

A member interjected.

Peter WALSH: So was his son, but he did not quite have the same football ability. I am sure Graeme would have been proud to be followed by a proud son of Geelong after his inaugural speech.

It is also an interesting fact that he was part of the Tilley Soaps business. So apart from being a pharmacist and running a small business, he also invested in and was part of the Tilley Soaps business that makes specialty soaps. For those that go to museums in our electorates, you will see the tins that Tilley soap came in at that particular time. He was someone that actually practised what he preached – he not only talked about supporting small business but was actually involved in small business. So I think the community of Frankston and the peninsula in general is much the richer for having had Graeme as a member of Parliament for 17 years with the things that he fought through. As we know from the current member for Frankston's contribution, the work is never done for any of our communities. There are always things to fight for, but Graeme did his community proud and we congratulate him for that. Vale, Graeme Weideman.

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (12:25): I rise to also join my parliamentary colleagues in paying respects to the former member of this place Graeme Weideman, who represented Frankston for the Liberal Party from 1976 to 1982 and 1992 to 96, as well as Frankston South from 1985 to 1992. On 13 April 2023 the world lost Graeme, a dedicated statesman, a distinguished businessman, an enthusiastic and empathetic representative of his community and a devoted husband and father.

Graeme and I actually shared quite a lot. As the former federal member for Dunkley I covered the areas of both Frankston and Frankston South, the same areas that Graeme covered. As was noted before, I grew up in the Wimmera – I have that connection with Graeme – and I also have that farming background in the Wimmera in my blood. I also have the situation of having lost a seat and having re-won a seat, so that is yet another thing in common. And importantly of course I am a fellow supporter of the Collingwood Football Club – I should say the great Collingwood Football Club; I am sure many of you will agree. Graeme and I shared that in common, along with having relations in the Collingwood Football Club. His brother Murray Weideman was a club great. I myself have both players and presidents in my family, including Tom Sherrin, Norm Crewther and Bill Proudfoot, so we shared that love of Collingwood.

Prior to becoming a member of this place, Graeme had an esteemed career in pharmacy, serving as a member of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia Victoria state branch committee from 1966 to 72, the director of Protos Chemicals from 1968 to 72, the managing director of Weideman Tilley Soaps from 1974 to 76 and a partner of Tilley Soaps in 1977.

As a pharmacist and businessman Weideman had to be meticulous, dedicated and efficient, and it is perhaps these values that made him such an esteemed and dedicated member of Parliament, as the member for Frankston noted before. In his time as the member for Frankston he also recognised that there are problems unique to the region and dedicated his life in public office to trying to have them resolved, highlighting the impacts, for example, of alcohol and drug use in his local community and the struggles of small businesses. I note that some issues have been resolved, but as the member for

Frankston noted, there are still many more issues that both the member for Frankston and I have fought for in the past and we continue to fight for in our region that Graeme fought very hard for.

In his time in Parliament he served as the Minister for Tourism and Assistant Minister of Health from 1981 to 82, on the Public Accounts Committee from 1979 to 80 and on the Public Bodies Review Committee from 1980 onwards. He also served on the first board of VicHealth when it was established in 1987. Rhonda Galbally, former CEO of VicHealth, said that:

The ebullient Graeme Weideman ... was so enthusiastic a Board member that we had to assign a staff member to respond to his multitude of suggestions and ideas.

And that was noted in the speech just before. On being a politician and VicHealth board member Graeme said:

We had the opportunity to do things that had never been done before. We had to use the money available with the greatest amount of respect and get value for our money. I believe we did.

Indeed Graeme was inherently innovative. When Weideman took over as chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee during the Kennett government in the early 1990s he met with Ches Baragwanath, Victoria's former Auditor-General, and agreed that a central function of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee was to work closely with the Auditor-General and to represent his office in Parliament. Over the next four years Graeme helped put this philosophy into action, carrying out in-depth investigations on issues that were raised by the Auditor-General and developing a close collaborative relationship with the government and bureaucracy to resolve these issues. The output of this committee was indeed formidable – a system of public accountability that Graeme Weideman saw as being 'the envy of the world' and 'setting the standard for others to follow'. Following Graeme's retirement from politics in the 1996 state election Ches Baragwanath noted this as a tragedy, and it was after this time that relations between the government and the Auditor-General began to deteriorate.

In his time as the member for Frankston and member for Frankston South Graeme was also known as 'Mr Frankston', and I note that the former member for Dunkley, who my office and I have spoken to, appreciated Graeme's mentorship and guidance at the time when he commenced his role as the member for Dunkley as well. I would like to finish by noting my sincere condolences to Barbara and to Prue, Caroline and Nicholas, his children, his grandchildren and great-grandchild and all his family and friends. Vale, Graeme Weideman.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (12:31): I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Graeme Weideman, the house now adjourns until 2 pm today.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 12:31 pm.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 2:01 pm.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Government integrity

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass discredited the Premier's characterisation of Operation Daintree as an educational report, saying:

It was not an educational report, it was a damning report about misconduct of ministerial advisors, and ministerial responsibility for those advisors.

The Ombudsman went on further, saying:

... it says a lot about the Premier's views on corruption and integrity ...

Does the Premier agree with the Ombudsman's scathing characterisation of his actions and those of his office?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:03): Whilst I am invited to reflect upon the Ombudsman, an officer of this Parliament, I will not be doing that. Nor will I be offering an opinion, which I think is outside the scope of the standing orders. If the Leader of the Opposition – who perhaps needs a bit of help with the drafting of these questions, just quietly – has read the report, then he will know that there were 17 recommendations made. The cabinet, as part of a proper, orderly process, will consider those recommendations, and we will update the house and the community accordingly. In the meantime, I will take the opportunity to say, lest anyone be misled by the Leader of the Opposition, that the anti-corruption commission had an investigation. They have produced a report and found no corrupt conduct by anyone.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Having refused to read the letter from former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich about corruption on the Premier's watch, has the Premier read *Operation Daintree: Special Report*?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:04): Of course I have read the report and responded to it. At the end of the day, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to go letterbox by letterbox pinching people's mail, have at it, mate. That correspondence was not addressed to me, and I will not read that correspondence. If you want to spend your time reading missives from the former head of an agency, go for it. We would rather focus on delivering for Victorians and getting on –

John Pesutto interjected.

Daniel ANDREWS: The Leader of the Opposition ought reflect on the small number of people he sits with because the people of Victoria have had their say on you, mate. They have had their say on you, and you can be as distracted as you want; we will not be.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I refer you to standing order 58. The Premier knows better than to debate the question, and I would ask you to bring him back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: kindergarten funding

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:06): I am delighted to rise today to encourage all parents of our littlest Victorians right across the state to enrol their three- and four-year-olds in free kinder. Free kinder – why would you do that? Well, it is not only about supporting families at a time when cost-of-living pressure is a really significant challenge, a really significant issue –

John Pesutto interjected.

Daniel ANDREWS: Leader of the Opposition, you have had your go. We are now talking about serious issues, and you have got nothing to say. You have got nothing to offer. You are in political kinder, buddy, and we will see whether you get to four-year-old.

The SPEAKER: Order! I would ask members to address their comments through the Chair.

Daniel ANDREWS: Instead of being distracted by party-political kinder over here, we will talk about free kinder for families across Victoria.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has clearly ignored your ruling, outrageously, and I would ask you to bring him back to the question.

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

Daniel ANDREWS: Far from being outrageous, free kinder is outstanding. It is all about making sure that families are \$2500 per child per year better off. It is about making sure that our smallest Victorians in those precious early years get the socialisation, the play-based learning and the

developmental head start that will shape their life opportunities throughout their whole life. It is called Best Start, Best Life for a reason, because that is what it is delivering. Despite the commentary of some, we are getting on and delivering this – \$2500 per child per year in the pockets of parents, the best place for it. This is a \$9 billion reform, one that is nation leading and one that will mean we have an economy and a community with people that have got the skills necessary, the competence and the confidence to play their part when it comes time.

A member interjected.

Daniel ANDREWS: Well, we will not be cutting the kinder services and the childcare services that the Baillieu government cut when they were in office. We would be happy to talk about early childhood education, Best Start, Best Life and free kinder every day and twice on Sundays, Leader of the Opposition – more than happy.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narracan is warned.

Government integrity

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Premier. The Victorian Ombudsman, the then IBAC Commissioner, the Parliamentary Budget Office, a former Chief Commissioner of Police and at least two former Supreme Court judges have taken the unprecedented step of criticising the complete lack of integrity and abuse of power by this government. Given the Andrews government is mired in corruption, will the Premier now seriously consider his position? If the Premier is the problem, how can he be the solution?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Premier will come to order.

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:09): Mate, you have got to know where the post is. It is 10 past 2; we have not even rounded the first bend yet.

John Pesutto: I'm not doing it for you, buddy.

Daniel ANDREWS: Well, they are not going anywhere. You just said you are not doing it for me; you are doing it for them, are you? Well, they are not going anywhere. They will be here for the full hour. I hope you are not doing it for the ones behind you.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to cease trading barbs across the table and direct their comments through the Chair.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! When you are called, Leader of the Opposition. When you are called.

John Pesutto: the Premier accused me of doing it for them. I am not doing it for them, I am not doing it for them, I am not doing it for them, I am doing it for them – the people of this state.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eltham can leave the chamber for 1 hour. The Leader of the Opposition is not immune from being removed from the chamber. The Premier to answer the question, without assistance.

Member for Eltham withdrew from chamber.

Daniel ANDREWS: Thank you very much, Speaker. A penny for Brad Battin's thoughts, that is all I can say. Goodness me. In any event the Leader of the Opposition has asked me to take a course of action. Only a few months ago –

John Pesutto: You are the problem.

Daniel ANDREWS: Well, that is what they say about you, your colleagues. They can barely order their coffees, they are gossiping that loud. They are down there in Strangers Corridor. You will be a stranger to them soon enough, mate. They will not be able to find a seat far enough back for you. But in any event –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker – it is hard to know where to begin, because there are so many points of order.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eildon will be heard in silence.

Cindy McLeish: On relevance, and also the Premier knows full well that question time is not an opportunity for him to attack the opposition. He has used the bulk of this time to attack the Leader of the Opposition, and that is not on. You know that, and he knows that.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eildon will not direct her comments at the Chair in that way. It is disrespectful. I ask the Premier to be relevant to the question that was asked.

Daniel ANDREWS: I was asked to take a course of action, and let me tell you what we will do. What we are going to do is we are going to deliver every single election commitment that we made to the people of Victoria. We will continue –

Members interjecting.

Daniel ANDREWS: Well, in 2014, 47 seats; 2018, 55 seats; 2022 – the member for Bulleen is not in his seat. He is off doing a podcast somewhere or readying himself for his appearance at IBAC. We will see whether he is a big fan of –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 58, for the second time today the Premier has defied your ruling. You asked him to be relevant, and I ask you to bring him back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier to answer the question.

Daniel ANDREWS: Speaker, I respectfully submit there is nothing more relevant to the business of this house than the composition of this house – nothing more relevant. We had an election at the end of last year, and our positive plan to do what matters – to support families, students, patients, every Victorian in every part of the state – was resoundingly endorsed, and it is our intention to get on and deliver every element of that plan. While others are fundamentally distracted, while others are all over the shop on so many different issues – every position you could possibly have, and never the right one – we will continue to deliver for all Victorians. We will do what matters.

John Pesutto: On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, the question was pretty specific about comments by a number of independent non-political heads of integrity agencies. The Premier did not say one word to address what is fairly described as an unprecedented intervention by these non-partisan figures, who are calling the government corrupt. These people are calling the government corrupt.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to be succinct with the point of order.

John Pesutto: I am sorry, Speaker. The question was pretty specific about non-political, non-partisan agency heads of integrity bodies accusing this government, effectively, of corruption. The Premier has done nothing here or before to address that.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Premier has concluded his response.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): It is clear that the Premier will not take the advice of highly respected independent integrity watchdogs. Former minister Jill Hennessy stated that the growth in the Premier’s office represented:

... a greater centralisation that has occurred in government ... a centralisation of decision-making and media management.

Former minister Jenny Mikakos described this government as:

... very centralised with the PPO having its tentacles everywhere.

Will the Premier take responsibility and accept that the only way to clean up corruption in this state is for him to go?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:16): You could not even describe that as angry for effect, because he has no effect. It is just nonsense, absolute nonsense. People are free to have views. People are free to have opinions. They are not free to have their own facts, though. I would refer you to the fact that the anti-corruption commission – no less an authority than the anti-corruption commission – made no finding of corruption. And I know that is deeply upsetting for you. I know that is not the outcome you wanted.

John Pesutto interjected.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition!

Daniel ANDREWS: I know that is not the outcome you wanted, but that is the outcome that has been delivered – because they are not about political games over there at that agency, not the nonsense you are up to. They instead look at the facts and produce a report. That is what has happened here. The cabinet will consider the 17 recommendations, and we will update you and all Victorians at the appropriate time.

Ministers statements: health system

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:17): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government’s commitment to making sure that health care is affordable for all Victorians. We know the rising cost of living is making it harder for families to make ends meet. When budgets are tight at home, no Victorian should have to choose between putting food on the table and getting the health care that they need. However, due to almost a decade of mismanagement and neglect by the former Liberal–National coalition federal government Australia’s primary healthcare system is broken. Under the coalition’s watch we saw a downward trend in GP bulk billing rates, with average out-of-pocket expenses increasing to more than \$40 per visit.

Rather than be spectators to the decline of Australia’s universal healthcare system, the Andrews Labor government stepped up and committed to establishing 25 priority primary care centres to care for Victorians for free. The Premier, the member for Ashwood and I visited the Glen Waverley PPCC on 16 April, and we met there Peter Ferne from Coldstream. Peter was thrilled to share his experience of our priority primary care centre and the excellent care that he received from the hardworking GPs there on duty 16 hours a day, seven days a week. More than 50,000 patients like Peter have been seen by our PPCCs for common presentations that they used to visit GPs for – presentations like lacerations, abdominal pain, infections and the like. So not only are our PPCCs delivering better health outcomes for Victorians, they are also reducing demand on our emergency departments. But no Victorian should be put off from accessing the health care that they need and deserve because of cost, and only the Andrews Labor government will stand with – *(Time expired)*

Home building industry

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:19): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. As a result of the clear regulatory failures by the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, many Victorians who are the victims of builder collapses such as Hallbury Homes have lost their deposit and with it their dreams of owning a home. Given the government will compensate Porter Davis customers, will the government also compensate other homebuyers who have lost their hard-earned deposits?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:20): I thank the member for her question. I offer my sympathies to those people who entered into a contract with Porter Davis as well as any of these other companies.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition! Assistant Treasurer!

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Member for Lowan withdrew from chamber.

Danny PEARSON: As I was saying, it is becoming increasingly clear that the responsibility remained with Porter Davis to take out domestic building insurance for their clients, and they should have. That is why the government has stepped in to take action to try and deal with these matters in a one-off relief scheme. We are also investigating claims of unconscionable conduct, and we are considering further reforms to make sure this does not take place again. In relation to the specifics that the member raised, we will look at this on a case-by-case basis. But it is our expectation that builders and building companies do the right thing, and I think the overwhelming majority do the right thing – they do take out building insurance at the time those deposits are taken. That is the expectation I have. It is the expectation the VMIA have. In relation to the matters that the member has raised, we are happy to look at them on a case-by-case basis.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:21): The Assistant Treasurer was briefed in July 2022 about insolvencies in the residential construction sector and options to de-risk consumers. The minister failed to act. Why did the minister fail to protect thousands of Victorian homebuyers who have now lost their deposits or have been left with half-built homes?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:22): I do not accept the basis of the member's question. As one would expect, the government is briefed on a wide range of issues from time to time. Since we were elected we have constantly engaged with business, with unions and with other stakeholders to get an appreciation in relation to what is happening at a broader macro level. In my portfolio I commissioned the supply chain review to ease the supply chain pressures that the industry faces, and I also invited industry consumer and union representative groups to be part of a residential construction working group. I think the other point to make too is that we are making these investments to pump prime the economy, if you look at our Big Housing Build, if you look at the broader Big Build – the investments that we have made – which those opposite have tried to cancel. They have tried to cancel the Suburban Rail Loop project not once but twice, and it has been comprehensively rejected. We have made these investments to support the community and the economy.

Ministers statements: Get Active Kids voucher program

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (14:23): I rise today to update the house on the extremely successful Get Active Kids voucher program. The Get Active Kids voucher program is a Victorian first. It was established by this Labor government in November 2020 to reduce cost-of-living pressures

on Victorian families by providing eligible kids under 18 with vouchers up to \$200 to play sport, covering costs such as uniforms, equipment and registration. Just two years on this program is a resounding success. Round 6 of the program is currently open, and I am pleased to advise the house that the response to this round has been phenomenal, with around 35,000 vouchers snapped up in this round alone.

When we introduced this program we said that we would provide more than 100,000 vouchers, and we are delivering on that commitment. It is making a real difference. Over previous rounds of the program over 50 per cent of voucher recipients said that their child would not have been able to participate in sport if not for this vital program, which shows that this program is helping out household budgets and it is having an impact where it matters most. Across Cardinia LGA, in the electorates of the members for Monbulk, Berwick, Narracan, Pakenham and Bass, around 600 vouchers were provided in the most recent round, and across Mornington Peninsula LGA, in the electorates of the members for Hastings, Mornington and Nepean, around 500 children benefited. So from bringing communities together to helping kids live a happier, healthier life through this program, the Andrews Labor government is delivering the support and the investment that our young Victorians need to play the sports that they love.

Rental support

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:25): My question is for the Premier. Right now across Victoria we are seeing the worst rental crisis in living memory. We are seeing retired women sleeping in cars. We are seeing families with schoolkids sleeping in tents. We are hearing from way too many people who are just one rent rise away from homelessness. Given the severity of this crisis, will the government act urgently to implement an urgent two-year rent freeze to protect renters from further rent rises?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:26): I thank the member for Richmond for her question. I have no announcements today to make in relation to changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, but I am indebted to the honourable member for giving me an opportunity to reflect just for a moment on more than 100 changes that we have made to that act. The member will be well acquainted with those changes, given that at various points she and her political colleagues have sought to claim credit for those changes. But it was not a Green government that made those changes. It was our Labor government. Everything from hanging a picture to having a pet to having a long-term lease to not unimportantly –

A member interjected.

Daniel ANDREWS: Well, now, we were going along so well, and you had to remind us of the Northcote by-election. The member for Northcote is only too happy to be reminded about who represents the mighty community of Northcote – it is in fact the parliamentary secretary that is sitting behind me here.

But let us not be distracted. The question that is raised is a good one, and it is an important matter. The point that I was about to make in terms of, if you like, a series of highlights from our many, many changes to the Residential Tenancies Act is in fact the change that allows landlords to increase the rent but once a year. That is really very, very important. Now many landlords are increasing the rent, availing themselves of their power under those provisions, and they are increasing rents substantially. That is putting significant pressure on a number of tenants in a number of different communities. I would point out that Commonwealth rent assistance – the name rather gives it away – is a Commonwealth program, and I would urge the federal government to do more and do better when it comes to support for vulnerable tenants. Their budget is next week. Let us wait and see whether there is a windfall for tenants out of that.

In terms of the broader issue, I am obliged to point out, and I do so almost reluctantly, about the very political party – and I am not questioning the degree to which the member is concerned about these issues or the degree to which they are real – that you cannot very well have senators lined up against

the social and affordable housing future fund, this very moment standing in the way of \$10 billion – \$10,000 million – and then get up here lecturing people about affordable housing –

Ellen Sandell: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is knowingly misleading the house on this matter. I know that the government would prefer to blame others –

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member for Melbourne.

Daniel ANDREWS: You cannot very well be opposed to the biggest single investment by a national government in social and affordable housing and at the same time be in here basically lecturing the government on what it ought to do. These are serious matters, but you have got to come to this with some sense of credibility, because there is too much at stake not to have policy consistency and some credibility. That would be a bit like someone whose political party had stopped social housing at the local government level.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:29): So this government has made amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act – absolutely. We can hang a picture, we can live with our pet, we can flush the toilet and we can lock the door – whoop-de-do! Renters need real rights. Right now, they can be evicted for no reason.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Deputy Premier! I would like to hear the question.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI: Right now, renters need real rights. Will this government advocate at the meeting for housing ministers across the country on Wednesday for rent freezes to protect renters from the 11.5 per cent rent increase that we are about to see over the next 12 months?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:30): I thank the member for Richmond for her quite extraordinary supplementary question. You know how you flush a toilet? With running water. Apparently running water is a point of humour, but not every tenant has got running water, let me assure you. If the member for Richmond got out a bit more and spent less time blocking social housing and a bit more time building it, or a bit less time claiming credit for changes to the Residential Tenancies Act and more time actually delivering them, she might well know that there are more than a few people in this state and in other jurisdictions across the country who do not think it is whoop-de-do to have a heater that works, power on, water that runs, a roof over their head. Honestly, the member for Richmond has literally said it all. This is a question about her, not about anyone she might advocate for. While the games are being played by some, we will keep building social housing, we will keep advocating for the federal government to build social housing and we will keep looking after vulnerable Victorians in whatever circumstances they find themselves in. Whoop-de-do to that, hey?

Ministers statements: vehicle registration fees

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:31): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's commitment to making rego free for Victorian apprentices and providing cost-of-living relief to Victorian drivers. We will deliver on our election commitment to making vehicle registration and TAC charges completely free for our hardworking apprentices. This will put more than \$700 back into the pocket of each Victorian apprentice each year so they can focus on getting the skills they need for the jobs that they want instead of finding the cash to pay for their rego. This will build on the work that we have already done to halve rego costs for 12,000 apprentices across the state. From bricklayers to carpenters, sparkies to plumbers, tradies rely on their vehicles to get to and from each job, and this should not be an extra cost for them – and under this government it will not be.

But that is not all that we are doing. We know that bills to keep the car on the road are bills that we just have to pay, so this government is softening the blow to the household budget where we can.

Thanks to the work of the former minister for roads, we have already slashed a range of other fees, including 25 per cent off rego renewal fees for drivers with a clean safety record, rewarding good driving behaviour for over 200,000 people and saving them \$7.8 million in total. We are making learners and hazard perception tests free, saving new drivers over \$5 million. We have also cut fees for P-platers, reducing licence issue fees to absolutely nothing. That is a huge win for the family budget. The members for Wendouree, Ringwood, Pakenham and Laverton know just too well how important this is, with some of the busiest VicRoads testing centres in their electorates. It is all part of the Andrews Labor government's work to relieve the cost-of-living pressures, putting millions of dollars back into the pockets of Victorians.

Member conduct

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:33): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. The Assistant Treasurer had a clear conflict of interest as a decision-maker in approving the opening of a Commonwealth Bank account worth up to \$10 billion for the Victorian Future Fund at the same time as he held \$100,000 worth of Commonwealth Bank shares. How many more decisions has the Assistant Treasurer made while having a clear conflict of interest?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:34): The only thing surprising about this question is that you are asking it, mate. I could have sworn you would end up there on the back bench with the member for Richmond after your performance last week.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask you to bring the minister back to this very important issue, another issue of integrity.

The SPEAKER: The Assistant Treasurer to come back to the question that was asked.

Danny PEARSON: Thank you, Speaker. Well, I have always declared my interests. I have always acted appropriately. I refer the Leader of the Opposition to comments I have previously made. What I would say to the Leader of the Opposition is that the Future Fund –

John Pesutto interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

Danny PEARSON: The Future Fund wrote to the Department of Treasury and Finance seeking to open not one but three bank accounts with the three banks on the central panel. That request was approved by the Department of Treasury and Finance, and that was endorsed.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:35): Pathetic. The Assistant Treasurer has now been found to have an active conflict of interest hanging over at least eight different decisions he has made as a government minister. The Assistant Treasurer is a serial offender. He has repeatedly failed to understand his responsibility to Victorians under the ministerial code of conduct. Will the Assistant Treasurer now finally do the right thing and present his resignation to the Premier?

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (14:36): What a ridiculous question from the Leader of the Opposition. The answer is no.

Ministers statements: power saving bonus

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:36): I am absolutely delighted to update the house on the real cost-of-living relief that our bill-busting power saving bonus is delivering to every Victorian household. Since 24 March more than 1.2 million Victorian families have applied for the new round of the power saving bonus, and of course that is more than 1 million Victorian households who have already received that \$250 in their pocket – money back there. That is on top of the 1.85 million Victorians who

received the bonus in the last round. That is \$500 of direct bill support for Victorian households since July last year. Of course we know that right across this great state Victorian households are taking up the power saving bonus in droves. Whether in regional Victoria or in metro Melbourne, they are applying for the power saving bonus, and it is really easy. The member for Point Cook certainly can be really proud that almost 12,000 Victorian households in that electorate have actually taken up the bonus. Of course we have got the member for Lara, with just over 8000 power saving bonuses in the pockets of their hardworking households, and there are stories right across our state.

Not only can you apply for the power saving bonus, but you can compare your prices online at the Energy Compare website and get a better deal, with 40 per cent of customers finding a better offer and saving at bill time. While this government is interested in lowering peoples' household bills and relieving peoples' cost-of-living stress, others have a proven record of actually causing harm to Victorian families. The last time they were in government retail electricity prices rocketed up 34 per cent, and we had almost record numbers of people disconnected from their power supply. Not this government – we are bringing back the SEC – (*Time expired*)

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, I have a number of unanswered questions: question 108 for the Minister for Public Transport, question 89 for the Minister for Health and question 74 for the Minister for Education were all due to be answered back in April, and question 57 for the Minister for Education was originally due in March. Speaker, you actually wrote to that minister requesting a response four weeks ago on 5 April, so I would appreciate you following up answers to those questions.

The SPEAKER: They will be followed up by my office.

Tim McCurdy: On a point of order, Speaker, I have also got some constituency questions to be followed up: number 13 to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety was due on 11 March, number 117 to the Minister for Agriculture, numbers 262 and 263 to the environment minister, question on notice 264 to the Minister for Health and finally questions on notice 265 and 266 to the Minister for Public Transport. I would appreciate if you would follow those up.

The SPEAKER: The questions will be followed up.

Constituency questions

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:41): (110) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the question I have for this minister is the same question I have had for her predecessors, which is about the as-yet-incomplete, unfinished roundabout at Colac East on the Princes Highway west redevelopment. This project was started back in 2015, and just for the minister's benefit we have now endured two election campaigns since this commitment was made. The roundabout is sitting there as an absolute civic disgrace to the people of Colac Otway shire and the city of Colac. The roundabout has gone through one design phase, which was a disaster – all the plants died and it was not prepared properly. It is still under the remit of Major Road Projects Victoria and VicRoads. It is essential that this roundabout, which was committed to by the government to be a feature and a centre point of our city, be finished and restored back to its glory.

Lara electorate

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:42): (111) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Can the minister please provide an update on the current round of the power saving bonus and its uptake and benefits across the Lara electorate? Cost-of-living pressures that households are facing are one of the major concerns brought to me when I am speaking to constituents across the Lara electorate. Every day I am hearing from residents who have been struggling with rising energy costs. The \$250 one-off payment is a much-needed bonus for many across the community. It is also about finding a better power deal to help with the ongoing cost of people's bills. My office has already assisted

hundreds of people in the Lara electorate to fill out their applications, and local residents are extremely grateful for the \$250 power saving bonus and other cost-of-living measures introduced by the Andrews Labor government. I look forward to hearing from the minister on how many residents have applied for the power saving bonus and the other benefits of finding a better deal.

Gippsland South electorate

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:42): (112) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health, and I ask the minister: when will Gippslanders begin to see a turnaround in mental health treatment and support? The most recent data from the department, the *Adult Mental Health Quarterly KPI Report* for quarter 3, shows that Latrobe Regional, which is our regional mental health acute facility, had a bed occupancy level of 105 per cent, seclusions per 1000 bed days of 13.5, versus a statewide average of 7.9, and most concerningly the percentage of people who presented at the emergency department being transferred to a mental health bed within 8 hours was 39 per cent, versus a target of 80 per cent. These figures are hurting Gippslanders. I ask the minister: when will this be turned around?

Mordialloc electorate

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (14:43): (113) My constituency question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and I ask: when will the geotech investigations conclude for the Mordialloc level crossing removals? As people in our local community know, the Andrews Labor government committed to making the Frankston train line level crossing free, and a key element in that agenda and that plan is to remove all the level crossings in Mordialloc. It gets you to where you need to go more safely and sooner. It takes congestion off our local roads and allows us to run more train services more often as well. We are just up the road in Parkdale at the moment, where detailed works are getting underway. Parkdale will be level crossing free by 2024, and a brand new station will be delivered. The excitement around Mordialloc and Aspendale is palpable. People want to see the aspirations of their communities realised, and these transformational projects bring so many more benefits into our communities. We are really pumped that geotech works are underway, and we are wondering when they will conclude so we can get on with some of the more important works.

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:44): (114) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the minister install a 40-kilometre zone along Doncaster Road through the Balwyn North village shopping strip? Balwyn North village is home to many vibrant small businesses, from Salzano's Deli, owned by the hardworking Ana Salzano, president of the traders association, to Ainsley and Narelle at Stanley & Stone, Sam at the popular Village Cafe and Rocco and the team at Signorelli's fruit shop. Traders and shoppers are rightly concerned that the current 60-kilometre speed limit is dangerous for the shopping strip and discourages pedestrians' activities, with near misses occurring all too often. It is also a risk for the hundreds of parishioners at the Greek Orthodox church located at the eastern end of the strip.

Further, just 100 metres off Doncaster Road from the shopping strip is the wonderful St Bede's Primary School. Reducing the limit to 40 kilometres an hour is incredibly important for the safety of our community – shoppers, traders, parishioners, parents and primary school students alike. It will help increase pedestrian foot traffic, making it a more welcoming and accessible community hub, backing our small businesses. I call on the minister to provide an update as to when the North Balwyn village will see their much-needed 40-kilometre zone.

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:46): (115) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment in the other place, and I ask: how will the Andrews Labor government's container deposit scheme, starting in November this year, be implemented within the Glen Waverley district? I spoke with one of my constituents back in December, and he was excited about the possibility of a

container deposit scheme and what it means for Victoria. I was pleased to inform him last month of the announcement of the date of our implementation of this world-class scheme. The container deposit scheme will turn drink containers into new recycled products, reduce Victoria's litter by up to half and create over 600 jobs. There will be more than 600 collection points across the state, making it accessible for all Victorians. This scheme builds on the government's \$515 million investment to transform the state's waste and recycling sector. I know that my constituents and I will be looking forward to the response to this question.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:46): (116) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. This government has missed its own legislated deadline of December 2022 to make all tram stops accessible for those with restricted mobility, wheelchair users, parents and carers with prams and small children, and the elderly. If upgrades continue at the current speed, tram stops will not be fully accessible until 2066. When will the government make public transport accessible for all Victorians? Specifically, the constituents of Richmond want to know when the government will fund the construction of accessible tram stops on Gertrude Street in Fitzroy and along tram route 78 to make trams accessible for all in the electorate of Richmond.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:47): (117) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education and concerns the Andrews Labor government's affordable school uniforms program. Minister, how is this program supporting financially disadvantaged students and families in my electorate of Narre Warren South? Many families struggle to provide their children with items such as uniforms, school shoes, stationery and schoolbags. These expenses add to the cost-of-living challenges that local families are facing on a daily basis in my electorate. The Andrews Labor government will always continue to support our most vulnerable students to ensure that they do get the best education possible. To that end I would appreciate any further information that the minister could provide on how the affordable school uniforms program is supporting vulnerable families and students in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:48): (118) For the last two years there has been an ambulance based at Main Ridge CFA station to provide an essential and life-saving service to the local community through the peak summer period in December, January and February. Before this arrangement the closest ambulance was based in Flinders, which was considered too far down the peninsula to be effective. The arrangement at Main Ridge has proved both effective and appreciated across the community. I am committed to ensuring that all Nepean residents can live comfortably knowing that the care and services they need are always within reach. The Main Ridge CFA has advised that during the off-peak period ambulances based at Mount Martha ambulance station on Bentons Road are more than a 20-minute drive from Main Ridge. So my question to the Minister for Emergency Services is: will the government extend the ambulance service based at Main Ridge CFA to ensure year-round coverage for those communities?

Albert Park electorate

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (14:49): (119) My question is to the Minister for Ports and Freight, and I ask: how will the redevelopment of St Kilda Pier benefit the local Albert Park community? Recently I had the pleasure of joining the minister for a tour and an update on the progression of works at the pier. It was great to see how efficiently the development is taking shape. This \$53 million project, in collaboration with the City of Port Phillip and Parks Victoria, marks a serious investment into making our community an even better place to live. For the wider Victorian community we know that the redevelopment will deliver not only a better and more accessible experience for visitors but also a safer and better protected habitat for the little penguins that call it home – and a shout-out to the Earthcare

St Kilda volunteers and Parks Victoria rangers as well for the care they show for the little penguins. I look forward to hearing how this brilliant investment will deliver for the Albert Park community.

Bills

Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:50): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 in relation to wagering and betting and to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:51): I seek a brief explanation of the bill, please.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:51): The bill will facilitate the award of the next wagering and betting licence by amending the licence structure to permit multiple licences for varying periods of exclusivity and will remove the requirement to determine that the licensee or licensees have entered into a no-less-favourable funding arrangement with the Victorian racing industry.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Gambling Taxation Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:51): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to consolidate and amend various gambling taxes, to make consequential amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991, the Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:52): I seek a brief explanation of the bill, please.

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (14:52): The bill increases the tax rate on electronic gaming machines, EGMs, at the casino to match the relevant EGM tax rate for clubs from 1 July 2023. It increases the wagering and betting tax rate from 10 to 15 per cent from 1 July 2024. It establishes a new gaming taxation act as a taxation law under the Taxation Administration Act and refers to the administration of casino tax from the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission to the commissioner of state revenue from 1 July 2023. It establishes a new act as a taxation law under the Taxation Administration Act; this was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence. Finally, it consolidates other gambling taxes currently administered by the commissioner into the new act.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

*Announcements***Victorian Electoral Commission**

The SPEAKER (14:53): I advise the house that today I administered to Máiréad Catherine Doyle, the acting deputy electoral commissioner of the Victorian Electoral Commission, the affirmation required by section 16 of the Electoral Act 2002.

*Rulings from the Chair***Scope of debate**

The SPEAKER (14:54): I would just make a ruling on a point of order raised by the Leader of the House on Thursday 23 March 2023. The Leader of the House raised a point of order at the end of a procedural debate. The debate was on the motion moved by the member for Malvern to adjourn debate on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022. The motion itself was simply to adjourn debate on the bill and the member for Malvern was clearly within his rights to move the motion. There may be any number of reasons a member of this house may seek to adjourn debate on a bill. The ensuing debate on the motion allows the member moving the motion and subsequent members to put their views as to why the motion should or should not be agreed to. Such procedural debates often have a very narrow focus. Having reviewed *Hansard*, it is clear that many members across the chamber tried to raise matters outside the scope of the debate. Some points of order on this issue were taken at the time and dealt with at the time. I therefore rule the point of order out of order. However, I remind all members that their contributions to any matter the house is considering need to be within the confines of that debate. All debates are different, and the remarks members make will need to be considered by the Chair in the context of the debate. However, members do not have unfettered ability to raise matters extraneous to a debate at hand.

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

Notice given.

*Documents***University of Divinity***Annual Report 2022*

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:56): I table, by leave, the University of Divinity's report of 2022.

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022**Alert Digest No. 3*

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:56): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being the *Report on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022*, together with an appendix, and a further report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 3 of 2023 on the following act, bills and subordinate legislation:

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Raise the Age) Bill 2022

Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023

Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Act 2023

Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023
SR No 41 – Dangerous Goods (Explosives) Regulations 2022
together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Bendigo Kangan Institute – Report 2022

Box Hill Institute – Report 2022

Chisholm Institute – Report 2022

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978:

Orders under ss 17B and 17D granting a licence and a lease over Balnarring Beach Foreshore Reserve

Orders under s 17B granting licences over Camberwell Gardens Reserve and Gasworks Park Reserve

Order under s 17D granting a lease over part of Albert Park

Deakin University – Report 2022

Duties Act 2000 – Report 1 July to 31 December 2022 of Foreign Purchaser Additional Duty Exemptions under s 3E

Federation University Australia – Report 2022

Financial Management Act 1994 – Reports from the Minister for Environment that she had received the reports 2021–22 of the:

Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board

Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board

Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board

Gordon Institute of TAFE (The Gordon) – Report 2022

Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOTAFE) – Report 2022

Holmesglen Institute – Report 2022

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Operation Daintree: Special Report – released on 19 April 2023

La Trobe University – Report 2022

Major Events Act 2009 – Major Sporting Event Order for the FIFA Women’s World Cup 2023

Melbourne Polytechnic – Report 2022

Monash University – Report 2022

Ombudsman – Councils and complaints: Glen Eira City Council’s approach to contractor work – released on 26 April 2023

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Banyule – C165, GC204

Bayside – C188

Boroondara – C396, GC204

Brimbank – C216

Cardinia – GC204

Casey – C292, GC204

Darebin – C213, C215
Glen Eira – C220
Glenelg – C108
Greater Dandenong – C228
Greater Shepparton – C233
Kingston – C214, GC204
Knox – C200, GC204
Latrobe – C140
Manningham – GC204
Maribyrnong – C176
Maroondah – C151
Melbourne – C450
Melton – C236
Merri-bek – C221
Mildura – C104
Mitchell – C164
Moonee Valley – C231
Moorabool – C101, C107
Mornington Peninsula – C284, C296, C297
Mount Alexander – C96
Nillumbik – C148, GC204
Port Phillip – C203, C211
Stonnington – C304
Victoria Planning Provisions – VC231
Wangaratta – C88, C89
Wellington – C117
Whitehorse – C236
Whittlesea – GC204
Yarra – C312, C315, GC204

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University) – Report 2022

South West Institute of TAFE – Report 2022

State Concessions Act 2004:

Concession (Electricity Retailers) Order 2023

Concession (Gas Retailers) Order 2023

Concession (Local Government) Order 2023

Concession (Water Corporations) Order 2023

State Owned Enterprises Act 1992 – Constitution of Breakthrough Victoria Pty Ltd under s 75

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 – SR 18

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – SR 20

Retail Leases Act 2003 – SR 24

Road Safety Act 1986 – SR 22, 23

Supreme Court Act 1986 – SR 21

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 – SR 19

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – SR 25

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Electricity Safety Act 1998:

Order under section 120W exempting Ausnet Electricity Services from section 120M(1)(c) of the Act

Order under section 120W exempting Jemena Electricity Networks (Vic) from section 120M(1)(c) of the Act

Service Victoria Act 2018 – Service Victoria Identity Verification Standards

Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (SuniTAFE) – Report 2022

Swinburne University of Technology – Report 2022

TAFE Gippsland – Report 2022

University of Melbourne – Report 2022

Victoria University – Report 2022

Victorian Inspectorate – Inspection Report March to August 2022 under the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*

Wildlife Act 1975:

Wildlife (Closure of Lake Elingamite Lake Reserve) Notice (*Gazette S199, 24 April 2023*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Indigenous Game Bird (Quail) Hunting) Notice (*Gazette S142, 27 March 2023*)

Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 2 (*Gazette S195, 21 April 2023*)

Corrigendum to Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 2 (*Gazette S196, 21 April 2023*)

William Angliss Institute of TAFE – Report 2022

Wodonga Institute of TAFE – Report 2022.

DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER STANDING ORDERS – Under standing orders the Clerk tabled the following document:

Government response to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee’s Report on the Inquiry into Victorian Universities’ investment in skills.

Bills**Heritage Amendment Bill 2023***Council’s agreement*

The SPEAKER (14:59): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023 without amendment.

Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2023**Heritage Amendment Bill 2023***Royal assent*

The SPEAKER (14:59): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2023 and the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023.

Joint sitting of Parliament**Victorian Health Promotion Foundation****Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation**

The SPEAKER (14:59): I have received a letter from the Minister for Health requesting a joint sitting to elect three members of Parliament to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation due to the expiry of the previous members’ terms, and I have received a letter from the Minister for Casino, Gaming

and Liquor Regulation requesting a joint sitting to elect three members of Parliament to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation due to the expiry of the previous members' terms.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (15:00): I move, by leave:

That this house meets the Legislative Council for the purpose of sitting and voting together to:

- (1) elect three members of Parliament to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation; and
- (2) elect three members of Parliament to the board of the Responsible Gambling Foundation

and proposes that the time and place of such meeting be the Legislative Assembly chamber on 3 May 2023 at 6.30 pm.

Motion agreed to.

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

Committees

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER (15:01): I have received the resignation of Tim Read from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee effective from today.

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (15:01): I move, by leave:

That Ellen Sandell be a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:01): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house notes:

- (1) comments made by the Premier in response to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission report *Operation Daintree*, citing it as 'an educational report'; and
- (2) from the Ombudsman that the report was damning rather than educational.

Leave refused.

James NEWBURY: I would appreciate the notice being placed on the notice paper.

The SPEAKER: It will be placed on the notice paper.

Business of the house

Program

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (15:02): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following items be considered and completed by 5 pm on 4 May 2023:

- Address-in-reply to the Governor's speech
- Disability and Social Services Amendment Bill 2023
- Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022
- Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023.

This is another government business program with many options for members to make a contribution to debate here in this chamber. Each of these bills and indeed the motions that have been foreshadowed build on the important work that our government is delivering and the many commitments that we have made to the people of Victoria.

We will also see in this week's government business program a further opportunity for another two members on the government side of the house to make contributions to the address-in-reply. Obviously, that is an opportunity that many members relish. It is that time when you can get on your feet in this place and talk about the way in which the Andrews Labor government is really delivering for the communities that we represent. I offer that to all members of the house, that opportunity, because indeed ours is a government that governs for all Victorians, whether it be bringing back the SEC, putting power back in the hands of Victorians, capping V/Line fares at metro prices – and what a fantastic initiative that has been, not just for the people in my electorate of Macedon, where we proudly have seven V/Line stops, but importantly for the people of Melbourne who are taking the opportunity to come to the regions and spend their money in country Victoria and boost our economy, create great jobs and ensure the vibrancy of our tourism industry.

Of course there is a great opportunity in the address-in-reply to talk about all the hospitals that we are building. As Minister for Health Infrastructure I am incredibly proud of the more than \$20 billion of investment that we are making in health infrastructure in this state. It is an opportunity to talk about our government's commitment to giving women's health care the focus and attention it deserves, with \$71 million committed in the lead-up to the election to establishing women's health clinics across our state, and I am delighted that the member for Northcote, the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, is here in the chamber. I know that she has already taken many opportunities to talk about the important work that she is doing in women's health. So of course we look forward to hearing those contributions.

If I can talk a little bit about the bills before the house, the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 emphasises the government's ongoing commitment to better supporting more than 1.1 million people who are living with a disability here in Victoria. The bill makes important and critical amendments to enhance services, safeguards, rights and protections for people with a disability and seeks to address national disability insurance scheme implementation issues and unintended regulatory burdens and operational difficulties. It will include reforms to residential tenancies protections, information sharing and privacy, treatment plan provision and compliance measures for care providers, amongst other things.

With the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, I know that water is obviously an issue of concern to each and every one of us in this house, and that is why this bill seeks to clarify sections of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 to continue to protect the existing rights of Victorian water users, provide more flexibility for them to manage their own delivery risks and improve powers to manage delivery shortfalls. So these are obviously very important bills.

The Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022 offers the chance for this house to contribute to discussion on a range of topics encompassed in the bill, including treaty, First Peoples and Aboriginal heritage; housing and the Big Housing Build; pet rehoming; and the Andrews Labor government's continued work on modernising the state's animal care programs. So of course I look forward to hearing contributions to the debate throughout the week.

The Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action has given notice of her intention to bring a motion to the house, which I also look forward to debating. I look forward to the contributions of all members of the house on this really important motion, because let us remember that securing the energy future of our state is something that our government has worked tirelessly to do since we were first elected in 2014. The minister for energy has shown extraordinary energy in the delivery of all of the commitments that we have made to the people of Victoria. I commend the government business program to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:08): I would like to start my contribution on a positive note and say that the coalition will not be opposing the government business program, but the positive contribution unfortunately will end there while I make a number of other broad comments.

What we have seen over recent sitting weeks is a government, sadly, that has no agenda and is frankly misusing Parliament. At Parliament we sit for three days, which is not so much, and 1½ days in, the government is moving away from their scheduled business program and moving on to whatever item on the notice paper they feel they can make a political point with, which is disappointing. It is disappointing for a number of reasons. It is disappointing because the house could be doing so much had the government the foresight to be working on and developing new laws and proposing issues of importance. Instead the government is misusing the time of the house to effectively run a second matter of public importance. For those that are not aware of the mechanisms of the house, most weeks the government or opposition have the opportunity to raise a particular issue and the house will spend some time debating that issue. But because the government has run out of things to do, they are using about half of the parliamentary sitting time each week for creating a new item of interest and sadly using that item and turning that item into a political hit, really. It is a political hit on the opposition – it is no more than that – which is disappointing, because when it comes to energy security, when it comes to renewables, at the last election the coalition brought forward some wonderful policies, some nation-leading policies, in this portfolio space. As Shadow Minister for Environment and Climate Change, there are a number of policies that were brought to the election that were fantastic policies, and I am really proud of those policies.

One of them that the government has not picked up on is legislating the 2030 target, which is something that the community actually wants. The community want to see less politics in the environment space, and they want to see certainty of where government is going. That was some of the thinking around the proposed policy at the election, which was supported by not only so many people but also peak bodies and interest groups, and not just in Victoria. One of the difficulties I think with the running of government especially in Victoria is the lack of transparency, and we know when it comes to this portfolio space there just is not enough transparency in the operation of government. So the coalition introduced a number of policies in this space which would have done that.

Not only will the government waste time with another political hit job, or what I like to refer to as a sledge motion of the week – and that is what it will be – they are failing to talk about the issue that frankly most Victorians are thinking about right now, and that is the issue of a lack of integrity in Victoria. And we saw it today. When the Premier stood up you could almost feel the lack of integrity in the way he responded to issues in question time. I would say it is disappointing that when we look at the way that Parliament is going to operate this week we will not be considering a matter that is so important in Victoria. When you hear the Victorian Ombudsman make the comments that she has made, there is no doubt that these types of issues are the issues that deserve the attention of the house, and that is why the opposition, through me, has moved a motion in that regard. I look forward to it and hope that the government will consider debating my motion as well as their sledge motion this week – another sledge motion and one that we see is entirely to cover the fact that the schedule is so light on.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (15:13): It is just terrific that the member for Brighton uses his opportunity in the government business program debate to sledge the government about sledge motions. Irony has been lost. The minute you cross Bay Street, irony goes out the window. There is just no sense of what is actually real and important for both this chamber and people in this place. To sledge so mercilessly the government for bringing on sledge motions is spectacularly tone-deaf –

James Newbury interjected.

Will FOWLES: in your words, not mine – from the member for Brighton but nonetheless altogether unsurprising.

Three bills are before us this week. I am not sure if the Manager of Opposition Business actually indicated whether the opposition would be supporting the business program.

Members interjecting.

Will FOWLES: Well, yes, but it is hard work with him – you know that. Well, that is very good; I am glad you are not opposing it.

Three bills are before us this week. The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 sets the framework to regulate the place, rate and time of taking water. That is an important matter for this Parliament to consider in the context of the floods that went through parts of northern Victoria last year – a very important matter for the government to consider. I look forward to some very interesting contributions there. For those of us who spend any time in, near or on the Goulburn it is very germane that we should be having that debate as we move out of the La Niña cycle and into perhaps another weather cycle as we head into the winter after what was probably one of wettest springs on record.

The Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 of course amends the Disability Act 2006 regarding the secretary's functions, information sharing about persons with disability and people subject to restrictive practice and supervised treatment orders, residential services and the use of restrictive practices and amends the Residential Tenancies Act 1997. We heard a bit about amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act a little bit earlier today, didn't we, and I know the member for Northcote will agree with me fulsomely when I say that it is extraordinary that some would seek to come into this place and lambaste the government for making very important reforms – like ensuring people have running water, the ability to hang a picture or the ability to keep a pet – and give us the whoop-de-do treatment in relation to the very important reforms that we have made on residential tenancies over the life of this government. So I am very pleased that there will be another opportunity to revisit that act, because it is a very, very important part of public policy.

Indeed housing supply is a very, very important part of public policy, and wouldn't it be nice if those who sought to claim credit for aspects of housing policy while simultaneously denigrating the very great advances being made in this arena by the federal Labor government – wouldn't it be great, if just once – just once actually approved a social housing project in their LGAs. Wouldn't it be terrific if just once they could stick their hand up, take a hard decision and actually approve one of the very valuable social housing projects, whether it is in the LGAs of Merri-bek or Yarra. It would be terrific if they actually made such a monumental political statement as to support social housing at the grassroots level.

But I digress. The third bill this week is a humdinger, and I know it is a humdinger because I think I am one of only two people on the speaking list for this one. Not having read the bill book, I suspect it is because it is really, really interesting, as statute law amendment bills in fact tend to be. I am told that the purpose of this bill is to revise the statute law of Victoria to make minor amendments to the Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Act 1995 and for other purposes. Statute law may very well be interesting – fascinating, indeed – to some black-letter lawyers in this place, but to others it is necessarily the great opportunity we seek to have to talk about what is going on in our communities, which brings me to what is going on in our communities. It is absolutely terrific to see work underway on the level crossing removals at Dublin Road in East Ringwood and Bedford Road in Ringwood as part of this Labor government's outstanding Big Build project, and we look forward to continuing that work over the course of this Parliament.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (15:18): As the member for Brighton did point out when he rose to speak earlier, we are not opposing the government business program this week. In fact we are quite enthusiastic about it.

Danny O'Brien: I wouldn't go that far.

Jade BENHAM: Well, even though some might not find water legislation and the amendments that we are debating this week exciting, it is exciting for those in my communities up along the Murray River and those irrigators that it affects. We are actually quite enthusiastic to debate these things, and statute law, these sorts of amendments, surely is good legislative housekeeping. I am sure it is amazing, but there is some robust debate to be had, obviously, on the program this week. As I was saying before, water legislation amendments are ones that can divide communities, particularly along the River Murray and downstream of the choke, which is where we are talking about as far as my electorate goes. Thankfully, though, this one could be good news, particularly for water users and food producers in our area. Water can be a highly contentious issue when we start getting into the rules around the unbundling of water, environmental and recreational water and how that is used and how one rule is okay for some and not for others with regard to irrigators, environmental water-holders et cetera. So I am quite enthusiastic to speak on this bill amendment, and I am looking forward to hearing from my colleagues also in regard to the amendment. It does centre largely around the place and time of take, which will heavily impact those food producers and irrigators in my part of the world.

Also the Disability and Social Services Amendment Bill 2023 makes changes which have been spoken about in this place earlier today. These amendments have been requested by the disability sector and will remedy some of the oversights of some previous legislation that perhaps was not right in the first place. So we are not opposing the government business program this week, and I look forward to some very robust debate in this place.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (15:20): It is with some pleasure that I rise this afternoon to speak on the government business program. For those that might be listening that are not necessarily overly familiar with the procedures of this place, one of the great opportunities of being in government is that the government gets to set the government business program for the coming week. In this context we are going to have a very, very busy week debating three important bills, and we have heard contributions from people across the chamber about why those bills are important to various communities that people in this place do represent. We also have this week that opportunity to debate a very significant and important resolution, and that is about re-establishing the State Electricity Commission. That is an important election commitment that the Andrews Labor government took to the people late last year, and I know that certainly very much played a significant role in the election outcome.

I think when we think about the energy security of this state and the things that we need to do to make sure that we provide the necessary electricity to commerce, to industry and to households, the State Electricity Commission will play a very important role in the years and the decades to come, and I actually commend the government in bringing this forward. I certainly know that so many of my Labor colleagues wish to make a contribution on this motion because we of course see the wisdom of re-establishing the State Electricity Commission. The Manager of Opposition Business bemoaned the government bringing this forward. One of the realities of being in opposition is that you do not have the opportunity of setting the agenda for this place – for this Parliament. That is the nature of being in opposition. We as the government wish to bring forward the things that are important to the people of Victoria as we see it. That is the pleasure and privilege of being in government.

I look forward to making my contribution on a number of these bills. I look forward to making a contribution on this very, very important motion, and indeed I challenge those that might disagree with the Andrews Labor government's view that this motion is important. I challenge them to come into this place and put on the public record what their views might be about re-establishing the State Electricity Commission. I certainly look forward to looking at the history of the State Electricity Commission, and I very much look forward to discussing in this place the privatisation agenda of the Kennett government when they flogged it off to overseas interests, and I look forward –

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I think it is all well documented that Joan Kirner started the privatisation of the SEC.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): That is not a point of order. The member shall remain seated.

Darren CHEESEMAN: People, clearly, in this chamber, it would appear during my contribution, have some views on the State Electricity Commission, and I challenge them to come along to this Parliament, to come along to this debate and to put their views on record about what they think of the Andrews Labor government re-establishing it. It is well and good to make comments when you do not have the call in this place, but I challenge them to come along and make a contribution. This is an important debate, and I commend this to the Parliament.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:26): I agree with the member for Brighton and his statements earlier, and we are not opposing the government business program. I am not as excited about the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 as my colleague the member for Mildura. I am actually quite disappointed. When I saw it come up, I thought, 'Finally, something to do with water – something that might help my electorate.' But unfortunately, they are just largely structural changes. I do appreciate, member for Mildura, how it will benefit your community, but I think the government has missed an opportunity and I think they have run out of ideas. I know the government needs the Greens. But you do not have to recycle bills all the time; you can think of something new.

I would have thought over the last five weeks, with what has occurred in the construction industry in particular, that a minister would have put a bill forward to protect consumers and the industry as a whole. We have seen Porter Davis go down. We have seen other building companies go down. This government has put out a \$15 million rescue package, and I would have thought the minister responsible would have come to this Parliament this week and put forward a bill that would protect the consumers and the builders within this industry. The industry is in a lot of trouble. We have thousands of families now –

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: What was that? We have thousands of families now that will not have their homes finished. I do not know, mate, I would not be laughing, because there are thousands of people out there that are not laughing. My apologies, Acting Speaker.

I am really disappointed on the water bill because there is nothing to do with drainage – absolutely nothing to do with cleaning the drainage through West Gippsland. My community floods from east to west, and there is no investment and there has not been investment by this government to help with the drainage in my area. I am really disappointed too given that the Minister for Water represents Eastern Victoria Region. It is in her backyard. She knows about the drainage issues down there, and she had an opportunity. She could have brought it into this bill, brought it into this Parliament and fixed these issues. Right now my community has a petition up to fix the drainage, that is how serious it is getting. Communities do not put petitions forward if everything is okay. I am very disappointed that the Minister for Water could not actually address this issue in these bills.

It just seems as though the government is out of ideas. I mean, we are recycling bills. We have not thought of anything new. As I said earlier, with what has gone on in the last five weeks, I would have thought the government would have come in with something this week to protect consumers and the construction industry. We are not opposing the bill, obviously, but I tell you what, I am actually really disappointed in the government. Couldn't it do better?

Motion agreed to.

*Members statements***Father Bob Maguire**

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (15:29): I rise to speak about the late Father Bob Maguire, who passed away a couple of weeks ago aged 88. Father Bob was a uniquely beloved Melbourne figure, as iconic to our city as laneway art, the magic coffee order or footy at the G. That this Catholic priest, who overcame a difficult upbringing, could become a TV and radio star, a charity hero and a figure beloved by so many across our nation irrespective of their religion speaks to his incredible legacy.

Father Bob was so much more than a priest. He spent every waking minute of his life, to the end, helping the most disadvantaged in our state. In an era where our Catholic Church produced figures that mired it in controversy, Father Bob was a shining beacon of old Christian traditions of looking after one another, of accepting and loving everyone and of speaking truth to power. It was a pleasure for me to work with Father Bob in recent years and to work with his incredible foundation. As funny and as charismatic as he may have seemed in public, the truth is he was even funnier. But beneath his hilarious and often confusing riffs was a message that never faltered: we had to do more for the needy and for the unloved. My condolences to Father Bob's family, his friends, the staff, Paul and all at the foundation, and all those whose lives he touched with generosity and kindness.

Regional roads

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:31): I want to raise the issue today of the failure of the Andrews government to fully fund flood-affected regional shires to repair their roads. It is yet another indictment of the government's lack of understanding and their attitude to regional Victoria and the challenges they face post the floods. We are now six months down the track from the October 2022 floods, and only the first very small tranche of funding has just started to turn up in some councils' bank accounts. The best estimate that I have from my region is that there is nearly \$190 million worth of road damage to be repaired. In 2011 after the floods the then Baillieu government made sure that full funding was available for all those local government areas that had flood damage. The Andrews government is letting it come out in dribs and drabs without any clear indication as to when those councils will get that money. Even worse, the bureaucrats are indicating that local government may have to fund up to 20 per cent of that amount of money themselves. That should be an alarm bell for ratepayers that the normal road maintenance program will not be able to be carried out because local government areas are going to have to stump up for what should be state government funding to fix those flood-damaged roads. It is also another indicator of just how broke this government is. They are not doing the right thing by those ratepayers. They are holding the money back because they actually do not have that money. I would urge the government to fund those roads fully.

Frank Cherry

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:32): I pay tribute to Frank Cherry, a former secretary of the AMWU who sadly passed away on 14 April. Frank has been influential in our union through all its forms since he first joined the Amalgamated Engineering Union in 1951. Beginning as an AEU shop steward and coming through the ranks to become the state secretary in 1988, he was a trade unionist through and through, respected and trusted by the membership and all those who worked with him in the interests of the working class. Frank was a contemporary of and equal to other giants of the Victorian metalworkers union in its heyday – John Halfpenny, Laurie Carmichael, Jim Roulston, Percy Johnson and Neville Hill. Frank was a powerful orator and unrelenting campaigner. He was also one of the most loyal and dedicated members of the metalworkers union that I have ever met.

Following retirement Frank did not stop. He took up leadership roles in the AMWU retired members association and Fair Go for Pensioners Coalition. He brought his skill to these roles and the same fire in the belly. Frank's passion for workers education, better wages and working conditions, a just society and a world of peace – he did not just talk about it, he fought for these things all his life. It was Frank

who fought with others for the 36- and 38-hour week, raising the status of and pay for metalworkers around the country, better health and safety, support for migrant workers and superannuation.

Frank was a good trade unionist, but that was not all he was. He was a man who dearly loved his wife Kath and family, an avid gardener and a staunch friend. He was a peace campaigner, an internationalist leading working people to fight for a better world for all and a relentless advocate for worker education and empowerment. He made a mighty contribution to our movement and lived his values in all aspects of his life.

Princes Highway, Yambuk

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:34): A number of south-west locals have raised with me their concerns about the ongoing sinkhole situation on the Princes Highway near Yambuk. When I say sinkhole, many regional Victorians will naturally think of the enormous potholes that cars sink into as they drive along our state government maintained roads. However, near Yambuk an actual sinkhole has occurred on the stretch where upgrades are being undertaken to add an additional much-needed overtaking lane. This project was funded in early 2019. That is nearly four years ago. Naturally the community are frustrated and concerned that the state government are taking so long to get on with the job. It has taken nearly three years to simply do the planning and scoping work required for this overtaking lane, which has been the excuse for why we have had to wait so long for the government to get the shovels into the ground. It is hard to fathom that in limestone country the preparatory work did not anticipate this possibility, yet due to this sinkhole everything has slammed to a halt. It is no surprise the community are worried when for weeks there has been nothing happening to fix the sinkhole. I am told the contractors are ready to get the job done, but it appears no plan has been formed by Regional Roads Victoria to get on with it. No wonder the community are worried about the second overtaking lane that is not getting actioned. Sadly, this is so common to see from a government which forgets that it is there to govern for all Victorians. I repeat my invitation to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the Premier to visit South-West Coast and view the deplorable and unsafe condition of our roads in regional Victoria. It is time: come.

Anzac Day

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (15:35): It was a pleasure to attend a number of Anzac Day ceremonies held across the Bellarine, and I must say that each of those services was a very fitting tribute paid to those men and women who have served our country. The day commenced with a dawn service organised by the Queenscliff-Point Lonsdale RSL, a truly moving event with a backdrop of the sun rising over the Rip. I then attended morning services at Leopold War Memorial and later the Ocean Grove and Barwon Heads RSL service. It was a pleasure to see hundreds of residents supporting their local ceremonies and paying their respects. In the afternoon it was great to be part of a big crowd watching Drysdale take on the Portarlington football club in their traditional Anzac Day match. Congratulations to all the RSL sub-branches on their work, including Portarlington, St Leonards, Drysdale and Barwon Heads, where services were also held.

Barwon Heads 13th Beach Surf Life Saving Club

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (15:36): On Saturday 22 April I was also very pleased to open the newly extended Barwon Heads 13th Beach Surf Life Saving Club, to which the Andrews state government has provided nearly \$1.4 million. These fantastic new facilities include extra training spaces, increased emergency equipment storage, a gym and an upgraded kitchen, with change room facilities as well. The club formed in 1961 and today is a strong and highly respected organisation keeping our beaches safe. Many thanks to all the members of the club, led by president Matthew Burke and past president Andrew McKinnon. I look forward to working with the club.

Single-use plastics

David HODGETT (Croydon) (15:37): I rise today to speak about a letter I recently received from two young constituents, Rosie and Elizabeth, both aged seven years old. They took it upon themselves

to contact me to raise their concerns regarding single-use plastics and the impact they place on the environment. It is wonderful to see the passion for our environment and climate that Rosie and Elizabeth displayed in their letter, spending their recesses and lunchbreaks to write the letter so they could have a voice on what is most important to them. As their local MP I wanted to ensure their voices were heard in Parliament. They are calling on the government to do more to limit single-use plastic production and consumption as they have seen firsthand these plastics littered around them every day. With more single-use plastics around than ever before, they know more must be done now to help protect the environment for the future. Thank you, Rosie and Elizabeth, for having the initiative and passion to bring this issue to my and the government's attention. Continue to share your voices and stand up for what you believe in, and you will go far in life. I know I cannot use props, Acting Speaker, but I do just want to show the letter in Parliament here.

Ainslie Park Cricket Club

David HODGETT (Croydon) (15:38): On another matter, I would like to congratulate the two newest inductees as life members of the Ainslie Park Cricket Club, Sean Minetti and Ryan Willmott. Both have played a massive role within the club, giving their time, energy and passion to help the club grow and succeed. They have both earned their induction, and we thank them for their contribution to the club. On a personal note, knowing Sean, I pass on my congratulations, well deserved, to Sean Minetti and to Ryan Willmott.

John Attwood

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:38): It is with a heavy heart I rise to pay tribute to John Attwood, who sadly passed away earlier this month, leaving behind a beautiful family and a community indelibly grateful for his work. If you have ever lived around Murrumbreena, you are sure to know the Attwood name. This is because John, a lifelong resident of Murrumbreena, was the living embodiment of what it means to serve our community. Widely regarded as the unofficial mayor of Murrumbreena, John's whole working life was committed to the Murrumbreena newsagency. In 1939, at the age of 10, John started working there doing the paper rounds. He then went on to manage the business before buying out Alf Stevens in 1963, who had started the store in 1929. John was a great newsagent, and his colleagues and customers loved him. John was also a dedicated supporter of all things Murrumbreena. He adored all local organisations and sports clubs, in particular the Murrumbreena football club and the Murrumbreena Bowls Club, to whom he was a generous sponsor and loyal supporter. John was also a valuable member of the steering committee which roused community support for the return of local bank branches to the Neerim Road shopping strip, including the Murrumbreena community Bendigo Bank branch, which still exists today. In a time of frequent bank closures, I am glad that Neerim Road is still bustling, thanks to the passion and vision of people like John. I wish to thank John and his family for their contribution to our community. We will miss John's cheeky smile. I offer my sincere condolences to his family, loved ones and many friends. Vale, John Attwood.

Euroa electorate shadow ministerial visits

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (15:40): Over the past few weeks I have had the pleasure of hosting several of our great shadow ministers in the Euroa electorate. Our Shadow Minister for Health Georgie Crozier met with local hospitals and community health services, who are incredibly nervous about the state's financial emergency caused by the Andrews government. This is anticipated to lead to further cuts in the health sector which will, worryingly, see reduced or inferior services being provided to our regional communities. The Deputy Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Agriculture Emma Kealy visited the Benalla abattoir, which was broken into by animal activists with no regard for workers, local business or safety. On a lighter note, she also saw the great work the University of Melbourne's Dookie campus is undertaking with several regional contributions to our economy and the ag industry. The Shadow Minister for Home Ownership and Housing Affordability Jess Wilson met with regional leaders in construction, real estate, planning and development and heard

about the burden being placed on businesses due to a broken planning system and the economic headwinds caused by this financially incompetent government. Finally, on Thursday the Shadow Treasurer Brad Rowsell spoke to our resilient local businesses, who have survived COVID and the floods but are now being punished by this tax-obsessed government. We are the highest taxed people in the country, and this continues to hamper regional development. While the government makes decisions from the city and for the city, I thank our great team of shadow ministers for coming to the regions and hearing what needs to be done to improve our livability, cut through red tape and support regional Victoria.

Anzac Day

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (15:41): Last week thousands gathered at the many Anzac Day services across the Ripon electorate. We honoured our service men and women and those that made the ultimate sacrifice in defence of our nation, our values and our way of life. I had the privilege of joining locals from Landsborough, Navarre, Paradise and surrounds at the dawn service and gunfire breakfast in Landsborough. Local legends Gary and Janeane Edwards held the moving service in the memorial garden and commemorated local veterans who gave so much to our nation.

I then laid a wreath in Elmhurst and attended morning services in Streatham and Skipton. A big thankyou to Bruce Dunn, Jan Eastick and Lorraine Cooper from the Streatham hall committee for a moving march and service followed by tea, biscuits and great yarns in the main hall. Another big thankyou to Gail Ward, Graham Layley and the Friends of the RSL, Skipton branch, who held a service attended by almost every local in town. Skipton Primary School students recited poems. The Skipton and District Historical Society put together a beautiful photographic display of local service men and women in the mechanics hall, and Amr and Heather kept us all fed with delicious sandwiches and cake.

I finished off the day in Stockyard Hill, where the local social club held a two-up and Anzac biscuit competition. Western Ag and the Hawker family supported the event along with Deb Bain and the Kirkpatrick family.

It is individuals and community groups like those I met on Anzac Day that make me so proud to be Australian. They embody the qualities of the Anzacs with selflessness and mateship, and they keep the Anzac spirit alive for current and future generations.

Prader-Willi syndrome

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:43): Prader-Willi syndrome is a randomly occurring disorder where some of the genes in chromosome 15 are inactive or missing. The syndrome affects development and growth. Many of Melbourne's Prader-Willi families recently met in Hampton to walk and raise awareness for the syndrome. The recent walk was the first since COVID and a special opportunity to re-engage and raise awareness.

Hampton Rovers Football Club

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:43): The Hampton Rovers Football Club Anzac Day match is a touching commemorative event each year. Thank you to club president Gary Nash for hosting the event. It was particularly memorable to have Bill Mirabito from the Hampton RSL conduct the ceremony. Bill, or 'Choc' to friends, has been honoured with the RSL National Certificate of Merit with Gold Badge, a well-deserved honour for a great man.

Hampton post office

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:43): The Hampton community was outraged when Australia Post announced its intention to close the Hampton post office in late April. As we know, Australia Post is a federal government-owned entity that makes a financial windfall. Therefore the decision is ultimately within the control of the federal Labor government, yet the communications minister has refused to stop the closure. Federal Labor have proved their contempt for Hampton.

Jack Levy Pavilion

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (15:44): Hampton East deserves its fair share, yet sadly the Jack Levy Pavilion at Moorabbin West reserve is run down and well known in the sporting community as being a problem for women and girls. The site is home to Moorabbin West Cricket Club and Moorabbin Kangaroos Football Club. It is also a highly utilised location for visiting clubs. Disappointingly, Bayside council has budgeted yet withdrawn funding several times over many years. It is time for the Hampton East community to get their fair share.

Armstrong Creek library

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (15:44): I stand with you today to share a very important issue close to my heart, and that is an issue that I have campaigned hard for, which is to see a new library funded and constructed in my community of Armstrong Creek. Pleasingly enough, we won that campaign and we were successful in getting a state government grant to help fund a new library for the Armstrong Creek growth corridor, something that I am enormously proud of. That library will service Armstrong Creek, Mount Duneed and Charlemont, and I am very pleased with the outcome.

Disappointingly, though, the City of Greater Geelong, in their budget handed down just last week, failed to make the necessary allocation of money to provide adequate staffing for that library. Of course Armstrong Creek is full of lots of working families, people who make their way into Geelong for their regular working week, and to have a beautiful purpose-built library to service that community be inadequately staffed is inappropriate. As a consequence of that, I am launching a petition calling for that funding.

Rental support

Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (15:46): We need to freeze rents for people in Prahran. The rental crisis is out of control. Rents have already risen by around 20 per cent and are forecast to rise even further this year, adding to the skyrocketing cost of living. There is a massive lack of affordable rental properties right across Melbourne, pushing people even further to the margins and adding to the increasing number of people experiencing homelessness and housing stress. The state government needs to implement a two-year freeze on rent increases and put permanent caps on rent increases to stop unfair and out-of-control rent rises. I have heard from renters in Prahran who are struggling with affordability, struggling with homes in poor condition and struggling with a lack of maintenance. There is so much more to be done to give renters more rights and make sure that everyone has an affordable place to call home, like increasing supply through short-stay regulation and strengthening the vacancy tax; improving rental standards like energy efficiency, cooling and heating, and access to solar for renters; and longer term leases and protections. This is a crisis that requires immediate and significant government action and not sitting idly by and watching it go past.

Footscray electorate planning

Katie HALL (Footscray) (15:47): The residents of Footscray have spoken loudly and clearly that they want more respect from the people who own large landholdings in central Footscray. Little Saigon burnt down in 2016, and it is still burnt down. Forges closed in 2008, the empty Paint Spot building on Buckley Street, the demolition of the historic Belgravia hotel – Footscray has been let down. I recently took my campaign on land banking to the Minister for Planning Sonya Kilkenny and was pleased to take her on a walking tour of Footscray. At Joseph Road I showed her what happened when Matthew Guy approved buildings with no setbacks off the roads and where we had to introduce retrospective planning controls to get contributions from developers. We now have to retrofit infrastructure into this development, and I am pleased to inform residents that their park on Warde Street, funded by the Andrews Labor government, will commence construction in June. In our walk-through of Footscray we were joined by mayor Sarah Carter and the CEO of the council to discuss planning laws and actions that can be taken, and I understand that the mayor is now meeting with owners of these sites. I am excited that an election commitment I secured for artworks for Footscray

will be delivered to tackle graffiti problems, but it is important to acknowledge the graffiti problem is made worse by the negligence shown to our community by the owners of these bombsites. I will continue to update the community on this campaign.

Anzac Day

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:49): Last week I was invited to the Neerim District Secondary College to be part of their Anzac Day service. Neerim District Secondary College is a vital part of our local community, and to see their passion for the day was truly inspiring. It was great to see so many students taking part in the service. Well done to the students who led the service, the teachers and the wider school community for their effort in recognising the sacrifice of those who served for Australia.

George Collins Kokoda Award

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:49): On another point, last week the 2023 George Collins Kokoda Award recipients were announced. The award was created by former member for Narracan Gary Blackwood and local businessman Bernie Rowell. Each year it sends a group of students from Baw Baw to Kokoda to walk the trail. On their return the students share their experiences to educate the next generation about the history of Kokoda and its importance. Congratulations to Lani, Hayley and Mia, who were all successful and will walk the trail later this year.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:50): I have not wasted a day over recent weeks, serving the Pascoe Vale community through: welcoming the Premier to Coburg High School to inspect plans for the new \$17.8 million Coburg technology hub; hosting the Treasurer for a successful business and community breakfast attended by over 100 local representatives to talk about Coburg revitalisation; officially opening, as of yesterday, the new Pentridge visitor and entertainment precinct, which will be a game changer for tourism in Melbourne's north; accompanying the Minister for Small Business and Minister for Veterans to the Coburg RSL and to meet with local traders; inspecting the Metro rail tunnel, which will support more train services up the Upfield and Craigieburn lines; welcoming the Minister for Health to meet with Merri community health in Coburg; touring the Big Housing Build Harvest Square project with the Minister for Housing, who is at the table here, in Brunswick West; paying my respects to veterans at the Coburg RSL and Pascoe Vale RSL Anzac Day services; welcoming Merri-bek's newest citizens at local ceremonies; celebrating with East Coburg Cricket Club their record-breaking two-premiership-winning season with the men's and women's teams; and representing the Minister for Police and Minister for Youth Justice as well at the Youth Activating Youth Ramadan dinner at the Islamic museum in East Coburg and Thornbury. I have also managed to secure a number of significant grants, including \$178,000 towards the Reynard Street Neighbourhood House, \$154,000 for the Shirley Robertson Children's Centre and \$10,000 for Brunswick Juventus. My office has also been helping many residents with the \$250 power saving bonus, which is helping and taking real action on the cost of living today and tomorrow.

Noela Rose

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:51): It is great to be back in the Parliament, but it was a very busy month across the electorate as we paid our respects locally. On Anzac Day we reflected on the courage and the commitment of Noela Rose, a former air force clerk, aide and proud Sunbury RSL member who featured in my annual brochure. It was her grandfather's service during World War I that encouraged her to join the Australian Defence Force, and I thank everyone in our community for attending these very moving services.

Victoria's Big Build

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:52): In other great news, I am delighted that the frame for the massive two-storey pavilion at Diggers Rest reserve has arrived – I know the member for Footscray will be very excited about that – and is being put up as we speak, a joint project of course by this government

and the City of Melton. We are also getting on with our massive construction blitz of Sunbury Road as we get on and we upgrade that important arterial road within my community. It is a massive project delivering new lanes, shared user paths and improved safety. Right across our state, as Parliamentary Secretary for Level Crossing Removals, I was also delighted to see that our 68th level crossing has been removed at Mount Derrimut Road. Just over nine weeks have ticked over since the massive construction blitz began to remove the dangerous and congested level crossings at Union and Mont Albert roads, building a brand-new Union station and a 1.3-kilometre rail trench as we get on and remove these dangerous and congested level crossings. Only the Andrews Labor government is getting on and getting it done.

Brimbank mental health and wellbeing local

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:53): It was absolutely wonderful to be down last week in Sunshine for the official launch of the Brimbank mental health and wellbeing local. This hub is being run by Cohealth and is one of the first of six new local mental health and wellbeing hubs that are currently up and running across Victoria, with 50 to be up and operating by 2026. I had the pleasure of joining Cohealth's CEO Nicole Bartholomeusz and director of mental health transformation Suzanne Dick for a tour of this wonderful facility and a look at the services that are being provided to my local community and to folks across the broader Brimbank community. These hubs are operating as a one-stop shop for people looking to access mental health services but who are unsure where to look. We know from the royal commission that these local hubs should serve as a front door for people seeking a transformed mental health system. As soon as they walk in they get the help that they need and they very much deserve, and for sites like these anyone over the age of 26 can now walk in and get the help that they need free of charge and without any referral or appointment required. Folks in Brimbank can find this location at the Cohealth centre on Dickson Street, right across the road from the train station in Sunshine, and as for the rest of the Laverton electorate, I look forward to seeing more of these hubs, including one in Trug, open.

Whitehorse City Council

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (15:55): Last year Whitehorse City Council voted behind closed doors to cease delivery of council-run in-home care services and outsource these services to a range of alternate service providers. Up to now, Whitehorse home and community services have delivered a range of support to residents through the Commonwealth government's home support program and home care program. Whitehorse's decision to step away from that arrangement from 1 July this year will affect around 2500 local residents. Services impacted include the real essentials – daily meal delivery, shopping assistance, housekeeping, maintenance, transport and respite. Affected residents were not consulted about this change and were only notified by mail after the decision had been made. Many people in the Box Hill community have contacted my office in a state of shock and anger. Many worry about what this outsourcing means for them. Some are saddened at losing contact with the people who have provided these services to them over the years. These residents are our most vulnerable – the elderly, those with disability, those with chronic health issues and the housebound.

Council's cut to in-home services is just one of a number of frontline services that it is removing from its responsibility: outsourcing of the Aqualink swimming pools at Box Hill and Nunawading, closure of Aqualink's childcare service and the planned closure of the service centre at Box Hill town hall. Residents expect our local governments to be service providers to their communities, so it is disappointing that Whitehorse council has chosen to see these services as a burden rather than an investment in the health and welfare of our community.

Steven Tougher

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (15:56): I rise to speak on the tragic event that occurred in Campbelltown, New South Wales, approximately three weeks ago. Paramedic Steven Tougher was working night shift, trying to have a short rest break between cases. He was stabbed in the back of his ambulance. In my 38 years in ambulance both as a paramedic and the secretary of the union, I have

been involved in and witnessed many traumatic and tragic incidents. This is the first time I think in Australian history that a paramedic has been murdered on the job. The hurt and trauma of this event will spread across the ambulance family throughout Australia. Everyone expects to go to work and to come home safe. This is a painful reminder of how dangerous it can be to work on the front line. No-one should think that they have the right to abuse, to assault or to murder frontline workers – our paramedics, our nurses, our emergency service workers – who work to protect our community.

This is my message, and I am sure there are people out there who need to hear it. If you have the inclination to harm anyone, especially one of our frontline workers, stop. Do not do it. Allow our frontline workers to continue providing their fantastic services to the community. Steven Tougher was just 29 years of age. He had been working as a paramedic for only 12 months. He had a long future in front of him, which was cut short in such tragic circumstances. I extend my condolences to Steven's family, his friends, his paramedic partner on the shift and his work colleagues. Vale, Steven Tougher.

Ramadan

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:57): We recently marked a one-in-33-year occurrence of the Christian Lent and Easter season, Jewish Passover and Ramadan. In my electorate of Greenvale, where over 80 per cent of residents profess a faith, tens of thousands of families spent weeks across March and April engaged in reflection, fasting and a shared pursuit of greater understanding and piety. I was immensely grateful to have been invited to spend so many joyful evenings throughout Ramadan sharing the breaking of the fast, reflecting on the message and meaning of Ramadan with my constituents and of course wishing them Ramadan Mubarak. I want to particularly thank all of the organisations who generously hosted me to share an iftar dinner, including Ilim College, the Australian Intercultural Society, Darulfatwa Islamic High Council of Australia, Muslim Welfare Trust and of course Islamic Community Millî Gorus, who hosted Melbourne's largest street iftar in the heart of Meadow Heights, where I was joined by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, who is at the table.

Mary Queen of Heaven Primary School

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (15:58): Congratulations to the leaders, staff and families of Mary Queen of Heaven Primary School in my electorate of Greenvale, where I was delighted to represent the Minister for Education at the formal opening last month. The Andrews Labor government supported the construction of this fantastic new school with a \$4 million investment in stage 1. The school's beautiful buildings are complemented by an outstanding culture, and I acknowledge principal Renae and her team, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools and Fr Dishan and the Good Shepherd parish team for their hard work over so many months in building that culture and the wonderful educational infrastructure that will serve the young people of my electorate for generations to come.

Eid al-Fitr

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:59): I was very pleased to attend the United Cultural Support Inc. Eid celebration and the Afghan Australia Philanthropic Association Eid celebration, so I congratulate everyone. Eid Mubarak.

Address to Parliament

Governor's speech

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed on motion of Martha Haylett:

That the following address, in reply to the speech of the Governor to both houses of Parliament, be agreed to by this house.

Governor:

We, the Legislative Assembly of Victoria assembled in Parliament, wish to express our loyalty to our Sovereign and to thank you for the speech which you have made to the Parliament.

And Tim Read's amendment:

That the following words be added at the end of the motion: 'but respectfully regret that the speech fails to announce a ban on new coal and gas projects'.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (15:59): I am delighted to make a contribution on behalf of my community of Bendigo East on the address-in-reply, acknowledging that the address-in-reply was presented to the Parliament by the Governor in December of last year. It is always a great opportunity to reflect on the work that is happening in our local communities. I will also touch on some of the work that is going on in my portfolio, because of course the Governor's speech to the Parliament really does lay out the four-year agenda of the incoming government.

And what an action-packed agenda it is, Speaker, particularly in our community of Bendigo and more broadly in central Victoria. The work that we are doing in central Victoria in and around the communities of Bendigo East and Bendigo West really does build on the foundations that have been built up for the best part of the last two decades in terms of investing in the great regional city that is Bendigo and of course also supporting the smaller country communities that ring the great city of Bendigo. That is why I was particularly pleased to see some commitments that the Andrews Labor government made to the Bendigo East community that supported the work in those smaller communities.

We have made a commitment to the Raywood community to rebuild the Raywood CFA station on its current site, and I want to acknowledge the terrific advocacy of the Raywood community. It was a great day last year – I think it was in August of last year if my memory serves me correctly – when we opened the brand new Raywood train station, bringing train services back to the country community of Raywood after many, many decades of trains running through that town but not stopping in that town. The train services are there; we have seen work on upgrading the road into Raywood, and now we are building on that by investing in a brand new rebuilt CFA station for the hardworking CFA volunteers in that community. Over the journey we have also got works going on for new CFA facilities in the small town of Serpentine in the north of my electorate, in the Loddon shire, and it is all about providing great support for CFA volunteers around the state.

Also, we have made a couple of significant school commitments for the Bendigo East community, and I was just thrilled to be able to make the commitment to the Huntly community of \$13.18 million to upgrade the Huntly Primary School. Huntly was not that long ago a small community on the northern outskirts of Bendigo. Today it is a rapidly growing one, but it still retains that great country feel. I was pleased to join the Huntly community on Anzac Day last week. Every year they hold a really special community Anzac Day service where the local kinder and the local school, alongside hundreds and hundreds of people from the local community, come along to commemorate Anzac Day. If I can, on indulgence, Speaker, I will acknowledge the hard work of the Huntly Memorial Hall committee and Keith Kelly and Margaret Pitson, who have told me they are hanging up their boots, in Keith's case after 28 years of service as president of the Huntly Memorial Hall committee. Over that period of time he has seen great events grow in that local community. I would like to pay tribute to the great work that they have done. As I said, we are supporting the Huntly community with a \$13 million investment to make a major upgrade to support the growth of students at the fantastic Huntly Primary School.

We are also, at White Hills – further down the Midland Highway, coming into the suburbs of Bendigo – building on the work that we have done as part of stage 1. We are investing in stage 2 works, which will include a new gymnasium for the White Hills Primary School community. Again, it is a growing school, and that support of \$9 million for stage 2 works, which as I said includes a new gymnasium, is going to support both the students but also the terrific staff who work at the school.

I also want to touch on the investment that we are making in the Bendigo regional employment precinct. We committed \$6 million to do the important planning and development work. This is, if you like, looking at getting the foundations in place for future industrial activity to happen at this site, which is in the Speaker's part of the world, in the township of Marong. This is all about jobs. This is

all about making sure that we have got the land ready to go to support jobs and development for our growing community.

Another great project that I am also really pleased that we were able to make a commitment to for the Bendigo community was \$21 million towards the redevelopment of the Bendigo Art Gallery. It is the best gallery in regional Australia – I am looking at you, Ballarat. It is the best art gallery in regional Australia, and we can say that on an evidence basis.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Speaker agrees with the Deputy Premier.

Jacinta ALLAN: Speaker, I will acknowledge I may have been more than a little provocative; however, I am making an evidence-based argument through you to the Parliament that validates the claim I can make for Bendigo to have the best regional art gallery in Australia.

Steve Dimopoulos: Only the Minister for Creative Industries can make that judgement.

Jacinta ALLAN: Well, it is a fact, whether you look at the existing collection or whether you look at the exhibitions that have been curated and displayed at the art gallery, with wonderful support from our creative industries. We won a national tourism award most recently. I really do want to pay tribute to art director Jessica Bridgfoot and her team and also the City of Greater Bendigo, who have worked really hard on planning for an expansion of the gallery. The reason why we are having to expand the best gallery in regional Australia is not only so that we can continue to put on those big blockbuster exhibitions like Elvis – and I know the Assistant Treasurer remembers fondly his visit to Bendigo to open the Elvis exhibition, when we had the opportunity to hang out with Priscilla backstage as part of that exhibition. It is also an opportunity for our region to build in a really important dedicated space to showcase not just the Indigenous community's art but also culture and offer an education experience to the local community – education facilities to provide for children's programming. So that is a great commitment that I am really proud of. I know, Speaker, we worked very hard to secure that commitment and we are looking to work with the city as we look at that investment being realised through the redevelopment of the gallery.

Of course, if you look at the areas I have touched on – investment in education, investment in the art gallery, which speaks to the support for the creative industries, which also supports our tourism and hospitality sector and our investment in the regional employment precinct – these go to the fundamental pillars of where jobs and economic activity are occurring around central Victoria. We have an agenda that supports that activity but also builds on those other investments. For example, we recently opened the magnificent new Bendigo Law Courts. Not only is that an impressive facility in itself, but the services that are being delivered are making a difference for our community. And there is also the soon to open GovHub, which is in a similar vein. It is a magnificent piece of infrastructure, but it is also about bringing together state and local government services that are more easily accessible for our local community. This is all part of the build-up of Bendigo. Bendigo will be on the international stage, alongside Ballarat and Geelong and the Latrobe Valley and Shepparton, as we host the 2026 Commonwealth Games. There is also the ongoing work, and I thank our local community and our council for the work they are doing with us to support the activities around the Commonwealth Games.

There are just a couple of other areas I want to touch on, broader statewide areas, that are really important signals about how the Andrews Labor government supports regional communities. I particularly want to talk to the cheaper public transport fares for regional Victoria. This is going gangbusters in our regional communities, bringing fare equity between regional train travellers and those in Melbourne – that is \$9.20 or, for the 40 per cent of V/Line users who hold a concession of some sort, \$4.60 for those travellers to travel anywhere in the state for the entire day. This presents a real and massive saving for regional passengers. For families thinking about bundling the kids in the car and going to Melbourne to watch the footy, or indeed for Melbourne people who want to come up and visit our fabulous regional art gallery, the \$60, \$70 return fare just made catching the train really

not an option for some families. The Andrews Labor government has addressed this quite directly by bringing fare equity into our public transport system – the same fares for Melbourne and regional Victoria – and also making it easier for families to get around.

This has been supported by a massive investment in additional regional services. You can only make this announcement and provide this fare equity support if you have built up the foundations of our rail network, which successive Labor governments have done. Those upgrades to the train lines and the upgrades to new train stations have added hundreds and hundreds of extra services across the state, and those extra services are well and truly being put to great use with the great demand we are now seeing on our network from people who are taking up the opportunity to leave the car at home and get around the state by train. I should also point out that these fares also apply to our V/Line coach network as well. This was something that we worked very quickly on – and I want to acknowledge my colleague the Minister for Public Transport – to make sure that this policy was implemented very, very quickly. The fairer fares rolled out at the end of March so that we could move very quickly in bringing that cost-of-living relief as well as making our public transport network so much more accessible for public transport users.

Time will perhaps not permit me to run through the significant investments we have made across my portfolio areas that the Governor's address-in-reply speech outlined to the Parliament, but the theme of that was continuing on with the investment in a pipeline of projects to provide that certainty for the construction industry. If you are a young person wanting to consider a trade, you can see that there is not only the opportunity to get your start on these projects but indeed build a career on these projects. Then of course for local communities they can see that we are continuing that investment. I am a little sad that the member for Bayswater is not here. I was going to give the Boronia station – oh, there you are! I am not sad anymore; the member for Bayswater is here. One of the big commitments we have made is of course a new Boronia station. It is a big commitment that has been made.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: Hang on, we are going to have to do some cheerios, aren't we? The Thompsons Road and Berwick–Cranbourne Road intersection – that gets some people excited over there. Ballan Road, Point Cook Road, the Barwon Heads Road stage 2. You can only do stage 2 of course if you have delivered stage 1, which is what we are doing at the moment. I am sure if the member for Yan Yean and the member for Kalkallo were here, they would be pleased to hear us reference the Watson Street ramps that are part of making it easier for motorists to access the Hume Freeway, and of course there is the ongoing work to get rid of dangerous and congested level crossings, marking 110 level crossings to be removed by 2030. I am really pleased to report that at the start of last week we clocked over number 68 in terms of level crossings that have been removed in just on eight years.

So it is an action-packed agenda that the Andrews Labor government is delivering. Whether it is in our regional communities, like the one we are proud to represent in Bendigo, or indeed across the state, we are continuing to deliver on each and every one of our election commitments, and we also continue to work on the policy and project priorities that are important to the Victorian community.

In the time available I also want to acknowledge that the Governor's term comes to an end in the coming months, and I want to use this as an opportunity to acknowledge the tremendous service that the Governor and her husband Tony Howard have provided to the state of Victoria over the Governor's time in office. She has worked tirelessly. She has travelled the state, travelled the world being a proud civic representative of our state, and we thank her for that work and the way she has engaged compassionately and considerately with the local community.

Members applauded.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (16:15): I too rise to join the debate on the address-in-reply. From my perspective it is a wonderful opportunity to think about what has gone on and to gaze forward to the future with a degree of hope and optimism.

I had a fantastic campaign last year. I was so grateful and so pleased that my campaign manager for my last three elections, Darren Arthur, was once again campaign manager with the support of his wife Jayne. Darren is a Qantas pilot, and he is just everything you could possibly want in a campaign manager. He is steady, he is reliable, he is unflappable. He has got great judgement. This was our third campaign together, and to be together for this campaign was incredibly special to me.

I also want to use this opportunity to give a shout-out to my ministerial staff and my office. I have had the great privilege of being a minister for coming up to three years – it will be three years next month – and I have built a great team around me. I want to start with my chief of staff Naomi Nugraweni. Naomi is an incredible woman. She is so driven and focused. She is so intelligent. She has been a terrific chief to have in my office, and we complement each other well.

I want to acknowledge my former deputy chief of staff Jo Swift. Jo came on board when I was allocated the housing portfolio. Jo had previously been the CEO for Kids Under Cover. To have somebody who really understands the housing sector incredibly well as my deputy for those few months was incredibly valuable, so I really want to place on the record my appreciation for the important work she did over a short period of time.

Julia Donovan is my government services adviser and is all things digital in my office. Julia is very young, but God, the head on her shoulders. She is a really incredible woman. Being able to work with younger people and provide that mentoring for them in the same way that those who came before me mentored me is something I am incredibly proud of. In terms of the work that we are doing with Service Victoria, trying to turn the Westminster model on its head so that we have got more efficient, more consistent services being offered through those digital platforms is something I am really passionate about and I am really excited about. Having Julia doing a lot of that work with me is great.

Claudia Subocz, my current deputy chief of staff, is just a powerhouse and a dynamo. She is incredibly driven and focused. We have worked together for a very long period of time, and it is always great in these roles to surround yourself with people who will challenge you, who think differently to you, who will take you in directions you might not normally go in and who round you out and fill you out. Claudia has just been amazing.

John Hondros – Hondo – does a lot of that reg reform work and has got a real energy and drive about him. He and Julia are both younger people, but they have got a big future in front of them, a huge trajectory. To work with people for that period of time when they are at the start of their careers really is a great privilege, because you have got the opportunity to see people who you know are going to make a great contribution in whatever field of endeavour they embark upon. To be afforded that opportunity is truly wonderful.

Jackie Parry is my executive assistant. I often say about Jackie that Jackie has worked with everybody, is related to everybody or knows everybody – the number of people that know Jackie Parry from Navarre up in the Wimmera, I think the Clerk will correct me if I have got that wrong. Jac has been fantastic and just a great EA.

Tony Zhang has come on board doing a lot of that detailed policy and research work. Again, like with Jules and Hondo, he is on a huge trajectory. To Jabulani Bulle, who did a lot of the Assistant Treasurer work, I want to place on the record my thanks for his work over that period of time. I also was incredibly grateful that my former government services adviser Brent Carney took leave and worked after-hours to be able to come back and assist me with my re-election campaign.

As all members know, you need to have very strong electorate office staff around you to really support you when you need to get things done locally. It is particularly important when you are a minister, because you always have to dance with the one who brought you, and it is always important that, although you get dragged off to ministerial responsibilities, you make sure that at the time when you are in your electorate you are well served. So a big shout-out goes to Frank Dinoto. Frank has been with me all the way. He is incredibly steady, solid and reliable, one of the most patient people you will meet. When you are dealing with housing-related matters or people who have got really challenging, complex needs, it is really great having someone at the front who can navigate and deal with that.

To Rod Gurry – Rod has been around forever and a day and knows Essendon inside out and back-to-front and has made a terrific contribution in my office. To Jenni Chappell – Jenni has been terrific in terms of doing a lot of that office management work and making sure that things are well run and well organised in the office, and that is great. To Kara Thompson – Kara is at uni but she has been helping out in the office now for a few months. Again, she is a really, really bright, smart young woman and a joy to work with. I think Kara has got a huge future in front of her. I am not sure where she will go, but I know that someone like Kara, whatever she turns her hand to, will be successful. To Jono Oppenheim – Jono has been with me and has been terrific in terms of doing a lot of correspondence and that work. In the digital age, with so much that is being produced in the written form, making sure that you have got people who can write clearly and cogently, people who have got really good digital skills, really is essential in relation to the smooth running of an electorate office.

Over in Essendon I am incredibly fortunate. We have got a great branch structure and a great branch network. We have got people who have joined the Labor Party for the very best of reasons and who are committed and focused on wanting a progressive community, and they work so incredibly hard. On election night it was really special. We got together at the Maribyrnong Park bowls club. You can brag about the result, but I am not doing that here. What I want to focus on is that I had a room full of local activists from my community who had made such a huge contribution to the party – they are just the best people to hang out with – and I thought, ‘Well look, we can do something a bit different this time around.’ So I went down to New Somali Kitchen on Racecourse Road. It is probably fair to say that the membership of most political parties tends to be whiter and older. We got New Somali Kitchen to cater for the election night function and people got to experience Somali food who had never experienced it before, and it was just really nice. You are having a few drinks and you are working the room and you are talking to people about how they have gone on the booths that day and what they did – and, ‘Oh, this food’s really good. I haven’t had this before.’ It is knowing that you are able in a very practical way to support a small business, a successful small businessman in Abdul – giving him that opportunity and expanding people’s horizons. You know, life should be about moving forward and lifting your gaze, raising your horizon and having that opportunity to have a broader perspective – to try to push the envelope and do things differently. We did that on election night and it was really, really lovely.

So again to all the volunteers who helped me – because all of us know in this place we are only here for two reasons: by the good grace of the support that we receive from our communities, but also invariably off the labour and endeavours of hardworking volunteers – I want to thank those who helped in so many ways, be it phone banking or pre-polling, the election day booths, the erection and hosting of garden signs, the letterboxing, the street stalls and the stations. Many of the volunteers put in big hours at pre-poll before work and after work, and I just simply cannot thank them enough.

I do want to give a shout-out to a few people. I want to thank Glenice Thomas. Glenice has worked with me for three campaigns now. We turned her whole house into the campaign headquarters, which was great. It was wonderful for Glenice. Glenice is now I think probably about 81, so I do not think her house had ever seen so much traffic and movement before. It was just great being based at Glenice’s place. To Marg Healy, who did the booth rosters. To Jane and Ivan Bertoncetto who did phone banking and pre-poll scrutineering. Jan Chantry again did multiple pre-poll sessions with me. Luke Mitchell did phone banking and worked tirelessly on election day. To Paul Miles and Martin Scheirich. Marlene and Roy Burrows again did a lot of time at pre-poll with me. To David Hutchison –

David is one of those guys who just gets things done. He goes out there with his ute and with his hammer and gets garden signs erected. Stephen Fodrocy was a phone banking coordinator. Ian Lang was a coordinator for communications. To Robert Johnson and Helene McNamara who did the phone banking and pre-poll on election day. Rose Scott did a power of work in terms of doing the local fundraising. Derick Melder turned up to pre-poll every single day at Moonee Ponds, and he was there from dusk till dawn. He was a machine, Derick. To Kate Crossin, again, who opened every shift at pre-poll; and to Daniel Scheirich, again, who made a significant contribution. I want to thank Christine Blandthorn and India Pinkney as well for their work. To all the booth captains, the scrutineers, the letterboxers, the phone bankers, everyone who handed out how-to-vote cards, everyone who had a sign on their fence – it was just such a great campaign.

Locally, I was really pleased. My ministerial office did a power of work in the housing portfolio really trying to make life better for public housing tenants. If the house will indulge me, I told a story years ago about how a little five-year-old boy was in his walk-up at Flemington – it was in the height of summer and I had just got elected – and he put his hand on the windowsill and the window dropped. He nearly had the top of his finger severed; it was reattached. I remember thinking, ‘This is no way for people to live. We have to do better.’ I made some comments at the time that got picked up. I was probably a bit intemperate in some of my comments; I did not think they were going to be picked up and recorded, but they were. But anyhow, it led me on a journey to start to say, ‘How we can do something in a practical way to change the trajectory of public housing tenants? How can we give a meaningful, dignified experience for public housing tenants?’ One of the things I really pushed for incredibly hard was to say, ‘Let’s get air conditioning in towers.’ I remember when I was first elected, you would see Adam Bandt wandering around Flemington with his thermometer in the height of summer saying ‘Woe is me!’ and ‘Isn’t this bad?’, and he would never do anything about it. Now they are actively trying to stop a \$10 billion housing fund. Anyhow, I thought, ‘Rather than just talk about it, why don’t we do something about it? Why don’t we actually try and fix it? Why can’t we make it better for housing public housing tenants?’

I have always viewed housing through that prism of opportunity. It starts with housing, and it is about making sure that the schools are well funded and there are pathways to employment. When I was elected we had these walk-ups – they are gone; we have knocked 198 of those down. The first tranche will be commissioned later this year, and those families are coming back. The school no-one wanted to send their kids to and was a pretty poorly performing school – we have invested \$26 million in that school. The new block will be officially opened in a few weeks time, I am told, but kids are going there now. I remember speaking with the architect, and he described how he wanted to make sure that the top level of the main building would look out over the city – stunning views. For him it was about saying, ‘I want to lift the gaze of public housing students to see their future in the city, that that’s where they can go.’ The old community centre – basically the floor was falling into the foundations. We have provided \$5 million worth of funding for that, and that is going to be opened this year as well. You are here for a very narrow period of time, and you are here to get things done while you are here. For me the trajectory that Flemington is on now – if you had gone overseas at the start of 2014 and if you were to come back at the start of 2024, the place would be unrecognisable, and that is a really good thing, because I think it is about making sure that we can transform the precinct and we can give opportunities to people who need it most.

Locally, we have provided \$1.5 million to the Ascot Vale Panthers. I want to give a shout-out to the former president Aileen Cox. Aileen, a woman from Glasgow, did not know anything about footy before she arrived, but boy, what an incredible organiser. She is a change agent. She gets things done. She is just incredible, and she has just been delightful to work with. Belinda Nelson, her successor, is going to make a huge contribution and really drive things along as well.

I am really pleased that we are going to provide \$2.6 million to provide a new playground for Essendon Primary School. This is what the school has been calling out for. I want to recognise the fact that we will be providing \$1.5 million to St Monica’s, and I want to give a shout-out to the principal there,

Peter Moore. Peter is one of the best principals you will ever come across in the state district of Essendon. He is just sensational.

We have provided \$100,000 to the Moonee Valley Legal Service – again, what a great service locally – \$300,000 to the Fanny Street Reserve bike track and \$400,000 to a dog park in Flemington. And finally, we are going to have a neighbourhood battery in Moonee Valley.

Government is a gift and government is a joy. You never, ever know how long you have got in this place. You never, ever know how long you are going to have in government. But you do not want to die wondering; you do not want to be one of these people, one of these grey men or grey women of politics that never had an original idea, never took a chance and never risked it. For me this is something I am incredibly proud of. I have not wasted a day since I arrived, and I do not intend to start wasting days now. We have got a job to do; we are getting on with it. I am so pleased and delighted that we have been afforded the great privilege of a third term in government.

Members applauded.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (16:30):
I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Bills

Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (16:31): I am delighted to rise and contribute to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. It is the first bill in the water portfolio for this term of Parliament, and I know many members on this side of the house are very keen to see this debated because it is nice to see legislation that supports regional communities, rather than the same old metro focus that we have seen. So I am pleased to see it from that perspective and many other perspectives as well. I also want to extend my thanks to the minister's staff for organising the bill briefing and providing some important context to this legislation. I want to thank Georgia for liaising, and Alieta and Rose from the water team within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. It is complex and it is an often misunderstood area to work within, so I appreciate the work that they are doing in that field.

The bill amends the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 and the Water Act 1989. The changes to those acts are largely technical in nature, and I would describe them more as legislative housekeeping. We know the bill seeks to extend the last possible date for a provision of the water catchment act to come into operation, which I will touch on a little bit later. It also makes minor amendments to the proposed new part 4AA of the Water Act, particularly around place of take, and makes other minor technical and related amendments, as I touched on before.

Just to provide some context and background to the newer members of this house who may not have been here, in 2021 the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act was introduced, and it made some very significant changes to the water framework within Victoria. This includes the introduction of place-of-take approvals designed to help secure water supply for irrigators, particularly downstream of the choke, which I will talk about in a minute, and particularly in years where there is a shortfall of water, something we see fairly often in Australia. The Barmah Choke is a natural constraint on the flow of water for users particularly downstream, obviously, of the choke, and with increasing demands downstream from the choke more and more water is being pushed through, much to the detriment of the environment and of the choke itself.

The Murray system irrigation has many challenges. As a former irrigator and someone who still lives on the Murray River, I know only too well the importance that water has for the economic wellbeing of our communities. At the same time we need to balance irrigation rights, town use, consumptive users, recreation on the rivers and the environment of course. For those who do not know the Barmah Choke, it is situated between Nathalia and Echuca on the Murray River, and it is a very narrow stretch of the river. In fact some people call it 'the Narrows'. If you ever get a chance, go to Picnic Point and take the boat ride. It is a most interesting exercise to go down the Narrows. It really is an outstanding environmental asset, and it is worth having a look at. I encourage you to do so. Over the years this has got more and more restricted. Some say 9200 megalitres can pass through it a day, but it is now coming back closer to 7000 megalitres a day, so depending on who you are talking to there will be a differential.

To explain what happens in the Barmah Choke, most parts of the Murray River have a flood plain. To understand flood plains, when you send too much water down the river it spills out onto that flood plain as the water passes and then when the bulk of the water passes the water can come back into the river again. Now, where the Narrows is in the Barmah Choke, it is actually a perched river system, and by 'perched' I mean it is like a bathtub. When you fill up a bathtub and the water overflows, as we know, you will never get that water back into the bathtub again, and this is what happens at the Narrows and the choke. So that water flows out of the system – and all the river red gums get saturated, which is no good for them – and it never returns back into the system. This is why you cannot push too much water down the Barmah Choke, because it goes over the top. Some makes it back into the system; there are some small returns. But on the whole that water never makes it back into the system, whereas if we went further upstream or downstream and put too much water down the river, it would still make it back into the system and make it down to South Australia. That is what the choke is. It is a restrictor and literally is a choke in the system, and that is why whether you are upstream of the choke or downstream of the choke is really important. That is what this legislation is addressing, particularly for people who are downstream of the choke, because there are only 7000 megalitres a day that can get through it. That is exactly where the constraints are, and how that water is used and managed is what this legislation addresses.

Just to put a finer point on that, if you look upstream of the choke you have got, between Yarrawonga and Nathalia, a smaller area of irrigation ground and not as many towns, whereas if you go downstream of the choke you have got Echuca, Swan Hill, Kerang, Mildura and South Australia. You have got massive irrigation areas and bigger towns, so they have to be far more careful how they manage their 7000 megs a day, whereas for those upstream it is pretty straightforward. You can send more water down from Yarrawonga or Dartmouth, as long as you are not sending more than 7000 a day through the choke. Now you have got a situation where you have got reduced capacity from the choke but then a growing demand on the other hand. You have got almond growers, you have got citrus growers and massive table grape and wine grape growers downstream, and you have to manage this balance to make sure everybody is happy and also make sure the delivery of that water does not come under too much pressure. It places industries downstream of the choke at great risk, and what we see is, particularly if we get a heatwave or a snap of hot weather, this is where the difficulty comes in. You can imagine after four or five days of 40-degree weather everybody decides they want to irrigate on the same day, because it is quite hot, and with their trees, whether it is almonds or whether it is citrus or whatever it might be, everybody wants to irrigate. Well, not everybody can do it on the one day.

This legislation starts to talk about an assist, a priority, a rationing, so to speak, to say, 'Okay, one person might get to use the water on Monday, somebody else gets to use it on Tuesday and somebody else gets to use it on Wednesday', as opposed to everybody saying, 'No, I want my water on Monday'. So this will put some framework around how corporates, how farmers, how all users can extract that water. It is really important that we get on top of this now, because as things develop and as time goes by this is only going to get worse and worse in terms of there being still only 7000 megalitres that can be shared around, and as development takes place or better systems come into place, people will still only have 7000 megalitres to divide between those downstream. Businesses have an annual extraction rate. For example, you might have a licence that says you have got a thousand megalitres for the

season, but it is not the thousand megalitres that is the concern. It is how you want to take that water and when you want to take that water, so that is what this addresses, to make sure that there is a priority that says, 'This is what your licence says, and this is when you can extract it' – not particularly saying what day but actually putting a priority in order so all users are not arguing amongst themselves.

If, for example, a corporate comes to town and wants to put in a hundred thousand hectares of table grapes, citrus, almonds or whatever it might be, existing users will then say, 'Hang on a minute, I've always used the water on the Monday and the Tuesday. What's going to happen when this corporate comes in and wants to use the water on the Monday and Tuesday?' That is why I say, if we can try to prioritise, get this argument out of the way and make a water policy and framework, it actually makes it a lot easier into the future to decide who gets the water and when, and that is what is most important about having those extraction priorities. If we couple this with the increase in the sediment build-up in the choke and the previous increase in the number of developments further downstream, the situation is simply becoming untenable. As I say, it is not out of the ballpark yet, but in years down the track it will be. To the credit of former Minister Neville, there have been some sensible measures put in place that will help protect the choke and ensure that there is enough water for the whole basin, and that bill passed in late 2021, with the stipulation that the provisions within it would come into operation on 1 July 2023, which is just a couple of months away. Unfortunately, the government seem to have dropped the ball somewhere along the line and all of a sudden have realised, 'We're heading towards 1 July and we're not ready. We haven't consulted or educated the community on how this is actually going to roll out and happen.' I am told the reason this consultation with the community has not progressed is because of the floods. I am not sure that is completely correct, but they are saying that because of the floods there has been minimal uptake and they need to get more stakeholder engagement. I actually think this is a good news story for the government, and I am sure the government wants to spread the word over a longer period of time to make sure that everybody gets the message, because in many ways this is a good news story for people downstream of the choke and the future of irrigators and consumptive users.

One of the reasons cited for the delay was the October floods, as I say, which caused a huge amount of damage right across Victoria and the impacts that are still being felt. Now, I would like to note that the government has had over 12 months to consult and now needs an extension to the deadline because of the floods, but when we talk about the flood inquiry that the other place is doing and suggest people need time to get their submissions in, we have only got two months to get submissions in. I wrote to the chair, and we got that extended by a month. But I am just wanting to highlight, I suppose, when it suits your narrative you say, 'We need 12 months more to consult', but when it does not suit your narrative you will say, 'No, we're only going to have two months to consult'. So that is where I see some differences.

In terms of talking about the floods, I was talking to John Clurey, a former Katamatite farmer, on Sunday. He now lives in Shepparton. John is well into his mature years, and he told me he was pushed from pillar to post during the floods. He had to get out of his house. He has got black mould under the house, and he has been staying in motels. He would stay in a motel in Yarrawonga for a week and then they would send him to Kyabram for two weeks and then they would send him to Rochester for a week or somewhere else, and he was just getting pushed around. And all this guy wants to do is get home. I just think there is still more work to be done in terms of getting resources to these communities who have been flooded out, because it really is tough. We know how the people in Maribyrnong suffered, but certainly when you look at the communities of Shepparton and Seymour, Rochester in particular and Echuca of course, there are so many communities that have been damaged by the floods, and it is really important that they are heard and they get the resources they need. So that is really important. On that, I encourage people to get their submissions in. They have got until 5 June to make sure they have their say about how the floods affected them or their community. I am by no means criticising the work of those who for the most part do the work, but I look at Operation Daintree, merely pointing out the hypocrisy of those on those benches opposite. They cannot ask for more time

to consult on a good news story but less time when it comes to giving submissions and making sure that people get their say as well.

Returning more specifically to the bill, as I outlined before, the place of take is a new approach which is designed to provide clarity and protect the water rights of water holders, especially in times of water shortfalls and especially with the challenges of, as I say, getting the water through the choke. New research released in the Aither *Water Supply and Demand in the Southern Murray–Darling Basin* report indicates that the lower Murray is in a bit of trouble when it comes to water availability, which is why these reforms are so important. So that backs up the evidence and certainly backs up what this legislation is trying to solve. According to the current demand for horticulture, a dry year for the lower Murray will see potential shortfalls, and when a moderately dry year such as 2019 occurs, there will be a shortfall of around about 100 gegalitres. Now, we all remember 2019 was a dry and hot year, but it certainly was no millennium drought. But looking at the connected Murray, a moderately dry year could certainly lead to shortfalls. When factoring in future horticultural demand there will be huge shortfalls and a need for careful rationing and ensuring that water is shared fairly amongst the holders, and that is what this is doing.

This is critical for ensuring the stability of the communities further down the Murray and also for the farmers and the plantation owners who rely on the water to produce their crops, because they are a massive part of our local economies. I do worry that the buybacks have been mooted again – well, not mooted; the federal minister has said she is ready to do buybacks, which is really sad because there are still so many other ways we can make water savings before we just go to that easy option of buybacks. When you go to buybacks, go down that path, it is very easy to do – hand out the cash, somebody will pay you the money – but it is the whole community that suffers when you take more water out of those communities. The place-of-take reforms should make delivery rights clearer and more consistent, and the reforms in this bill also allow for this to extend to other declared water systems into the future, which could ensure that we have a well-managed water system.

I also note the article by Peter Hunt in the *Weekly Times* on 19 April, which raises some alarm bells about the progress of important sustainable diversion limit adjustment mechanisms, or SDLAMs, as the acronym goes. With the upcoming budget, reports have indicated that it is going to be a very tough budget. Everybody on the other side of the house is saying it is going to be tight and it is going to be nasty, but it is concerning that nine of these flood plain restoration programs have been halted due to the issue of cost. I heard the Minister for Water in the other place saying that the federal government will not guarantee funding for these restoration programs. There are nine of them, as I say, and there is up to 72.5 gegalitres that can be generated out of those savings. As I say, if there is money to go and make buybacks, why isn't there money to make sure these nine programs in Victoria for saving water can be honoured rather than just saying the easy option is to do buybacks? It is important that the state minister in the other place and the federal minister really put their heads together and make sure that we get the best outcomes rather than the easiest outcome of going to buybacks.

Further, the minister went on *Victorian Country Hour* on the ABC and refused to say whether or not these projects have been put on hold or will or will not be put on hold. I suppose we will wait until the budget to see what comes out of that, but the minister did say up to 60 gigs is still up in the air due to the uncertainty. We need every single drop of water to avoid the shortfalls and also to avoid those damaging buybacks by the federal government. I do note that the minister took the opportunity to criticise the former Liberal–National government for, which I find hard to believe, not coming to the table. I want to take the opportunity to say that it was actually the former Liberal–National government that said, 'Buybacks are definitely off the table, and we will make the savings elsewhere rather than go to that easy option of going down the path of buybacks.'

While I am talking buybacks and savings, there is a hydrological study and modelling around the Eppalock Dam, and that needs to be funded sooner rather than later to make sure that towns like Rochester certainly have some more assurance or understanding of where we can get to to make sure that they do not get flooded out. Some of these floods were avoidable – I am not saying entirely, but

certainly in some of those high-risk areas the flooding could have been reduced or the damage could have been reduced. If some of these studies get done asap, that will then allow us to look at where to from here for Lake Eppalock.

Now I will touch on a couple of other aspects of the bill. There is a slight rewording of the language around the fees paid for a place-of-take application. As I understand it, the fees are charged for every application that is put in, which sometimes leads to one individual paying the application fee two or three times a day. That is ridiculous and it is frustrating, and some might say that is an example of red tape. The proposed changes to the wording should therefore allow that only one fee needs to be paid for that day, essentially lumping together all the application fees into one lump payment so that you are not paying over and over for effectively the one transaction. This is a commonsense move. I am informed that the day-to-day operations can occur, we just need to make sure that it is in the legislation. I do note as well that the minister has discretion to determine a fee to accompany the application if it is not already in the regulations. This should mean that any gaps can be caught and dealt with accordingly.

Clause 6 of the bill touches upon the requirements around the information to be stored and kept by governments in the water register, including for those with certain water rights and those with place-of-take approvals. It is important to ensure that there is a level of transparency within the water market, and this follows on from recommendations by the ACCC a few years ago about the lack of quality information that is accessible for water market participants. I note the former minister did indicate support for a fully transparent market, which does have merit. I also believe there is a fine line that needs to be found between giving too much public information and obviously too much private information. That balance has to be struck to make sure that, particularly for those with higher annual water allocations, we know who owns that water. There must be a great deal of caution when publishing that in the public domain, because it follows that some of the smaller irrigators can be exposed to more aggressive operators with more resources.

I would urge the minister and the department to regulate this very carefully. Any feedback that comes as a result of this should be given due consideration to ensure that any issues can be caught early and any changes can be made as soon as possible. As I said before, I think the current guidelines are that around 2 per cent of total water share is for private irrigators, and I think that is the threshold. I also understand that no-one is above this threshold yet. It seems to be a reasonable system so far, but we must be careful regulating and sharing information at all times.

I just want to touch on interstate trade, also included in this bill, which is again another complex area of water policy. Currently there are regulations in place that dictate which zones can trade water to other zones. However, in Victoria we have used for some time a system which has misallocated water from Victoria as New South Wales water, for example. A New South Wales irrigator had bought the water shares. This legislation will make minor changes so that the system will revert to a tag system, which ensures that any water from Victoria that is used or bought externally is still considered Victorian water per se, tagging it as such. It is a minor legislative change, but it fundamentally ensures that Victoria is not losing any water to other states, and it will have substantial impacts on the operation of these water trades. Perhaps more simply put, water from Victoria will remain Victorian water.

I was in Acheron only a couple of weeks ago with my colleague the member for Eildon, who is also going to speak on this bill, talking to locals who had been impacted by the October 2022 floods. This is part of the Goulburn system, which obviously feeds into the Murray system, which is downstream of the choke, but it is still a very important part of that irrigation system and the Murray system that flows in there. The locals at Acheron were telling me about the huge damage caused by the floods last year and the lack of early warning notice that they got. They were told something like 8000 megalitres were going to come their way at about 8 o'clock at night. It turns out 30,000 megalitres came their way at about 2 o'clock in the morning. No-one can change what Mother Nature is going to send down, but what we can do is have better early warning systems, particularly as our dams get full closer to those higher rainfall periods.

I have been in the north for 35 years. Every flood we have had has been in October, so it is fair to say that in September if your dams are already full, you should consider doing something about that. A good policy would be to say, 'Well, how about letting some water out?' This is about changing policy for Goulburn–Murray Water, because at the end of the day, if you let the water out and it does not rain again, somebody is always going to say, 'Who's the fool that let the water out? Because it didn't rain again.' Well, nobody knows it is not going to rain again, but nine out of 10 years the bulk of our rain comes in October, so it is not rocket science.

I think there is work that can be done on policies, and they are some of the things that probably could have been included in this bill, because as I say, when I was down at Acheron just seeing the bridge, there was 10 metres of the bridge chopped away. Many people have lost infrastructure. They have replaced infrastructure and they have replanted their pastures, but they are very concerned with the level. The current level for 1 October is 100 per cent. That is the infill curve. That is the aim – 1 October. They are concerned that, because they are already at 94 per cent in the Eildon system now, that could fill up very quickly. Again, there is a really tough balance, but I think we do not want to see those people flooded out again, certainly not one year after the last flood – that would be devastating – and that is what we heard from that group that met with us the other day.

I also note the unique position of Lake Eildon, as it feeds into the Murray system downstream of the choke. As I suggest and as a result, this water can be used by South Australia and New South Wales irrigators, which again loops back into the tagged interstate trading. Some of this flooding could have been avoided if some of those guidelines were in place. As I say, I do not have the answers to what those guidelines should be, but certainly a review of those guidelines would be of assistance and would help those people in Acheron, Alexandra and those sorts of places to feel more comfortable.

As we talk about 'place of take', we also need to talk about 'place of receive', and by that I mean when you receive water that you did not really want, whether it is inundation or flooding that has occurred in your region. That also has to be included when we talk about place of take and the benefits of that on the Murray system and all systems. We cannot forget the place of receive is awkward for a lot of communities too, because they get water they do not expect, and this brings me back to increasing the size of dams.

I have been saying for many years about dams like Lake Buffalo that the government already owns the land around Lake Buffalo. While we cannot increase the size, it was always planned, in 1961 when it was built, to be increased, if for nothing else but flood mitigation. This would put a lot of people at ease, knowing that dam had been increased. With increasing the size of the dam, you cannot just increase it for flood mitigation alone, but certainly you could have that buffer zone there, that bit of freeboard that would help communities sleep better at night knowing there is a capacity there – that when the dam is technically full or close to full, there is that bit of freeboard.

The Premier and the previous water minister keep saying, 'Dams don't make it rain.' I get that. Dams do not make it rain. Building dams does not make it rain, but when you have got a bigger bucket and Mother Nature sends down more water and turns the tap on harder, it is a more practical approach to have larger dams to store that water. You are harvesting water that is just going to go downstream and do damage to a community downstream, when it could be held for another day. As I say, the good people of Acheron are not alone in their summation, and they are really concerned about how this spring could look. I also note hypothetically that better regulation of water could mean less water that is sent out to sea without being used. If we make better use of that water – what is going down the Murray and other river systems – we might have fewer shortfalls in water delivery and achieve better results for our water holders. This is a simplistic point of view, I know, but again it touches on the aspects of these reforms.

I was advised in the briefing that the reason the amendments were not attached to another omnibus bill was primarily for time's sake, but we need to get this bill's associated changes through Parliament before 1 July, because that is when they are enacted. To me it is somewhat strange that the government

is still working towards the July deadline and needs another year to implement these changes. Given that there is feasibility only six weeks away, really a month or two could have really resolved that, but we are going to have another year for them to sell this message. I sincerely hope that the extra work will allow for more fulsome consultation and greater understanding of the community before the changes are rolled out, as it has been a long extension for this project, but they will be reforms that are well received.

I want to conclude my remarks by just highlighting that whilst we do not oppose the bill, with both this bill and the 2021 act we still have genuine concerns about the management of water in Victoria. There have been some very positive developments in the water sector under the former minister, as I suggested, and I acknowledge former Minister Neville's work, but there are still areas where more could be done and indeed should be done for irrigators and communities, particularly those downstream of the choke.

I spoke about buybacks before and the threat of buybacks. There needs to be a review into the 2012 carryover rules. Evidence suggests there are 300 to 400 gigalitres from spillable accounts that have never been credited to the environment. That water and the spillable account need to be credited somewhere, because otherwise nobody is getting the benefit of that water. Instead of having these dangerous buybacks that we do not want in the north, there could be water that is already going to the environment that is not being counted and that should be used. So a review of the carryover rules certainly can benefit consumptive users. Those rules were brought in in 2012.

Again I just want to highlight that flood inquiry, as I am running out of time. About 5 June is the cut-off date. I certainly look forward to hearing from my colleagues who will have a contribution on this. I know the member for Gippsland South is going to have a say on this but so will the member for Mildura. I know the member for Mildura has the most to gain or lose out of these changes, because downstream of the choke it is really important that they understand it and they are good with the changes, because it is important. They will be the beneficiaries or the losers. The communities in her patch have a lot to gain or lose, and so does the member for Murray Plains – those areas around Swan Hill and Kerang will also benefit or lose on these. So with that being said, I once again reiterate that we are not opposing this bill.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:01): I too rise to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. The purpose of this bill is actually to extend the start date of the new water place-of-take framework which we introduced with the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021. The aim of this is to go ahead and create a better management system for Victoria's water system. Time and time again I have stood in this place and talked about how important it is for good long-term governments to be constantly looking for ways in which to improve frameworks, and creating a better management system for Victoria's water system is indeed a very, very important thing for folks here in Victoria right now but also for generations to come. We know that for water users, especially those living in regional Victoria and working in our agricultural sector, the water entitlements that allow them to take, use or extract water for their own purposes are extremely important not only to their businesses but also for the Victorian economy. What our government knows from talking to them about the framework changes proposed in this bill is that they need more time to understand those changes that have taken place and how the changes that this bill introduces will affect their ability to take and indeed use water.

It is also clear that our water supply is something that can be seriously affected by the impacts of climate change – something that colleagues on this side of the house have very much been interested in and indeed committed to doing something about for a very long time. What we are seeing are those hotter days – and more and more of them – and more droughts, which of course deplete our water supply. I was not living in Melbourne 15 to 16 years ago – I was trying to count back to where I was back then, and I think it was perhaps up in Queensland – but I do remember when the water supplies in our reservoirs were actually below 30 per cent of their capacity and the days when we had water restrictions on ordinary households, which preceded the Black Saturday bushfires. I think there are

many people in this house that would remember the little stick-on timers that we had in our showers. I have to admit that my in-laws in Sydney have probably had that little timer attached to their shower, it feels, for the past 10 years and still use it – it still works – for those 3-minute showers. The shortages back then prompted the Brumby government to deconstruct the desalination plant in Wonthaggi, which was completed in 2012. Personally, I see the desal plant as a really good instrument in regard to water security here in Victoria, and while I do not think it gets a great deal of use at the moment, it is something that can certainly spring to life if we ever again – and hopefully we will not – see water levels as low as they were in 2007.

Of course we are still seeing today how climate change impacts the way in which we use water. We have been lucky so far that the Murray has seen very few shortfalls in the supply of water to our farmers and irrigators up in northern Victoria, but that risk is still both real and omnipresent. We know in Australia that our environment and rainfall are often at the mercy of our Pacific Ocean currents. So many times we have heard about, read about and seen in full force El Niño and now La Niña. We have just left the La Niña period, characterised by heavier rainfall and warmer currents. The Bureau of Meteorology has now declared an El Niño watch, which has the opposite impact of dryer weather and more likelihood of a drought condition that triggers a shortfall event. It is why the changes that were contained in the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act are necessary for the future of our water companies and their customers.

The framework we are talking about today really relates specifically to approvals for place of take. As part of the changes this framework improves Victoria's approach to the management of approvals to take water and delivery rights in a declared system, and this affects a number of river systems here in Victoria, including the Murray, the Loddon and, surprisingly enough – I was actually surprised to read it – the Werribee River, which runs through my community in Wyndham. If folks here in the chamber have never actually gone down and seen the Werribee River and experienced the true beauty of that waterway system, it is indeed a place to go and spend time in and take your children to and visit and explore. It is very special indeed. In particular, however, the change is going to be really beneficial for folks who live in flood-affected communities. It should be made clear, though, that the changes in this bill will not actually go ahead and affect anyone's water shares, but rather what they will mean is that water shares have greater certainty about their entitlements, especially when demand exceeds water flow. It means that when there is a shortfall the Minister for Water can introduce rules to protect existing water users' rights, and that will be done by capping the extraction share, as well as facilitate the trading of extraction shares where there is a minimal chance of third-party impacts.

Under the current arrangements in the act the commencement date for this framework is 1 July this year. That is why it is important that this bill pass through the Parliament before the end of this month so that the extension can then come into effect. The biggest reason for the change is the impact of the floods that took place in October last year. Tragically, too many people here in Victoria were affected. Seeing the floods and the devastating effect they have on communities and families is felt as close to home as with my own husband, who was affected by three floods while growing up. Sadly, his parents did not have insurance and were forced to live in a flood-affected house for many, many years. He talks about mould up walls and all kinds of terrible stories. His family were very much affected by very big floods that took place in Sydney many years ago, and indeed having spent a lot of time up in Queensland seeing the devastating impact in cities like Brisbane being completely inundated by floodwater, it is a truly tragic thing and can have long-lasting impacts on people that experience it and are affected by it.

So indeed we do know that flood recovery can be a very long and a very difficult process, and the last thing that folks who have been affected by the floods need right now is to deal with an updated framework for how they use and rely on water. This was born out of the consultation process that restarted last year, and that is why consultation processes are so very important. The turnout for these sessions was low, and those who did turn up did tell us that they were not prepared for the changes to come into effect; they needed more time. And we get that – there are lots of Victorians doing it really

tough at the moment, and that includes our farmers in areas like the Goulburn Valley and along the Murray Basin.

What is also really important is that by carving out this particular part of the act to delay commencement we are allowing the sections that relate to market transparency to proceed as planned to come into effect on 1 July this year. These provisions have been thoroughly consulted on and will improve the accountability and the fairness of the water market. It also means that the public can have access to this information about the largest holders of water. This is really important, because what we do not want is a situation like back in 2017 when the Commonwealth had its own – what can we say – ‘water-gate’ scandal, with \$80 million in water entitlements being purchased from a company that not only happened to be formerly directed by the now Shadow Treasurer of the federal opposition but also happened to be a Liberal Party donor.

This is exactly why we are planning on going ahead this year with these provisions of the act, and that is a really good thing for Victorians, who expect our water supplies to be handled fairly and indeed need them to be handled fairly. This bill is one that is intended to make one change, but it will benefit Victorian users at a time when they really do need our help. By delaying the commencement of this framework we are giving them relief at a time when they are grappling with the impacts of last year’s floods and do not have the means to grapple with a really big change in the framework for how they use water. It means that farmers across Victoria, especially those out in rural and regional Victoria, benefit from an eased pathway to reform their water system, getting the new framework next year. I commend the bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (17:11): I rise to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. Disappointingly this, like the other bill being discussed in the Parliament this week, is a bill that is a hangover from the last Parliament. The last bill lapsed as the government did not prioritise regional communities, once again, and do the work to ensure this was addressed in the last Parliament as was promised. The bill seeks to amend the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 to extend the last possible date for a provision of that act to come into operation, to make minor amendments to proposed new part 4AA to be inserted into the Water Act 1989 by that act as to the regulation of places, rates and times of taking water and to make other minor and technical amendments; and to make minor related amendments to the Water Act 1989.

I do not oppose this bill, but I call for this government to work harder with rural and regional communities to preserve this finite but vital resource. This bill is characteristic of the Andrews government’s waste and mismanagement of projects. The bill joins a litany of delayed and derailed projects caused by this government’s inability to run a schedule. The very reason this bill is required to be discussed now is because the government ran out of the time that they set to be able to do the work they said they would do before the time ran out. So here we are extending the time. The commitment made, because of the Andrews government’s inability to conduct community consultations in an appropriate and timely manner, did not happen. This government did not commence a consultation process until December 2022 and seeks to blame the floods for the incompetent community consultation. I have always found it a bit lame, blame-shifting, and in this instance it is certainly lame to be blaming the floods.

The Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 received royal assent on Wednesday 3 November 2021, so why didn’t the community consultation commence on Monday 8 November 2021? Why did this government sit on its hands for over 12 months before commencing community consultation? Like so many pieces of legislation this government has introduced, they outline the purpose and then make the claim they will do the detail later. I find this process very concerning. The point of legislation is to have a structure in place to ensure functionality and to avoid unintended consequences, yet we are debating legislation today that does not have the detail worked through, so how can we as an opposition and as a community scrutinise the legislation effectively and properly? On principle the vision is fine, but the lack of detail is worrying.

We saw exactly the same with the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Bill 2020. The government introduced the bill and said they would work out the detail later, and now, less than six months from the start date of that legislation coming into effect, the organisations who will be left to deal with the practical situation on the street have no understanding of who will be responsible and how it will work. That to me does not reflect a government who is interested in caring. It demonstrates the aim of this government is to get headlines into the public eye so they look like they care and then not bother to get around to doing the work. It is the same with this bill. It is supposed to be implemented by July 2023, but they have not begun the work. They have not begun the consultation, so here we are extending the deadline to July 2024.

Community consultation is important, and it enables communities to not only voice their concerns but be involved in identifying both problems and solutions. When community consultations are conducted well, community members are empowered and communities are strengthened. We all know that community consultations are lengthy and that water is an issue that most people have an opinion on. We also know, in the words of Dorothea Mackellar, that our wide brown land is home to both droughts and flooding rains. So one may question: why did this government fail to commence the community consultation in a timely and efficient manner, knowing that circumstances beyond anyone's control like a flood had the potential to delay the consultation process? Unfortunately this failure to consult in a timely manner is symptomatic of this government, a government that delays, denies and blames others for their mistakes and omissions. This is a government that simply cannot follow a schedule or a budget.

Unfortunately, bills lapsed are characteristic of this government. I have lost count of how many lapsed bills have been presented to the Parliament by this government. It is disrespectful to the Victorian people to behave in this manner, and the government needs to stop wasting parliamentary time and manage the agenda better. As I have said before, a failure to plan is a plan to fail. Unfortunately this seems to be the motto of this government. Victorians deserve so much better.

Water is the source of life. Without water, life simply ceases, and farmers know this very well. Water is the lifeblood of all our communities, both rural and urban, and it is due to the importance of this that stewardship of water must be prioritised. This bill recognises this and seeks to provide stakeholders with assurances of what will happen in times of shortfall.

By 2050 the world's population will exceed 9 billion people. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations projects that world food demand may increase by 70 per cent by 2050. To put it another way, we have 7 per cent of the world's crust that we can farm, that is arable. In the next 50 years we have a challenge in front of us. It is about 500 years since we started organised farming, where we did not hunt and gather but used fences and had crops and flocks. So in the last 500 years we produced a certain amount of food. In the next 50 years we have to produce the same amount of food as we produced in the last 500 years. That, by anyone's imagination, is an incredible task in front of us. So to feed 9 billion people steps need to be taken to ensure there is food security. Food security is when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Ensuring reliable access to water for communities, agriculture and horticulture is one step in this direction.

During my Nuffield scholarship travels, when I studied food policy around the world, it was very evident and obvious that we had a major challenge in front of us with only 7 per cent of the earth being arable, that we had to find ways – and desperately have to find ways – to make sure we have suitable and available land for our crops and our stock. By 2050, as I have said, we will need to produce a huge amount of food, the same amount as we produced in the last 500 years. Demand will outstrip supply as we see more developing countries wanting food, good quality food. So it is pleasing today to see in reports that 1000 scientists have signed a petition to support meat production and the fact that they value and understand that it is important have meat in your diet, it is not bad for the environment and it is not bad for your health. Now, I will always value that people have the right to choose whatever they want to eat, but when they tell others they cannot do that I do not support it.

So you do not have to be a rocket scientist to acknowledge that a global population exceeding 9 billion people, requiring 70 per cent more food on 7 per cent of the earth's crust, poses some challenges. It will require innovation, it will require perseverance and it will require dedication. Fortunately these are attributes of the Victorian agricultural and horticultural communities. It is these talents that will be harnessed by this bill to ensure that water is used effectively and productively.

A sustainable and resilient Victoria needs agriculture and horticulture sectors that are strong and vibrant. For agriculture and horticulture to thrive, the right to farm needs to be protected and preserved. Farmers of all stripes, be they cattle producers or cereal growers, need assurances from all governments that their right to farm will continue without interference. The competition for precious resources will only continue to increase, and governments need to work with rural sectors to ensure that the food that will be required into the future will be able to be produced. This government must not let perfect be the enemy of good and must continue to strive to strike the balance needed to protect and preserve the right to farm.

Water is vital for the survival of humanity. This bill takes some positive steps towards ensuring the consistent management of this resource throughout Victoria. I do not oppose the bill but note that this is yet another example of yet another lapsed bill, something that is far too common in this place and emblematic of the Andrews government's level of chaos and inability to follow through. It lacks detail, and that concerns me. This government's arrogance is highlighted by their failure to commence the necessary community consultation in a timely and competent manner. This government needs to do better and be more proactive in its engagement with Victorians, not just those who reside in the metropolitan area.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnet) (17:20): It gives me great pleasure today to rise to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. This bill addresses a range of issues related to water delivery, market transparency and effective consultation with stakeholders. One of the key drivers of the bill is the gradual loss of capacity to the Barmah Choke, which is a narrow point in the Murray River that controls the flow of water downstream. This has resulted in water shortfalls that have affected many water users downstream of the choke. This bill also improves market transparency and ensures that the water market operates in a transparent and fair manner, as the member for Laverton spoke about previously. This will benefit farmers, irrigators, investors and the wider community. Finally, the bill seeks to extend the time for consultation with flood-affected water users in northern Victoria to ensure their views are taken into account when transitioning to the proposed changes.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action – known as DEECA – has been actively engaging with affected water users since the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 passed, and contrary to the sentiment of the previous speaker, the member for South-West Coast, it has been incredibly difficult for those people that this bill will affect to effectively engage in consultation in many ways – namely because they are rebuilding their communities, rebuilding their homes and rebuilding their lives after a horrible flood event, and my sympathy goes out to those communities. DEECA has been working in close collaboration with the three declared system rural water corporations – Goulburn–Murray Water, Lower Murray Water and Southern Rural Water – as well as their customer committees. This is to ensure that systems and processes are updated for them to manage their customers' place-of-take approvals when the new framework comes into effect. DEECA has been proactively publishing information on the Victorian Water Register website to help water users understand and prepare for the changes. Additionally, several online webinars and face-to-face presentations have been conducted for stakeholders and agencies. Proposed conversion rules have been developed by DEECA in consultation with the rural water corporations, the consultative committee and water users affected by the changes. These rules are relevant to private diverters, whose existing extraction share will be distributed between multiple place-of-take approvals. A decision on these rules is expected prior to this bill passing Parliament so that affected water users have time to prepare and make arrangements if the new framework were to come into effect on 1 July 2023 as proposed.

As I spoke about earlier, it has been incredibly difficult for stakeholders and people in flood-affected areas to effectively engage with consultation on this bill. I myself know several families, including primary producers in regional and rural Victoria, and having had conversations with them over the last little period, I understand how incredibly difficult it has been for some of these communities. Indeed I wish them all the best in their efforts to rebuild their communities, rebuild their homes and in some cases rebuild their lives. This bill is being introduced in that vein to allow for time for consultation with those whose statutory approvals will be affected by the transition to the proposed part 4AA of the Water Act 1989. It is simply not fair to expect farmers in flood-affected areas of northern Victoria to participate in consultation about preventing shortfalls in the current circumstances. These Victorians have enough on their plate dealing with flood recovery, rebuilding their houses, dealing with insurance and repairing their farms. This government understands that this bill is incredibly important but now is not the time for effective consultation, so having that extended is entirely appropriate. This means that consultation needs to be extended to ensure the government gets this right. The delay of the default commencement date provides much-needed additional time for those people in those flood-affected areas and water users in those flood-affected areas in northern Victoria to consider and also to adjust to the new reforms. The additional time will also better manage technology risk inherent in updating the Victorian water register functionality to support the new place-of-take framework.

The proposed changes to correct technical matters in the amendment of the Water Act 1989 are not expected to have any impact on the cost of water which, given the cost-of-living pressures that exist at the moment both to family households and to small businesses, is an incredibly important aspect of what we are doing. The last thing that we want to do is to pass legislation that will make those cost-of-living pressures even more difficult than what they already are. What they do is simply provide for clearer and more certain rights to extract a share of the flow in the river when a rationing restriction is declared and ensure no unintended consequences to interstate water trade. As you can imagine, with a bill of this nature there has been extensive stakeholder consultation, and based on that extensive consultation for the amendment act prior to and during 2021 the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, DEECA, is confident there will be broad support for the clarifying amendments in this bill to correct technical matters in the amendment act to achieve the original intent of the water reforms before they commence this year, in 2023.

Feedback from the place-of-take consultative committee, which is comprised primarily of irrigator representatives, has been that it is a difficult time, obviously, for rural water users in northern Victoria, given the effects of flooding that we have seen up there, which I have spoken about previously. It has been a really difficult time for those communities in northern Victoria to engage and consider these reforms while they are still addressing that flood damage and recovery. The very low turnout for public engagement sessions in January 2023 has further underscored this capacity issue, and to go to some of the comments made by the member for South-West Coast, it is most certainly not that consultation has not been conducted throughout this process and for this bill; it is simply just a fact that those that are affected by this bill were unable to engage in that consultation because they are rebuilding their communities, rebuilding their businesses and rebuilding their lives. So to suggest that consultation has not been forthcoming, to suggest consultation has not occurred is nothing more than disingenuous. Both rural water authorities and the Victorian Farmers Federation have been consulted and are supportive of the policy intent of this bill. Given that the Victorian Farmers Federation is the industry body that covers a lot of these businesses that will be affected, I think having their support for these changes goes a long way. I commend the bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (17:30): I rise to make a contribution to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. Water and the management of water in my electorate is absolutely crucial and remains one of the highest priority items that people want addressed in this Parliament, particularly at the moment. When you live in a country area, you are subject to drought, you are subject to normal years when things are quite good and you are also subject to floods. I think all through that we have to look at all of the stakeholders along the river catchment system and storage facilities, or storage weirs and lakes, to make sure that we are doing the right thing by everybody to the best that we can.

We have got a bill here before us which is essentially extending a default start date by 12 months – that is all it is. The bill was introduced in 2021, and there was an end date for 1 July 2023. Probably in December 2022 the government started to do some consultation and realised this consultation is really on the back of the floods which just happened a few months before, so of course people are not in a position at that point. Now, we do know that in reality it is not going to be ready, so it does have to be extended. We do know that, but I think the government have really dropped the ball because they did not commence the consultation perhaps when they should have and then found out that something else had happened. Sometimes things do happen that we do not expect. That is why you have got to get on the job early to make sure that you have covered for all risks or unexpected things that happen.

I just want to quickly touch on this bill which amends two acts: the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 and the Water Act 1989 as well. Now I have got the water authorities, and for me I have Melbourne Water and Goulburn–Murray Water that particularly have big roles in my electorate. The roles of the water authorities particularly are about managing, protecting and delivering our water resources. We need to keep our rivers, dams and weirs healthy, and we need to maintain that for many reasons. So many people use the water and rely on it, but also in my area we do not just have water for usage, it is also very much a recreational element for boating, skiing and fishing. Lake Eildon is also involved in hydro-electricity, so electricity generation, and AGL actually use their entitlements typically to make the most of the high energy prices and not always at other times.

As we have heard, there were a number of different ways that the government went about consulting. They had several different committees in different communities – Northern Victoria, Macalister and Werribee. They are different areas with different landholders. They went with some public webinars as well, and I think Agriculture Victoria had a fairly wide net that they linked into.

But I want to have a look first of all at the second-reading speech, because the second-reading speech talks about delivery shortfalls, and it talks about shortfalls when river operators cannot deliver the water to water users, and this includes the irrigators who rely on it, and to the environment. Sometimes, particularly during hot weather, there is an increase in daily demand, or if we have had a long spell of hot weather the irrigators might be taking a little bit more. If an irrigator orders their water or takes up their entitlement and they are quite a way from the water source, well it does take time. If you are in Shepparton, for example, water released from Lake Eildon takes several days, 2½ to three days, to get to Shepparton, so it is not right there when you need it. If you need it in Mildura, well that is a lot further as well.

We talk a bit about, in the second-reading speech, the delivery of shortfalls when water is particularly tight. The only mention of the floods is about the consultation and that emergency event and having to push that out a little bit. There is no mention at all of flood mitigation, and those in my community are particularly concerned about flood mitigation, because all the operating rules tend to be around the water delivery and from what I understand were put together during times of drought, when we had that particularly devastating millennium drought.

I want to talk just for the rest of my contribution about the floods and what happened. The closer you are to Lake Eildon, the quicker you feel impacts of water releases. Communities downstream will feel it at particular minutes, hours and – depending – days later. The rivers were full. Goulburn and its tributaries – the Yea River, the Acheron, King Parrot Creek – were all full, and it was raining a lot. People were very concerned because Lake Eildon was also full, and they were going to have to release water. So then what happened is Goulburn–Murray Water did release water, but the way they did that was exceptionally questionable. On the day they had informed the local SES, who knew that water was going to be released and knew that we were expecting some floods. The SES wanted to be on top of it, so they were informed at 5 pm that the current outflows, the releases, were 12,400 megalitres and that they would remain so. That same Thursday at 11 pm – we are talking 5 pm to 11 pm, not a lot later on – from 12,400 they were increased to 38,000 megalitres. That is extraordinary.

If you were in Thornton, you woke up to alarms at 2 am to find you were flooded. This happened in the dark. This was exceptionally devastating and stressful for people. The communities in Thornton pulled together so well. Their community effort sandbagging to stop a bit of the breakaway areas, to prevent the town from being flooded, was extraordinary, and they only just made it. If the water had come up another centimetre or two, Thornton would have been under water. The drains in the area are very ordinary.

If you head down to Acheron, a couple of hours later – maybe only an hour later – we saw the road leading to the bridge on the Alexandra side completely washed away, and with that the river then detoured. What was the old historic breakaway bridge over the river is now over all the gravel, because the banks and the sand all washed away under the bridge. Now the river has diverted around it, and there is this gaping hole the width of the chamber that has broken the communities apart in Acheron.

In Whanregarwen people woke up at 4 o'clock and rang all the neighbours to say, 'Hey, listen, we're all flooded.' This is extraordinary, and you cannot do much when you are in the dark at 4 am, 4:30 am, when you are worried about cattle. I know that there were instances where a group of farmers got together to help each other where cattle were stranded. There were four boats, there were people in each boat and there was somebody actually standing in the floodwaters where they swam the cattle across to get them to safety so that they could then be moved to higher ground.

In Yea it came up at the crack of dawn. People were waking to find their homes were flooded. Roads were cut off, with no warning that this was going to happen. People said to me that they have never seen the waters come up so quickly. Why was it flooding so quickly? Why were they rising so quickly? Then we found out why – because we had an increase from 12,400 megalitres to 38,000 in the space of a few hours, overnight, and this has just been devastating.

We have a whole lot of stresses at the moment. Lake Eildon today is at 93.17 per cent of capacity. The winter recharge in a typical year is 30 per cent, so they know that there is going to be well in excess of what the lake is able to cope with, and that water needs to be released. Goulburn–Murray Water keep saying, 'Yes, monitoring, monitoring, monitoring.' They are releasing 4000 megalitres a day at the moment. It does jump around a bit, and they have said that they are going to release between 1000 and 6000 to the end of May, because they have got filling targets. They want Lake Eildon full at 1 October, and I think they have extended that to the end of October, so it is 1 November.

People are very worried, and they want the minister to intervene, because it is unprecedented that the lake is at 94 per cent at this time of year. Usually it is much lower, around 70 per cent, because we have the irrigation season. We are coming to the end of the irrigation season in another couple of weeks. Usually it is lower because people have taken out their entitlements. They have not taken them out. That is part of the carryover water that is still there. I know that Goulburn–Murray Water and the minister's office have worked with a handful of people in the area, but they absolutely want the minister to intervene to help them with the operating rules around Lake Eildon.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (17:40): It is with some pleasure that I rise this evening to make a contribution on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I do so with some understanding of course of the Australian environment and the circumstances of the Murray–Darling region. I am sure people would be aware that the Murray–Darling region spans some millions, in fact probably tens of millions, of square kilometres, an area from southern central Queensland out the back of Bourke, as they literally say, down through New South Wales and into the Murray. And then of course the Murray River extends from the Victoria–New South Wales border all of the way through to South Australia. That whole region, those tens of millions of square kilometres, is a very significant economic driver for Australia, generating billions of dollars of agricultural output and supporting many, many millions of people living in that area. In fact it has been said by eminent water scientists that that irrigation system that sits alongside so much of the Murray–Darling region is one of the biggest man-made irrigation systems that we will find anywhere globally. That irrigation network has provided for the people of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia indeed for a

very, very long time, but water scientists and in fact the scientific community started noticing changes in our environment.

I first became aware of the concept of climate change I think in my early secondary schooling, which was in the late 1980s. Of course, scientists had been identifying climate change some 15 or 20 years prior to that. The concept of climate change means that in effect there is more heat energy in the environment, and what that ultimately leads to is a changed climate. That changed climate can see periods of more intense rainfall. It can see periods of extended wet and it can see periods of extended dry. The national body that regulates the Murray–Darling is the Murray–Darling Basin Authority. It is in effect an umbrella entity with representation from all of the states, and it plays a significant and important role. But all of us who are interested in the politics of water and indeed the politics of climate change are aware that this is a very, very contested space.

The reason why I bring these things to the table is that anything that any of the state governments do or indeed anything that the federal government does needs to be really understood – firstly, the consequences of climate change, and secondly, the number of families, the agricultural output, the billions of dollars of revenue that it generates, but also of course the consequences of a changing climate and what that actually might mean.

I have had the fortune, in a previous working life, of having the opportunity to interact with and to learn the work of people working for water authorities such as the Goulburn–Murray Water Authority, Southern Rural Water and Lower Murray Water. I became aware through that period of my working life of the great challenges that exist with our agricultural system and indeed the channels, the weirs, the locks and the other things that were put in place to help support the growth of agriculture in that region; what the science of climate change would mean and the consequences of that with respect to often less water in the system and at other times a great deal more water in the system; and in fact the ultimate need to be custodians and guardians of our environment, because if we do not protect the environment, then the consequence of course is that that very, very important wealth-generating sector of the economy, the agriculture sector, pays the ultimate cost. But we also have in so many ways many thousands – tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands – of people who live in the Murray–Darling Basin who live with the real risks of particularly substantial volumes of more water in the environment from time to time as a consequence of climate change.

I cannot think of an area of public policy, perhaps outside of taxation, that has been so hotly contested literally since Federation as water, particularly as each of those states and the communities that reside in each of those states contest for their own interest in how we manage environmental water, how we manage agricultural water and how we manage climate change. It is not easy public policy, and people of course are ultimately very exercised by its importance from any number of different perspectives. This bill I think is important; it kind of builds on the work that we have been doing.

We saw late last year, over a number of months, the floods and what that meant for all of those Victorian and South Australian communities. I can vividly recall talking to my uncle and aunty, who are farmers. They have a farm in the Kerang area, and they can recall months of blue sky and watching the water come ever increasingly towards them as the headwaters burst their banks and water came down that system. That is the reality of living in that very flat country through northern Victoria, and that was not the first time that their property was at risk of inundation. In fact in the last 20 years their property or parts of their property have been inundated three times, and in the 30 or 40 years that they owned the property prior to that there were no floods, so we have got a very different set of circumstances now.

In that period where they had those three inundation occasions, they also experienced a period of drought that went for about five or six years. It is remarkable that the climate has changed so much, and that has had a consequence on their property in real, practical terms. So this bill is important. We need to make sure we provide adequate time for communities to be consulted. I think this bill does do

that. I think there is going to be further work required, and I suspect that water policy and the Murray–Darling issues are going to continue to be hotly contested across our country.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:50): Whisky is for drinking; water is for fighting over. So said Mark Twain, just to reinforce the points made by the member for South Barwon in terms of the contested and controversial nature of water policy. Indeed, even to that point, the quote itself is contested, and I am indebted to my colleague, the former member for Euroa, who pointed out to me that it was not in fact Mark Twain that said that, but no-one knows who did, so we will stick with Mark Twain for the moment. But it is absolutely a truism that water is an issue to argue and fight over, and nowhere more so than in our great nation, which is globally the driest inhabited continent on the planet. It therefore becomes a very contested issue.

This legislation, the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, is yet another piece in the puzzle of water policy to try and deal with those issues of scarcity and who should get the water that everybody wants. As previous speakers have indicated, this is effectively a revisitation, an opportunity for the government to update the introduction of place-of-take approvals and delay that for some time to further discuss with the community, particularly with the irrigation community and particularly with the irrigation community downstream of the Barmah Choke on the Murray system. My colleague the Shadow Minister for Water, the member for Ovens Valley, explained very well what this is really all about, because while the place-of-take approvals will apply to all declared water systems – and that includes the north predominantly but also the Werribee system and the Thomson Macalister system in my electorate, in my part of the world and that of the member for Gippsland East – it really is about the Murray system, where scarcity is the biggest issue.

The member for Ovens Valley indicated the physical challenge of the Barmah Choke and the fact that – it was a surprise to me when he was talking about it earlier today – that is now down to 7000 megalitres a day capacity. When I was working in the industry some 10 years or so ago I think the figure was about 10,000 megalitres a day. So it is a constraint and it is a significant one. I am reminded whenever I speak of the Barmah Choke or hear people talking of the Barmah Choke, that when I was CEO of the National Irrigators Council we took a then shadow minister on a flight over the Barmah Choke to try and explain what it was, how it worked and why it was a constraint on getting water downstream on the Murray. Once it had been explained and shown to this then shadow minister, he was somewhat disappointed because he had the simple idea in his head that he would just get a very big D9 bulldozer, push a hole through and get more water through. But it is not that simple. So we do need this sort of legislation to come in and ensure that if we do face significant challenges with delivery of water down the Murray system in future everyone gets a fair crack at it, particularly, as the government's information to the sector has indicated, to ensure that existing water users' entitlements are protected.

That term itself reminds me of the strange nature of water policy around the world. Generally speaking I think Australia has some of the most advanced water policy when it comes to trade in particular, the allocation of rights and the like, perhaps reflecting our shortage or scarcity of water. I am reminded of the US where I understand in many states allocations are actually based on historic licence approvals, so the longer you have had a licence, you will get water before anyone. In some cases literally you will get 100 per cent of your water before someone else gets theirs. So if you got your licence in 1910, you will get all of your water before a person who got their licence in 1945 gets theirs.

Indeed, literally right now, as we are speaking, the Biden administration is facing a difficult decision on the Colorado River, which is severely overallocated – used by seven states, and a further two in Mexico – and they are actually having to look at how they are going to allocate that. California is one that is saying, 'We are the original user, we've had the rights historically, so we should be looked after first.' But what the Biden administration is looking at is ensuring that there is an even cut across the board if there has to be a cut – effectively what we are talking about here, in making sure that that place of take occurs fairly across the board. I should add the qualification that we do not yet know exactly how this will work. This is the framework being set up, and I do hope that through the

consultation period we get to a situation where the practical process for allocation in the event of shortages and caps is done to – I will not say to the agreement of all, because having started with the way I started, we know that that is not necessarily a likelihood – get a fair process that most people will understand and will accept.

I also want to highlight, as I said, that this will apply to all declared water systems. My interest particularly of course is the Thomson–Macalister, the home of the Macalister irrigation district, which I share with the member for Gippsland East. I have long argued that we should be trying to expand the MID. This is certainly some of Victoria’s premier irrigation district. It is virtually the only major irrigation district in southern Victoria, and it is historically a very safe area in terms of water supply. We did go two years in a row of no spill just a couple of years ago, but historically it has been very safe. The reason I have been wanting to expand it is that in a changing climate there is great opportunity for us in Gippsland – where we do have a wetter climate and we have more reliable rainfall both in South Gippsland and on the ranges feeding into the MID – to actually expand irrigated agriculture.

I have been campaigning for that for some time, and in particular there is an unallocated amount of water on the Latrobe system known as the 3/4 bench water, which was originally set aside for power station development in the Latrobe Valley but is now no longer needed – clearly we are not going to be building a new coal-fired power station. The government last year announced that as part of the central region SWS, the sustainable water strategy, of that 25 gigalitres, 9 will be set aside for potential future energy use – and probably reluctantly I will agree and acknowledge that is probably a wise thing to do and a conservative thing to do – but 16 gigs of that water will be indeed allocated. It literally sits in Blue Rock Dam at the moment, not used, and is to be allocated on the basis of a three-way split between the environment, in particular the Latrobe and Lower Latrobe wetlands and therefore the Gippsland Lakes; the traditional owners – and the Gunnai/Kurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation will have a bit to say about that; and irrigators.

It is important of course that we protect the Gippsland Lakes and that we ensure that the Lower Latrobe wetlands are utilised. I was actually in the Lower Latrobe wetlands on Friday morning, not shooting ducks myself but with duck shooters, having a look and hoping and praying that that is not the last opportunity this year they get. But they do fantastic work, I might add, on the Lower Latrobe wetlands, particularly the Heart Morass, where it has actually been duck hunters that have done the environmental work there, a fact that is not recognised by those who would have the season shut down.

I do think we can do a better job of allocating water to irrigators. There is great opportunity for us to expand the irrigation area, whether in the MID directly or along the Latrobe. I know Southern Rural Water has done some great work on options for that to occur, and we now have a decision from the government that there will be some water. If there is a three-way split of that 16 gigs – whatever that is, 5 and a bit gigs each – I do not think that is potentially enough; I think we could potentially do more for irrigation and look at the opportunities to actually get some real economic value. In an area that is going through an industry transition, we need long-term, secure jobs.

I will very briefly mention the issue of mine rehabilitation, which is intimately tied up with water allocation in the Latrobe system as well. I encourage the government to get on with the work on mine rehabilitation. It has been some time now since we established the Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority. I know there is an environment effects statement process underway at the moment with Hazelwood and the mine there, but it is going to come to a head over the next few years, and we do need some direction. This legislation, as I said, should be a good thing. We look forward to seeing the details when they are developed. I also look forward to hearing from my colleague the member for Mildura, who has a much greater say in this, later in the debate.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (18:01): Thank you, Acting Speaker Addison. I am delighted to rise to speak and see you in the chair. I am really happy to stand to speak about the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. Before I go into the bill and why it is so fabulous I would just like to respond to some of the contributions from those opposite. The member for South-West Coast referred to this

government as city centric. As ever I would like to remind those on the other side that this government has 18 regional members. The Liberal Party has as many Davids as it does regional MPs in this chamber. It is an extraordinary position that we are in that so many of us stand to represent regional Victoria. We understand the regions. We live in our electorates and really understand the needs of regional people.

This bill, as many people have said, provides some minor but very important technical amendments. It seeks to clarify the circumstances in which place-of-take approvals cease to remain in effect, allows prescribed fees for applications for these approvals, clarifies the power to trade water allocations and, really importantly, delays the default commencement of the new framework.

Before I really go into it, the member for South-West Coast was calling on this government to act in the interests of regional people, so I thought I might take a moment to look at water policy and how much Labor governments have driven water policy in this country. The State Rivers and Water Supply Commission was established in 1905. That was the original body, but it took a Labor government under Cain in 1984 to establish the Rural Water Commission. It was the Cain government that went to work and created the Water Act 1989. So it has been a piece of work that has been very, very close to those on this side of the house for many years. In the early 2000s Minister Thwaites in a Labor government established the sustainable water strategies and created this framework for these water strategies across Victoria, and indeed that work continues. It was only last year that those sustainable water strategies were reviewed, and last year the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy* was released.

I would like to ask for the indulgence of the house to acknowledge the wonderful chair of the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy* consultative committee, Christine Forster AM. Christine has spent a lifetime in water resource management, and in 1996 she was awarded the inaugural MacLean-Iedema Award for services to the irrigation industry. She was awarded that by Irrigation Australia. She was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 2006 for her services to water management. She was awarded a 20-year service award for her work with the catchment management authorities councils, and she is also a fantastic mum. I really want to acknowledge her hard work.

It is interesting; the member for South Barwon talks about his long memory of in the 1980s first hearing about sustainability and water management, and certainly for me as a child it was dinner-table conversation. I was actually laughing the other day – we spent our school holidays being taken to irrigation projects. I can remember going to the hydro-electric system with my mum to have a look. Water management and water resources have been in my family and in dinner-table discussions for a long time, so I just really want to acknowledge her. I would also like to acknowledge the former Minister for Water, Minister Neville. She was instrumental in bringing about the 2021 bill. She announced in 2019 the very strong need for the bill, and of course that was debated and passed – the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021.

The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 seeks to clarify some of the provisions related to the place-of-take approvals. While we endeavour to take any piece of legislation forward in its perfect form, I think a really responsible government needs to continually address legislation, look deeply and look where there can be reforms and changes. But of course the motivation for this bill and this change was really the pretty awful circumstances that were faced by farmers through the flood period. Of course we are aware of how much that has impacted farmers and communities, and so this bill really is about giving a bit more time for those people that will be affected by the bill to consult and to consider some of the elements of that bill.

The Murray–Darling Basin is an incredibly important area too. It covers 14 per cent of Australia, and it is home to about 2 million people. The basin's agricultural output accounts for about 40 per cent of Australia's agricultural output, so this is an incredibly important area to us. And of course agriculture generally is such a huge contributor to this state, both in an economic sense and really, you know, in all that it does to feed us and keep us all healthy. I am delighted to be the Parliamentary Secretary for

Agriculture and I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Agriculture in the other place, because I know of her commitment to this industry and supporting this industry.

On Saturday night I was really delighted to go to the Ausveg Vic dinner, which celebrates horticulture in Victoria, and you know, we are really punching above our weight. I think nearly half of Australia's exported vegetables come from Victoria, so we are really punching above our weight in that regard. For those on this side of the house, many of us live in regional areas. I certainly ran and managed my family farm for 10 years, and it was through that millennial drought, I have to say. We came back to the farm in 2001, and it was pretty tough times while we were there. So I think we can safely say that people on this side of the house are very, very aware of the needs of regional communities and the absolute importance of agriculture to our economy and to our communities. It really is a powerhouse. I think it is a \$3.2 billion industry, so very important to all of us.

But really in commending this bill I would like to acknowledge our current Minister for Water in the other house, the Honourable Harriet Shing. One of the things that I notice with the minister – along with my colleague Acting Speaker Addison we have attended the water bodies locally – one of the things she has always been really keen to grab is that moment, as she describes it, of 'women in water'. She celebrates women in water. I think that is a wonderful thing – her passion for water. We were talking earlier. I know I come from a passionate woman in water – and other people do not understand, but when they are mad for it, they are mad for it. Our current minister is definitely mad for it, as is my mother, and so I really want to acknowledge all that they have done to look after our waterways. As the member for South Barwon pointed out, they really are the lifelines for so much industry and for all of our communities. I am delighted that successive Labor governments have seen fit to really shine a light on the water sector and make sure that it is distributed fairly and evenly but also have the foresight. We have stood with people through drought; we have stood with people through floods – this government will stand by the agricultural community, and this bill is another way of giving them surety that we stand with them.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (18:11): I am enthusiastic to speak today to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, and I am hoping that this will introduce a framework to regulate the place, rate and time of take, which should allow for better management of the system – should. Being from an irrigated horticultural background, however, one might say I am less enthusiastic to add more regulation to water and the system, but it could actually be a good news story for those of us downstream of the choke, because the system can be hard to manage for those that rely on water to produce food, particularly in drier times. And it does clarify some sections of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021, which will essentially protect the existing rights of the Victorian water user and provide a bit more flexibility to manage their own delivery. But the fear of shortfalls – and we know this; this is topical day in, day out in the great north-west of the state – is very, very real. We know that during dry periods our irrigators and those that are producing food are the first ones to pay the price for any shortfall that there might be, and it is paying the price quite literally – sometimes north of \$1000 a megalitre – when they are not getting the allocations that are required to produce the crops. Without the water, obviously, they cannot produce the crops, and the flow-on effects from that can be quite devastating. It is a very high price to make sure that crops are watered.

To this point, shortfalls have been rare, but the risk does beg the question of whether or not water should be a commodity like it is in the first place. For those of us in irrigated horticulture, we would say no, it should not have been. Food producers will tell you – me being one of them, and coming from an area where that is our main industry – that water should never have been unbundled. It is an egg we are not going to unscramble, but unbundling water from land was devastating, absolutely devastating, and we are now having to amend the water and catchment legislation to try to unscramble that egg as much as we can.

It is the opinion of those that I speak with – and again, I speak to food producers, growers and irrigators every day – that you should have to be using that water for irrigation, not an investor and not a super fund. You should have to be a food and/or fibre producer to be able to access that water, particularly

in dry times, and those that are holding water should be encouraged and perhaps incentivised to put it on the market. And we include the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the recreational water holders. That should all go on the market in dry times, because when the weather is making circumstances tough the last thing that farmers and food producers need is to be paying exorbitant expenses for something that is essential, that is our lifeblood – and that is water. It should not be a commodity for super fund investors to make millions and millions of dollars. There is nothing more frustrating for food producers in our part of the world than to see the river full and flowing past us not being able to be taken, not being able to water the crops – going past us to South Australia and then having big pumps being brought in to forest floors to water them in a cycle of weather that is naturally dry. And for millions of years they have been naturally dry, so why on earth would you be watering them artificially? Meanwhile Donny down the road is paying \$1800 a megalitre and having to buy sometimes 25 megalitres. It just does not make sense. So I absolutely understand the angst that is coming from these food producers.

There are a couple of other levers that could be pulled. The member for Narracan pointed out earlier, when speaking about the government business program this week, that it perhaps does not go far enough. There are some other levers that could be pulled, particularly with our environmental water holders. The plan has left some of these lakes – and I am not talking about the large lakes like Lake Boga et cetera. We are talking about the small lakes: Lake Powell, Lake Carpul, Lake Poomah on occasion and Heywood Lake, which has got water in it now for the first time in 20 years. Environmental water – not only could they be storing water after a flood event, which they are now, but couldn't that then be redelivered? The environmental water holder is another irrigator essentially. When it comes down to it it is another irrigator. The same rules do not apply to an environmental water holder, but they are another irrigator. We could tick a couple of boxes by allowing environmental water to go into those smaller lakes, bringing them back to life and feeding the wildlife that lives there now. When it goes dry it disappears. The kangaroos at the moment look like caricatures of themselves. They are seven foot tall and they are built and quite scary. But in dry times when the lakes are empty they are either not there or they are emaciated and sick looking. The birds go away. There could be things that we could pull and do to make sure that environmental water is being used in a way that serves everybody, not just the environment, so it is then redelivered if it is needed to farmers that are close by. It is not that hard. It seems a bit too much like common sense perhaps.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Jade BENHAM: I know. Stop it, we cannot have common sense. Then we get onto the subject of course of buybacks, which are on the table at the moment. When we mention the word 'buybacks' in my electorate and anywhere along the Murray River, people shudder, and for good reason. There are very real-life examples of what water buybacks have done to small communities. It has decimated them. Tresco is a perfect example. It is not in my electorate, but my father grew up in Tresco. At the time it was a thriving little town just outside of Lake Boga. My uncle still lives there. But when water buybacks come along and farmers are desperate, then of course they are going to sell off their water. It has left Tresco in a situation where people are just walking off the land. It looks like a Third World country. I will be honest, it is awful. So when we talk about buybacks, we really have to be aggressive in our opposition to water buybacks.

All of these things are on our mind – a food producer's mind or a fibre producer's mind or those running cattle. Again we need what everyone needs – water. Like I said, it is the lifeblood of human society. It should never have been made a commodity, as it is, available for those to trade, to make millions and millions of dollars in profit. It just should not have been. There is nothing more frustrating and nothing that makes farmers angrier than super funds, overseas companies or big corporate farming companies that may or may not have land. Some have land – yes, that is fine – but some are holding it to make profit upon profit, and there is nothing more frustrating for farmers. So the fact that we have water that was unbundled from land in the first place was a huge mistake. We do not mind saying that now. It was long before my time, but again it is an egg that we are unlikely to be able to unscramble.

By making amendments, and I think this is a good one, it could have very positive outcomes in the immediate future.

I do think there is a lot more work that needs to be done as far as water legislation goes. Like the member for Eureka said earlier, there are a lot of women in the water business and they are into it. It is very technical, and I have not got into the technicalities of the water industry today, but it is something I am quite passionate about. It can be quite divisive. In my part of the world as well, where you have food producers with one very strong opinion and environmental warriors with another, I think they could be married up much closer than they are, like I said before, using environmental water to feed the lakes, to feed the tributaries, to help the environment along and to then have it redelivered to irrigators should it need to be.

For now, though, this bill will allow those who are still harvesting – and there are people still harvesting nuts and still picking grapes, which is much longer than we would have liked it to be or should have been – to actually be consulted properly, and I do encourage everyone that is affected by this to take part in the consultation period ready for 1 July next year.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (18:21): Today I rise to contribute to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. This bill clarifies some parts of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 and will allow for the implementation of a new means of regulating our water system, the place-of-take approvals framework. It protects our consumers and our waterways, and it ensures water supply in Victorian declared water systems for many years to come, and that is exactly what we want to do: shore up the system. The bill allows us to engage with flood-affected farmers, allowing them more say in how they manage their own water delivery, and it will make water delivery rights clear in the event of a delivery shortfall.

Just picking up on a point that the member for Mildura raised about trying to transfer or transmit water to other locations, I vaguely remember that when the north–south pipeline was a thing for moving water from one part of the state to another the farmers objected to that quite vigorously. While I accept the principle of shifting water around, it is okay if it suits the farmers, but when it does not suit the farmers they do object strongly.

As Victoria's population is growing rapidly in the mighty Melton electorate, I am very lucky to meet many individuals and families who have moved from interstate and overseas and have decided to make the district their new home, which is great. That will continue to happen, as it is projected that by 2050, 450,000 people are going to be in the electorate of Melton. Water is a big issue for us in that electorate. The bill also makes amendments to the Water Act 1989, which was a glorious year because the mighty Hawthorn Hawks won the premiership, so that was fantastic. It was a good year to amend the Water Act.

The water supplier for my electorate is Greater Western Water. They cover almost 1.3 million residential and business customers in a region that is booming, as I said, with the population to grow to 200,000 by 2030 and to 450,000 by 2050. I have a very good working relationship with Greater Western Water, and I have found them to be very responsive to their customers, which is terrific. It was only a few years ago that I had to help out Exford Primary School. In the first few months after I was elected in 2018 I found out that Exford Primary School did not have mains-connected water and did not have sewage connected – a school that is in the metropolitan region. I was quite shocked at this. We managed to get some funding of \$2.4 million to make sure that Exford Primary School was connected to mains water and to sewerage. Let me tell you, it was life changing for that school and that school community. I remember visiting the school and the smell of the septic tank and the kids having to drink bottled water because they could not drink the tank water. It was amazing. Again I have got to say, it was life changing for that school community. It is fantastic to go back there every time and they still recognise that outcome. I did approach Greater Western Water obviously and raised my concerns about that, and again they were forthcoming. Obviously it was about who was going to fund it, and I am pleased to say that the state put up the money to fund that change. Not only did they

get the water and the sewerage but it came with replacing relocatable buildings with more permanent classrooms, so there was a big upgrade to that school off the back of the water connection.

The ongoing effects of the 2022 floods are still being felt across our state. Major rivers flooded their banks, inundating thousands of homes and businesses, and we have all seen that in the news reports and things like that. Of course, as an ongoing outcome of that, some locations around the state had to have temporary villages made, such as what happened in Rochester and the temporary village of Elmore. We have all been through some of these tragic circumstances over the last four years – all these flooding events. We will know someone or will have family members or will have some people within our electorates that were affected.

I just want to take a bit of time to acknowledge the work and the tenure of the emergency management commissioner, Andrew Crisp, who has recently announced his retirement at the conclusion of his five-year term. Since his appointment in 2018, he has provided exceptional leadership and a calm, familiar face for Victorians during some of the most significant emergencies the state has faced, which included things like the 2019–20 fires, the COVID-19 pandemic response, the June 2021 storm event and of course the October 2022 flood event. Prior to his taking up the commissioner role at Emergency Management Victoria, he served his distinguished career – a 40-year career – with the Victoria Police, and his leadership has been instrumental in leading the establishment of a permanent, 24/7 workforce for the State Control Centre and the establishment of Emergency Recovery Victoria and ongoing work to reform the operating model and legislative framework for managing emergencies. His face was on our TVs daily through these disasters that we have had, and as I say, in more recent times with the floods that occurred in the last quarter of last year. I know I speak for my electorate – the electorate of Melton – when I say thank you to the commissioner for his service, and I wish him well in his retirement. But I take this opportunity to remind the house that I tried to retire once, and I just hope that Commissioner Crisp has a longer retirement than what I did. Hopefully he will enjoy longer than three months in retirement.

As well as floods, which happened last year, Victoria has experienced several significant droughts in recent times, leading to a greater focus on water conservation and management. As we know, drought can have significant and wideranging effects obviously on our water supply, reducing the amount of water availability and also affecting the quality of the water supply. Obviously this causes issues with consumers but we also have to think about the impacts environmentally and on the water system itself. I hope that most of us here understand that water is essential to our life, and protecting the health of the water supply is essential to making sure that our future generations will have safe and reliable water access. Clearly there is still a long way to go with some industries in regard to protecting our waterways – of just not spilling stuff into our waterways and polluting them. Again, I would ask that the regulator regulate firmly when that does occur to protect those waterways and how important this commodity is for all of us.

A shortfall happens when there obviously is not enough water in the system to meet demand at a time and place that a water user wants it. This might happen because of increased demand or because the distance between the dams and the water users means that the water cannot get to the user in time. The risk of this happening is obviously uncommon but it is increasing, in particular in the Lower Murray area. All of these floods and droughts are increasing because of climate change, and we cannot ignore that fact. Of course, climate change is real. It is an undeniable threat to our planet, and Victoria was actually one of the first jurisdictions in the world to legislate net zero greenhouse gas emissions with the Climate Change Act 2017.

Just over the weekend, I was down at Pykes Creek reservoir at Mymiong, just across the way in the electorate of Eureka, and the Women in Rescue SES initiative was on, which saw females at VICSES and volunteers from across the western region at a targeted training event designed by women for women, aimed at helping to celebrate women in emergency operations. I was down there for a few hours watching their exercise and their scenario training in regard to rescuing someone that went into the water in the lake and also someone that was lost in the vicinity of that reservoir there. Their expertise

and professionalism were fantastic, and I just want to extend my gratitude for the work that they do. It is fantastic to see now that female VICSES volunteers are currently around 35 per cent of all volunteers. I think that is a fantastic percentage, but of course we need more, and we encourage more to join. I just want to extend my congratulations and thanks to Jane Patton for organising that event and stress how important that event is. Again, it was all premised on a massive waterway and someone being lost in the water, and it was great to see those women in action.

This is a really important bill. Even though it has been alluded to that there are only some minor changes, they are very important changes. As I say, water is so important in our lives in every which way, so I commend the bill to the house.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (18:31): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on this amendment. Even though I am the member for Melbourne I grew up in Mildura just a stone's throw from the Murray River, so I am intimately aware of the impact on communities and the environment that water mismanagement has. My entire childhood until I moved to Melbourne to go to university was spent in that river, around that river, and I am very intimately connected, I feel in my soul, with that river.

I want to begin today by stating that the Greens support the amendment, which delays the implementation of the place-of-take approvals in recognition of the huge impact of the recent floods in Victoria. I also want to start by acknowledging the incredible resilience of our Victorian communities in the face particularly of the floods last year, in 2022. We know that recovery of homes, livelihoods and lives in so many areas is still ongoing, and those communities do need ongoing support.

We also know, as others have mentioned, that flooding disasters are increasingly occurring on a national and international scale. In 2022 alone we experienced a record five major floods across this country, claiming a total of 38 lives, destroying precious ecosystems and of course causing the death of countless animals as well. If it was not already obvious to governments here and around the world, 2022 is yet another reminder that we simply cannot ignore the role of climate change as a driver of these natural disasters on our planet. And of course we must start to think really carefully about planning for a future in which these kinds of disasters become more frequent and where a changing climate will unfortunately be our reality, and we must think not just about the impact on human lives and how we organise society but also about the impacts on ecosystems, which ultimately are the things that give us life.

While this bill in part delays the implementation of the revised water licence framework – I think I spoke on the bill in the last term around the water licence framework – it also legislates a series of technical changes to assist the functioning of the water licences. On this I would like to speak briefly on the crisis of mismanagement of water in our rivers. I have to say it is a little confusing sitting here and hearing both sides of the chamber, particularly Labor and the Nationals, get up and talk about how water is life and water is essential to us while governments of both persuasions have presided over such incredible mismanagement of water and still to this day are making decisions that are destroying our rivers. If we genuinely believe that we need healthy rivers and healthy water systems to sustain our lives, it is quite confusing then to see governments continue to make decisions that destroy those river systems.

The Greens have long been clear that decades of corruption, mismanagement and poor decision-making have left our waterways in crisis, driven particularly by vested interests and governments giving in to vested interests when it comes to water. Technical changes and revised frameworks – I mean, fine – are really not even scratching at the surface of the crisis that we are facing. We need to make sure that governments really look at the problems that we are facing and do so much more to protect water as the life-giving source that it is. Ultimately rivers have become an extension of our larger economic market and the problems that come with that. As others have mentioned, water is treated like shares to be bought and sold, shipped off in huge quantities to the highest bidder, and really there is only an afterthought to the environment, let alone the significance of water to our First Peoples.

These things come last. Successive governments of both persuasions seem to be on a unity ticket of prioritising corporations, large corporate irrigators and vested interests before anything else is even considered. But the environment cannot just be an afterthought. It is not something that is separate to us. Actually making the ecosystem function and work and stay healthy is what we need to ensure healthy rivers, and everything else flows from that. We cannot have healthy farming and we cannot have healthy industry unless we actually have the water there, and that comes from a healthy ecosystem. But it seems like corporations have managed to convince governments that that is not the case, that they come first and everything else comes last. It is simply the wrong way around.

The business-as-usual approach that we have now is just not working, and I think we can all see that. I mean, we have all seen the incredible fish kills that happen year on year. We are seeing signals being given to us year after year that it is not working, and yet governments keep doing the same thing. We have allowed these corporate interests, these vested interests, to get in the ear of government. They have given in and marketised and disrupted river systems. Water is moved around completely out of sync with the natural ecosystem. The dramatic consequences of this are just responded to reactively. We see government plugging holes. Instead of seeing the system as a whole we see them making technical changes, trying to fix little issues as they come up. But this approach – Labor’s approach right now – to a marketised river system is just simply at odds with the environmental and cultural values that our river systems and water systems provide. We need a holistic approach to changing it. If we do not put the rivers’ whole ecosystem first, it is simply a scientific fact that there will not be a resource left for us to use as humans at all. We cannot just take a selective approach to the measures through which to ensure river health.

For too long the government has played a political game with our precious water. They pit environment and land users against each other instead of seeing the health of the two as inextricably linked. Water strategies should not be – and they are not – mutually exclusive. For example, governments, particularly this Labor government, due to pressure from big irrigators, pressure from the Nationals, refuse to consider buybacks. There are some impacts on communities that absolutely need to be considered, but instead of considering that in a nuanced way, in a way that looks at the whole and looks at the effectiveness and the fairness of all the options, the government just completely refuses to do buybacks at all in favour of expensive large-scale engineering projects that offset their environmental water requirement. Environment groups and water scientists, the experts in these fields, agree that efficiency projects are only viable when combined with a suite of other techniques, such as increased environmental flows and constraints relaxation. To date the Victorian government, this Labor government, remains in the feasibility stage of constraints relaxation implementation – 10 years on from its commitment to implement this Commonwealth-funded program. It just does not seem good enough. It is a complex issue, the protection of water and all of these interconnected systems with so many different vested interests, and of course it requires complex solutions. But nevertheless this government must be held accountable to its commitment to ensure that water is returned to the ecosystem, is returned to the environment, because it is not separate from the system.

I also want to touch on the issue of water market transparency. This bill claims to enact reforms to water market transparency, but the reforms are pretty piecemeal. The government has chosen to marketise the river systems whilst building in these really opaque transparency mechanisms, making it really difficult to access information about water holders and their impact on the market. During the government’s own consultation process regarding this matter back in 2019 the community overwhelmingly reported that whilst there may be a lot of information technically available to community members regarding the water market, it is really hard to find and very time consuming to gather it all together and make sense of it.

While the community asked for improved access to information, it also agreed that there should be greater transparency regarding large water holders in the market. But at present the Labor government only releases information for water holders with 2 per cent of water allocation within any given system. What this actually means is that in one system, such as the Murray above the Barmah Choke,

information is published regarding water holders who have approximately 8 gigalitres or more of water allocation whilst in another system information is only published for water holders with 70 gigalitres of water holdings, nearly 10 times as much. Therefore, depending on the river system, we are still without a great deal of transparency regarding major water holders. I do not see how that is a system of equality across water users let alone how it constitutes true transparency.

The bill's introduction of transparency to include individuals along with corporations does not quite go far enough. If the government wants to treat water as a public resource, it must follow the precedent set by transparency mechanisms elsewhere. We would never accept that another industry that was, say, digging up a small bit of land here for an essential resource would not have to tell anyone because it was only a small parcel of land. That same thing should go for water. We need Labor to stand up to the vested corporate interests and commit to true transparency. Shining a light on the issue is the first step in solving it.

Water is essential. It is life. We literally cannot live without it. Through decades of mismanagement, capitalism, vested interests and big corporations having control over these government decisions and governments giving in to those pressures, we are literally letting our rivers die, and the only people who suffer are us. We are the ones who suffer because of it. Maybe we do not suffer right now, maybe there is money in it right now, but in a very short time we will suffer because of this. I hope that coming to the end of the 10-year Murray–Darling Basin plan in 2024 the government seriously considers a major reform in our approach to water, especially in our river systems. We need to do things differently; we need to do things better. We will be here supporting solutions that truly protect our ecosystems, the environment and the wellbeing of communities everywhere, whether they be First Nations communities, farming communities, city or country, now and into the future, because quite simply none of us can live without water, and we need to really have that perspective front and centre.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:43): I too rise and join my colleagues in saying a few words to support the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. We all know that back in 2021 the government did pass the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, and that introduced a new framework to regulate the place, rate and time of taking water. It allows for better management of the system which delivers water to rural water users and so protects existing rights and waterways. This bill clarifies some sections of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 to ensure that it is in line with the intent of that act and so that the reforms can be smoothly implemented. It will continue to protect the existing rights of Victorian water users, provide more flexibility for them to manage their own delivery risks and improve powers to manage delivery shortfalls.

The bill extends the default commencement date of the place-of-take approvals framework to 1 July 2024. It does not introduce the framework; it was introduced under that Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill. It makes some technical amendments to the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act to ensure that the legislation functions as it was intended when it was first introduced. The reason that the bill has been brought forward on its own is because of the short time frame that it has to pass through this Parliament. If the bill is not given assent by 1 July, the place-of-take framework will come into effect and will essentially void much of the bill. It has been brought forward on its own because of the imperative to pass in the May–June sitting period.

The passage of the bill will provide certainty for water users, particularly those who were impacted by the flooding in 2022. Due to the election campaign period last year and with the heavy legislative agenda of this government, the bill was not able to be considered before the October 2022 flood event. We do know the devastation that the 2022 floods caused across Victoria, particularly for regional Victorians in the north of our state. Thousands of Victorians are still dealing with the flood recovery today, and we know that is a long, difficult and at times distressing process. Many Victorians who were impacted by the floods were farmers and water users in our declared systems where the place-of-take-approvals framework will be implemented. These farmers have much to do, particularly with the flood recovery, and simply in many cases do not have the ability to engage with the many consultations on the implementation of this framework or even to adapt to the new framework in just

a few months time. So in January this year when consultation did resume after being paused as a result of the floods, the turnout to the consultation sessions was low, and those who did not attend said that they just did not have the bandwidth to prepare for the changes. The government took all of that on board, and that is why it has delayed the commencement of the place-of-take approvals, which will give regional Victorians the time they need to be ready and informed.

The place-of-take approvals were introduced as a part of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, and that framework improves Victoria's approach to managing approvals to take water and delivery rights in declared systems. It provides water users more certainty about their rights to take water from a river during the rare event of a shortfall and more flexibility to manage their own delivery risks. These changes are particularly important in the Murray River downstream of the Barmah Choke, where shortfall risks are known to be increasing. The changes will mean that the Minister for Water can introduce rules to protect existing water users' rights by capping extraction share as well as introduce rules to enable the trade of extraction share where possible without third-party impacts. The changes will also provide for a more effective and consistent enforcement and compliance regime for non-compliance with the conditions of taking water.

The River Murray system has seen significant changes over the past 10 to 20 years in both supply and demand for water. Changes within the system and changes in demand are making it increasingly difficult to move water to where and when it is needed for irrigation and the environment, which can lead to shortfalls in delivery. Although such shortfalls in the Murray have been rare, the risk of shortfalls occurring is real and is increasing. While we are coming out of a La Niña weather event, at the moment the Bureau of Meteorology has already declared an El Niño watch. An El Niño event would further increase the risk of a shortfall event in Victoria if we experience lower than average rainfall for a prolonged period of time.

In general, climate change is reducing the overall average water in our rivers with more variable rainfall and hotter than average weather, and so we do need to act now to protect the rights of our water users, including the environment. A shortfall itself is when water that is entitled to be used, including by irrigators and the environment, cannot be delivered when and where it is needed. A shortfall can happen when river operators are not able to deliver water to users – for example, when there is an increased daily demand during a heatwave and the long distance from the dams means that water cannot be delivered in time or when there is not enough capacity in the river and channel system to supply all downstream water needs, such as when flows through Barmah Choke are at full capacity and there is not enough water in the Menindee Lakes and Lake Victoria to meet all the lower Murray demands.

One of the other more important technical changes in the bill is to do with water market transparency. The bill will enable market transparency related amendments to commence separately from the place-of-take approval framework, so that means that the market transparency improvements, which the community have been thoroughly consulted on, can still be introduced from 1 July 2023 – earlier than the place-of-take approval framework. This will provide additional time for consultation with water users on the rules and regulations that give effect to the place-of-take approval framework without unnecessarily delaying the market transparency improvements.

Reforming the transparency of our water market is important work. It improves the accountability and fairness of the water market and gives the public access to important information about our largest holders of water. The Andrews Labor government is improving accountability and transparency in our water market. This complements the extensive work which has been done in the Victorian water sector to ensure strict compliance measures are in place. In Victoria we do not tolerate non-compliance with our water laws. Water corporations undertake a range of measures, therefore, to ensure that compliance, including water metering, strict reporting and community education as well as enforcement of those rules. Water is of course a scarce and limited resource in Victoria, and climate change will only worsen the challenges that we are facing, so this makes the market transparency compliance and strengthening delivery rights more important than ever. The amendment bill is a good bill. It is a bill that I commend to this house.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:53): I am very happy to rise to speak on this very important subject matter of water and water delivery rights. I do just want to pick up on a couple of points that were mentioned in the chamber. I note that it is very easy to diminish the significance of fundamental reforms when, for instance, with the member for Melbourne, you do not actually have to deliver, you do not have to handle any of the complexity of it and you can just sit there and trash what the government is doing very easily. I think that is quite offensive. So I just want to pick up on a couple of those points because I think it is important to be really clear about the incredible work that is already well underway and is very much proactive as opposed to reactive in nature.

I know that the Minister for Water Harriet Shing is very proud and very forthright in terms of striding forward when we are looking at reducing our emissions in the water sector. Just as an example, Victoria's water corporations have committed to reducing their emissions to net zero by 2035. To put water corporations on the right path to achieving this goal they have committed to achieving a 42.4 per cent reduction in their collective emissions by 2025 and a 93.7 per cent reduction by 2030. That does not sound reactive. That sounds very proactive, with full sight of the problem we have with climate change and the delicacy of maintaining and sustaining water into the future.

Secondly, Victoria has a nation-leading policy in *Water Is Life*, because I note that the member for Melbourne did mention water is life. Well, let us speak to that point, shall we? We might just reframe it in a very honest context with regard to what Victoria is actually doing. The road map for traditional owner access: this road map seeks to return water management to traditional owners and empower them to make decisions about their water. It will also return water where possible, which they can use in their own self-determined way. We are working closely with traditional owners already to consult them on water management and projects.

Victoria has already delivered 826 gegalitres under the basin plan and has also delivered more water than any other basin state for the environment. We are dedicated to returning water to the environment in a way which does not hurt our regional communities – hence that complexity, that delicate balance. We are looking for innovative ways to find more water to return to the environment and traditional owners. Across urban and regional Victoria we look for ways to return water to our waterways, improve the health and quality of our waterways and improve our water efficiency through programs like the *Victorian Waterway Management Strategy*, the catchment management authority flagship, waterway projects, our sustainable water strategies and our integrated water management programs.

Water also has the strongest compliance rules in place in the country. I am just going to say that again: Victoria also has the strongest compliance rules in place in the country. So, you know, that is why I was a bit sensitive about this issue of sort of mitigating or trying to diffuse the significance of the very significant steps that Victoria has been taking for some time in terms of having better sustainability with regard to water and water management into the future. This means we know that water in our rivers is highly reliable real water for the environment. We have strict compliance measures in place to ensure that people are not taking more water than they are entitled to.

That brings me around to the premise of this particular bill here, noting that there is a delay and that the bill will also delay the default commencement of the new framework from July 2023 to July 2024. Of course that has been very well transacted in the chamber, but I am very happy to say that it is good that we have a sense of unity on this point because it will ensure that there is enough time to engage with flood-affected farmers on the implementation of the new framework so that the rules and regulations are sensible and to provide irrigators sufficient time to prepare for commencement of the new framework. Now, the place-of-take approvals framework is a new approach to water delivery entitlements in Victorian declared systems that will clarify and protect existing water users' rights to take water during the rare event of a shortfall due to delivery constraints in the river and provide flexibility for water users to manage their own delivery risks.

I guess I was just concerned with some of the discussion in the chamber from the member for Melbourne – not Melton. I think I am sort of sliding there a little bit. I need to be very clear about that;

it is just quite distinct. You know, it is very easy to dismiss and to diffuse and to disparage when in fact there is incredible work being done. And we can see, with where we have come to this day with regard to this bill, that we are very much aware of the significance and the critical role that water plays in our lives. I actually find it quite patronising when we are lectured about the importance of water. I think everyone in this chamber would be fully aware that human beings cannot survive without it, and hence that is why we have aggressive targets and action underway to help mitigate the impact of climate change and to ensure that we do preserve sufficient water into the future.

So I hope that that helps to abate some of the concerns that may have been raised by the member for Melbourne, because we are very much aware of the innate complexity when it comes to the management of water and respecting that delicate balance between sustaining water for our environment and also the needs of regional communities, who, ultimately, are working in the environment. So there is obviously an overlap in that space – they are not distinct entities in any case – because we cannot survive without food so we need water for the agriculture. I mean, I am making obvious statements –

The SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member may continue her speech when the matter is next before the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Homelessness

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (19:00): (131) My adjournment today is to the Minister for Housing, and the action I seek is for the minister to explain why the government has not responded to or acted on a raft of recommendations by the Legislative Council's inquiry into homelessness delivered by the government in March 2021.

Everybody deserves a roof over their head. Last week I had the opportunity of attending a film night of *Some Happy Day* with my daughter Paige and got the opportunity to meet Catherine, Moira and Cecilia and talk about a film of someone sleeping rough shot in the area around St Kilda close to my electorate. This is a scourge on our community. It is something we must do more about as a community and as a Parliament to ensure we get some of the support that is absolutely needed for our homeless and our vulnerable. We have in Victoria homelessness reaching unprecedented levels. 36,000 Victorians are homeless; this is up over 365 per cent since Labor came to power nine years ago.

We also had a situation only last week where I got the opportunity to visit again Uniting St Kilda's community kitchen. This group does a great amount of work. What really alarmed me is that only a few years back, before the pandemic, when I was helping serve food out of that kitchen, we saw the same people there without a roof over their head. Thankfully they are getting support from the Uniting community kitchen, but they need more. They need a roof over their head. They need a home. So there is a lot of work to be done.

To add insult to injury, Charitable Recycling Australia have raised the issue around the government withdrawing the waste levy projections. What this means is that there are a whole lot of additional funds that charity shops need to find just to keep their doors open. Last month Hang Vo, CEO of Sacred Heart Mission, wrote to me and said they will need to find \$1.5 million because of these additional levies. What that means is that 428,000 meals cannot be provided to Victorians who will go hungry, along with 38,000 crisis and suicide calls and \$1.5 million in electricity or gas bills. This is real help that is needed for our most vulnerable. So I call on the government to respond to the report that was done in the upper house, a very important report that had 51 recommendations from the

inquiry about how we can do more for our most vulnerable: our homeless. Everybody deserves a roof over their head, and we must as a Parliament do more.

Broadmeadows electorate road safety

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:03): (132) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I am seeking is for the minister to request a review by the Department of Transport and Planning into safety improvements along Pascoe Vale Road near the intersection of Post Office Place in Glenroy. I know this government has made road safety a priority, with the *Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030* aiming to halve road deaths and reduce serious injuries by 2030. The strategy works across education, infrastructure, policy and technology to improve safety for all road users. As part of this strategy, 35 new fixed road safety cameras have been funded, two of which will be installed in my electorate of Broadmeadows.

The pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Post Office Place and Pascoe Vale Road in Glenroy has been raised as a safety concern by my constituents due to unsafe driving and a lack of traffic light compliance. Local residents and I made representations last year to Cameras Save Lives, who referred the matter for assessment to the fixed camera site selection committee. These lights are the main crossing point for the busy Glenroy shopping centre and also provide the main pedestrian access to the train station and bus interchange. Glenroy has a higher than average number of older people, people with disabilities and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, who make up a high proportion of those pedestrians and vulnerable road users. I thank residents who have raised this issue with me, particularly Mary Pope for her community activism and Andrea Bunting and other members of Walk On Merri-bek for their support of pedestrians.

I would also like to take this opportunity to briefly speak about the road safety of pedestrians on Hilton Street, Glenroy, a council-controlled road. Hilton Street is one of the longest streets in Merri-bek, yet it does not have a single pedestrian crossing, even though people need to cross it to access several schools, including Belle Vue Park Primary School, Glenroy Central Primary School, St Thomas More Primary School, Corpus Christi Glenroy, Glenroy Private, Ilim College and Glenroy College, plus two aged care facilities, open space and shops in North Street, East Street and West Street, Hadfield. Along the equivalent length of Bell Street there are seven crossings. Gaffney Street has five and Boundary Road has three. I have been advocating to Merri-bek council for quite some time about this unacceptable situation, and I am very pleased that they have recently agreed to install a signalised pedestrian crossing. I would like to thank local resident Marie Alberto for recently starting a petition on this matter and other local residents such as Anthony Scarpari, Ann Richardson and Rod Calendar for their continued advocacy on these important matters.

Country Fire Authority Morwell station

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (19:05): (133) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to allocate funding to ensure the Morwell CFA remains a standalone station. Over the past four years the Morwell CFA has made known its desire to remain separate from Fire Rescue Victoria on several occasions, including in this house, and still the brigade is no closer to gaining answers from the Andrews government about its future. Volunteers are adamant they will not move to a new site on Princes Drive alongside paid FRV staff, citing very real and valid fears about whether the Morwell CFA will survive if they are forced to co-locate.

The new FRV site is not designed to cater for the presence of the growing Morwell CFA brigade. There is not enough room for volunteers to work at full capacity, and their access to the station would be limited and monitored by career staff. This is an absolute slap in the face for our hardworking volunteers and undermines the legacy they have built over more than 100 years, selflessly protecting our community. The new FRV station in Morwell is actually not practicably big enough to accommodate the CFA tanker and the CFA equipment plus over 100 years of memorabilia, including honour boards that currently hang in the McDonald Street CFA station. The Morwell CFA has voted

overwhelmingly in support of a motion to remain a standalone station either at the current site on McDonald Street or at a new location. Volunteers have been working hard behind the scenes to access possible locations for a new station and are fully prepared to work with the Andrews government to secure the future of volunteer firefighting in the region.

Minister, a precedent has been set in other areas like Moe and Eltham, where CFA volunteers have separate stations to career staff. I am imploring you to put an end to the uncertainty and the lip-service with our volunteers and to discuss and commit to the allocation of funding for a standalone station for the Morwell CFA in the upcoming budget so they can continue to attract and educate new members to protect our community for the next 100 years.

Box Hill Central post office

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (19:08): (134) My adjournment matter is for the Deputy Premier in her capacity as Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Our community has been shocked to learn that the Box Hill Central post office located in the Box Hill Central North shopping precinct will be permanently closed from 26 May. This will leave the central business district of Box Hill without a post office for the first time since 1861, when Box Hill was just a tiny village and still some 20 years away from having a railway station. In fact according to some sources, Box Hill post office was first to officially use the name 'Box Hill', after the postmaster proposed the name of his birthplace in England. Over the last 162 years the Box Hill post office has certainly witnessed many changes, and it continues to be well used by local residents and businesses – and not just to post a letter. They use this service every day to pay their bills, deliver their packages and arrange passport documents, photos and statutory declarations. Every time I visit the shop, there is a line of customers. It is a busy post office. Sadly, its closure will mean that the entire Box Hill electorate is left without a full-service post office.

Even to access their nearest licensed post office, residents and businesses in the Box Hill activity centre will need to drive to Box Hill South. Given the predicted increase in population and employment in central Box Hill over coming years, it is deeply concerning that Australia Post plan to leave this thriving precinct without a single post office. Box Hill is a key station on the Andrews government's Suburban Rail Loop project. It will provide a north-south rail connection for thousands of people along the Belgrave and Lilydale lines, and it will provide access to the jobs in central Box Hill for people living in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs. The enormous economic activity that will be generated by this project surely necessitates a full-service post office.

The action that I seek is that the minister ensure that the Suburban Rail Loop Authority engages with Australia Post on its plan for continued services in central Box Hill, both throughout the construction of the project and into the future, via the authority's precinct planning process.

Pest control

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:10): (135) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. The outdoor recreation community are feeling alienated from the natural environment they love and care for by this government's continued tin ear to their concerns. Last week we saw our outdoor recreation groups coming together in defiance of this Labor government's actions, which have made them feel excluded from our parks, waterways and bushlands. Instead of engaging with the Victorian outdoor recreation community, this government is missing an opportunity to work with so many Victorians who love, understand and willingly assist in the maintenance of our outdoor recreation sites. This government cannot claim to have it all under control, as the growth in pests and weeds across our Crown lands, such as long-spined sea urchins, foxes, rabbits, Paterson's curse, blackberries and gorse, demonstrate that Labor are failing their responsibility to the community. The government have missed a perfect opportunity to instead engage with Victorians who are left feeling like they are being locked out whilst they watch pests and weeds get worse in the outdoors they love.

One such example is the long-spined sea urchin, which has invaded Victoria's coastal waters, damaging reefs and creating barren habitats. In Tasmania an innovative coalition of research,

government and industry have joined forces to address the threat, yet what is the Victorian government doing? Nothing, and under the water our natural environment continues to be destroyed. Many Victorians enjoy the pleasure of camping, fishing, gold prospecting or rock climbing in our beautiful national parks. Locking the outdoor recreation community out and failing in your responsibility as a government to manage these sites is allowing gorse, boxthorn and pittosporum to thrive.

The presence of pest animals, including wild pigs and deer, is a further risk to the safety of people, not to mention the impact these species have on the waterways, removing vegetation, reducing water filtration, causing muddier water and harming native aquatic species. The birdwatching community is also being impacted by the inability of this government to control pest animals. Last Friday night over 100 short-tailed shearwater birds were slaughtered by foxes on Port Fairy's Griffiths Island in the electorate of South-West Coast. This not a one-off. Over 50 shearwaters were killed by foxes last year. The outdoor recreation community plays an important role in rural communities, which cannot be underestimated. Local businesses across Victoria benefit from the presence of climbers, campers, hunters and fishers, injecting valuable funds into regional economies. A collaborative approach is required to effectively control these pests and weeds and to ensure the recreation community can continue.

The action I seek is for the minister to engage with our outdoor recreation communities, such Bush User Groups United, VR Fish, the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, Australian Deer Association, Field and Game Australia, Australian Climbing Association and so many more, who feel shut out, and to work on strategies with them to manage our environment for all Victorians together.

Blind Creek

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (19:13): (136) Construction is underway on the massive reimagining Blind Creek project, which is the largest environmental project in Knox's recent history. In short, it is unpinning close to 2 kilometres of waterways not seen for decades and creating loads of exciting new open space along Blind Creek from Fairpark Reserve through to Lewis Park in Wantirna South. It is fair to say I am excited about this project, as I have mentioned it a million times, and it is because locals are excited too. So I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Water, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit one of the sites of construction on the project and to see firsthand the huge, positive impact we are making to the local environment and amenity for Knox locals. Indeed I remember all too well helping to deliver the previous, albeit smaller, revitalisation of Blind Creek near Fairpark, which unpipe a few hundred metres of waterways and created an amazing new space for locals.

This project is much, much bigger than that. It is so big that construction literally spans three suburbs. The project that I refer to as creating the green heart of Knox, proudly being delivered by the Andrews Labor government, will see the creation of three new wetlands, over 6 kilometres of new walking paths delivered, nearly 700,000 new plants, improved waterway quality and more flood storage. It will unpipe 1.65 kilometres of waterways from Scoresby Road to Lewis Park; plant nearly 2000 trees; and activate 17 MCGs of open space, a boardwalk through the new wetland system at Lewis Park and lots of community infrastructure to engage with the reimagined space, such as stepping stones, benches, viewing platforms and more. All in all, it is an amazing outcome for the community that will create recreational opportunities for locals that never previously existed and will help create a healthier local environment.

I am proud to be part of a government that has put its money where its mouth is when it comes to the environment. Whether it is huge projects like this, delivering a container deposit scheme, moving to net zero emissions by 2045 or bringing in government-owned renewable energy, the Andrews Labor government is getting on with it. For those of you watching at home, for more details check the comments below.

LGBTIQA+ health care

Tim READ (Brunswick) (19:15): (137) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that she work with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, the Australian Professional Association for Trans Health and public hospitals to develop a public surgical service for gender-affirming surgery in Victoria. I spoke recently with a constituent who expressed their frustration at the current unavailability of gender-affirming surgery in Victoria despite the government claiming to support the healthcare needs of trans people in the public health system. As it stands, trans people can only have this important surgery through expensive private health care or by going overseas, often to Thailand, and for many this is impossible. Not every trans person wants gender-affirming surgery, but those who do face long waits, often over a year, and pay tens of thousands of dollars for private treatment.

There are only a handful of surgeons across Australia providing gender-affirming genital surgery, each with long waiting lists of patients both booked for surgery and booked for presurgery consultations. Waiting times are so long that private surgical care in Australia is effectively unavailable for most, and I am not aware of any public surgical care in Victoria. This has resulted in massive waiting lists extending, and that can be enormously distressing and have detrimental impacts on the mental health of trans people, sometimes very seriously so. This has resulted in many trans people seeking gender-affirming surgery overseas, which poses its own risks, particularly for those with postoperative complications, which can be challenging for local surgeons who are not experienced in this field. More must be done to make gender-affirming surgery accessible for Victoria's trans community. Alongside the significant costs, a lack of qualified surgeons practising gender-affirming genital surgery remains one of the largest barriers to accessing this health care. Not all gender-affirming surgery is genital, and surgeons working in the public system are already skilled in breast surgery and hysterectomy, so these could already be provided in the public system. It is not enough for the government to say they care about trans health. Care means action, and that means training and employing surgeons in a public service sufficient to meet demand.

Monbulk electorate events

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (19:17): (138) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in Monbulk to see some of the marvellous work our creative and artistic community is undertaking across the arts. The district of Monbulk is a place rich with artists and holds culture and creativity very dear. There is always much going on in the hills. Just this weekend the 20th Dandenong Ranges Open Studios was held. I had the pleasure of opening the exhibition on behalf of the minister a month ago. On the weekend, 44 studios of artists opened their doors to the public at no cost. I was able to visit more than seven studios, and I have to say that the quality and breadth of art on display was exceptionally high. The gallery at Burrinja Cultural Centre in Upwey is a source of pride for many, and the studios located within, known as the Aerie, provide a space for local artists to work their magic and produce their exceptional art. In terms of performing arts, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival, supported by the Andrews Labor government, is visiting with its roadshow of performances at Burrinja this Friday. It is the heart of performing arts in Monbulk, our Burrinja. It is host to many local and visiting performers. It is truly a gem, and I look forward to attending the show. We certainly do not need to leave the hills to enjoy performing and fine arts in Monbulk.

Next month the Belgrave Lantern Festival will see hundreds of lanterns line the streets and illuminate the town in celebration of the winter solstice. This one-night festival will see Belgrave come alive with music, dancers, street performances and the fabulous lantern parade. It is one of the many beloved celebrations of arts and community across our hills. We have a long history in Monbulk of celebrating and producing art in all its forms. These festivals and events enrich our community, and I would like to thank all of the volunteers and the organising committees for what they do to keep our wonderful region colourful, vibrant and thriving. I look forward to the minister's visit and to showing him around.

Meals on Wheels

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:19): (139) My matter is for the Minister for Health and it concerns Meals on Wheels. Manningham is one of Melbourne's oldest, by average age, municipalities, and there are currently around 2000 recipients of Meals on Wheels in Manningham alone, the largest provider being Uniting aged care. Noting of course issues around royal commissions into aged care provision, which have occurred in the last decade or so, and the treatment of our elder Australians, I think it is very, very important that we maintain Meals on Wheels in the manner in which we do today.

The current system has been working well and it has been working fairly efficiently. There are now 50 councils across Victoria who are looking at ceasing Meals on Wheels by July and home services by October as a result of federal government cuts, and the state government will not step in to assist. As a consequence, we are now seeing places like Manningham, according to our council as recently as Friday, having to cut services that are integral to one of Melbourne's oldest municipalities. The quality of service cannot be guaranteed if the current system is not maintained. The level of oversight, for instance, on some of the providers that would intervene to fill those gaps would not be adequate and they would not be able to provide the level of service or quality that is being provided today. I think it is exceptionally important that we maintain Meals on Wheels in its current state for the sake of, in my municipality, the 3500 Victorians who avail from it.

Our pensioners cannot afford top-shelf Scotch. They do not hang around with people who have got helicopters. They do not seek bronze statues to themselves. What they seek is decency in their old age. I ask the minister to intervene to provide the funding to keep Meals on Wheels and home care services in the manner they are in today.

Dawoodi Bohra mosque

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (19:21): (140) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, who I notice has snuck into the chamber towards the end of this adjournment debate, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at the opening of the beautiful new Dawoodi Bohra mosque in Blackburn. As the member for Ringwood, I am proud to represent a community that is home to a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds, and the Dawoodi Bohra Islamic community is a valuable and integral part of this diversity. Founded in India, the Dawoodi Bohra community are known for their strong commitment to education, entrepreneurship and philanthropy. They have made significant contributions to our society through their various business and charitable organisations. I would like to take this opportunity to give a shout-out to Mustafa Poonawala, Dr Tahera Adamjee, Mrs Sakina Hussain, Adil Adamjee and Abbas Khumanpurwala and the rest of the leadership team at the Dawoodi Bohra in Blackburn because they are outstanding community leaders for this community. The work they do every day to support interfaith relations and strengthen neighbourly spirit is absolutely terrific. A few recent examples include running a Clean Up Australia Day event in Wattle Park and handing out Ramadan gifts to local residents around their mosque in Blackburn and Forest Hill.

Ever since I first met members of the Dawoodi Bohra community I have been blown away by their kindness, their generosity and their unstoppable passion for building a better community. I am thrilled that the Dawoodi Bohra community will soon have a new mosque in Blackburn. This will not only provide a place of worship for their community but also be a valuable addition to my electorate, offering opportunities for interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange. The grand opening is set to be a truly special occasion and will be attended by His Holiness Syedna Mufaddal Saifuddin, the 53rd al-Da'i al-Mutlaq and head of the Dawoodi Bohra community. His Holiness will be travelling from India for the mosque opening, and it would be absolutely sensational if the minister could attend.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:23): Speaker, it is a pleasure to have you in the chair tonight for this special adjournment debate.

Can I just respond to the adjournment item that has been raised by the honourable member for Ringwood, who I know is a very strong supporter of multicultural communities not just in his own community but right across Victoria as well. I understand the Dawoodi Bohra community in Melbourne consists at the moment of about 160 families – but it is growing – and these families come from all corners of the globe. Of course the new mosque will serve as a place for worship for Koranic classes and of course for community events and functions as well. I will take the opportunity to say that in the lead-up to the election the Andrews Labor government promised to establish a \$5 million Islamic communities infrastructure program to help Muslim organisations build, upgrade or renovate buildings or facilities to support our wonderful Islamic communities, and I will have more to say about this in the near future, in particular how this fund might be able to help organisations just like the Dawoodi Bohra community in the member's electorate. I should also mention that our government will also invest \$3 million to help stamp out Islamophobia in Victoria and strengthen the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 to make it easier to prosecute individuals who incite hatred or bigotry – something I would hope all members in this house will support. Labor is backing our Islamic communities not just with words but with action, and I would be very happy to join the member at the grand opening of the Dawoodi Bohra mosque in Blackburn.

I might just respond to a matter that was raised by the member for Caulfield as well in relation to homelessness and say to the member, through you, Chair, that the government will be responding to the Legal and Social Issues Committee report. I take the opportunity at the same time to just update the house in terms of the homelessness service provision that the Andrews Labor government supports. We are investing over \$400 million annually in homelessness this year, with \$194 million going out to homelessness services across the state. These are 138 organisations that provide services directly to people either experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. On top of that there is \$167 million which we fund for the From Homelessness to a Home program, which members will be aware is a very successful program that began during COVID and provides rough sleepers with a home, a housing first approach, and wraparound services – a very important program for people who are experiencing homelessness. So there is a really significant investment of over \$400 million annually into the homelessness sector.

What I have learned very quickly as Minister for Housing is that the most important thing we can do in terms of homelessness, but also other vulnerable Victorians, is to provide social housing. It is so important. Whether it be people fleeing family violence, youth homelessness, people from our Aboriginal communities, it is so important for us to increase the amount of social housing stock so that we can provide homes at the end of those service pathways. And that is exactly what the Andrews Labor government is doing through the Big Housing Build, delivering over 12,000 new social and affordable homes right across the state, a quarter of which will be delivered in regional Victoria.

I know that the member for Caulfield has raised the issue tonight in a genuine way, but without sounding too political I just do want to raise the point that the Premier touched on in question time today: there is a federal government now that has an appetite to invest in social and affordable housing in every state and territory across the country; it is not something we have had for the best part of a decade. That housing package, which would equate to around \$200 million of investment in social housing for those very people that the honourable member referred to, is being held up in the Senate by the Liberal and National parties and the Greens. I think the most valuable thing that people in this place could do to help people who are experiencing homelessness, are at risk of homelessness, are vulnerable Victorians who need social housing, is walk out of this chamber tonight, pick up the phone to your federal colleagues and ring them and tell them to not block that housing package from getting through the Senate.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:28): I appreciate the assistance so there are fewer matters to follow up thanks to the good work of the honourable member for Bundoora, the Minister for Housing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

Kicking off, the member for Box Hill directed a matter to the Deputy Premier and Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, that the minister ensure that the Suburban Rail Loop Authority engage with Australia Post in retaining those Box Hill post office services, and then he raised further matters in relation to the very serious issue that there have been Box Hill post office services since 1861. The member for Morwell raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place to see that funding is allocated to the Morwell CFA to remain a standalone station. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in relation to seeking a review of safety improvements along Pascoe Vale Road near the intersection of Post Office Place.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in relation to seeking greater engagement with the outdoor recreation communities – for example, VRFish, who do amazing work in those communities – to manage the environment and opportunities together, and a range of other stakeholders that she indicated. The member for Bayswater raised a matter for the Minister for Water to visit the Bayswater electorate around the Knox area and see the significant waterways projects across several suburbs in his electorate – the amazing work that is being done there through his leadership and hard work. The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the Minister for Health, seeking action to engage the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, public hospitals and other key stakeholders that he mentioned around the work that is needed with those key organisations, with public hospitals and the like, for access to gender-affirming surgery in Victoria. He went to great lengths to explain the detail in relation to those matters for the Minister for Health, and I will ensure that those matters are followed up too.

The member for Monbulk raised a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries to visit the amazing electorate of Monbulk. I have had the pleasure of visiting the Emerald police station with the member, but she is keen too of course to get the minister for tourism, sport and creative industries out there to meet many of the talented artists in the artistic community in her Monbulk electorate that are doing amazing work – an opportunity for the minister to visit with her the electorate of Monbulk. The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Minister for Health in relation to Meals on Wheels services, particularly those 2000 services that are provided across the Manningham local government area in his electorate, and a desire to see funding secured to maintain those services for Meals on Wheels across Manningham given his concerns around threats to that funding in relation to federal government. That concludes, thanks to the assistance of the honourable member for Bundoora, matters to follow up with ministers on behalf of members.

The SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:31 pm.