



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 16 May 2023**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

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

**Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier**

Daniel Andrews

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier**

Jacinta Allan

**Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition**

John Pesutto

**Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition**

David Southwick

**Leader of the Nationals**

Peter Walsh

**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury

**Members of the Legislative Assembly**

**60th Parliament**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
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	Ringwood	ALP	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

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

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**Tuesday 16 May 2023**

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

*Bills*

**Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:04): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (12:05): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:05): This bill will improve community and worker safety through clearer and more targeted regulatory settings and provide an enhanced enforcement toolkit for Energy Safe Victoria to effectively respond to emerging energy safety risks. This includes risks posed by the rapid transformation of the energy sector with renewable energy generation and storage. The amendments will do this by making critical changes to the above acts.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:06): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000, the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (12:06): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:06): The bill creates a new power for the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to direct electricity distribution businesses that were privatised by those opposite to provide information and assistance following mass power outage events. The bill also makes minor amendments to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to clarify enforcement and compliance mechanisms of the Victorian energy upgrades program.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Racial and Religious Tolerance Amendment (Anti-vilification) Bill 2023***Introduction*

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (12:07): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 to prohibit the vilification of persons on the grounds of gender, sexuality, disability, intersex status or HIV/AIDS status and for other purposes.

This year we have seen the far right converge on the steps of Parliament with anti-trans groups, members of Parliament using their platform to spout anti-trans hate and family-friendly events cancelled due to threats from the far right. Our current laws do not protect people from these harmful actions. While the existing legislation protects against hate speech and vilification on the basis of race and religion, it fails to protect people on the basis of sexuality, gender, gender expression, HIV/AIDS status, intersex status or disability. As lawmakers it is our job to make sure that all Victorians are fully protected. By expanding the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act we can make it clear that we will not accept hate speech and vilification.

This is a matter of urgency. It is not just a few stray zealots; these are well-organised, coordinated campaigns of hate. The far right is growing and growing bolder. Yet another IDAHOBIT event was cancelled last night – that is, International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. The very purpose of this day is to fight hatred and vilification, but this year alone we have seen over 10 inclusive family-friendly council events for queer people cancelled because of threats from the far right. What message does this send to our young queer folk? Drag performers and councils have been inundated with threats of violence. They have cancelled out of concern for the safety of their community members and concern for their staff. Drag performers, who contribute so much to our communities, are losing gigs and facing vitriol. We need to move quickly to stamp out this dangerous movement of hatred and vilification. It is forcing our queer community underground. It is entrenching fear, hatred and shame.

Let us be a society where every Victorian can be proud of who they are, where they can be safe and protected. Denying the LGBTIQ+ community legal protections, people with disability legal protections and people who are HIV/AIDS-positive legal protections perpetuates fear. We need to send a clear message now to the far right that their hatred will not be tolerated. We know that members of our queer community face disproportionate rates of self-harm and suicide. Every day we allow hate speech to continue we tell another young queer person that they are not valid, not loved and not safe. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

I am urging MPs in this house to allow this bill to be considered. This addresses a rising problem. Inaction is a choice. Delay is a choice. What message will you be sending to your constituents, to your own friends and family members, if you will not even vote to discuss protecting people from hate speech? The time is now. There has been an inquiry. This government has given in-principle support to expanding the anti-vilification laws, and yet there has been no action. Not allowing it at the very least to be debated is simply undemocratic. We are elected representatives. We are here to serve our communities. Representing, advocating for and protecting our communities in all their diversity – that is what we are here to do.

I represent the people of my electorate, Richmond, where, statistically speaking, we are twice as queer as the rest of Victoria. For matters of such urgency I urge the government to overcome this culture that sees all non-government bills fail before they have even seen the light of day. As a progressive state and as believers in democracy it is important that all members of this house are able to bring forward bills that are important to their electorate. Living in your electorates are people who are queer, people who are living with disabilities, people who are intersex and people who are HIV-positive. All I ask is that you give us the opportunity to consider this bill. Marginalised Victorians whose very identities and whose very lives are under attack deserve protection from vilification. Thank you.



**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:12): I want to be clear from the outset that our government has always stated that in this state equality is not negotiable. We have worked to implement this every single day. We are about action. What I want to say is that we believe that this is a significant issue, and that is why our Attorney-General is undertaking work and giving these elements or issues that have been raised due consideration. As the government of the day, we believe that proper cabinet processes should always be followed when it comes to legislating in this place. As the government's normal practice in the house, we will not be supporting a bill raised by the Greens party in this place. I indicated earlier that this is an important issue that deserves a proper cabinet process, and that is what our government will deliver.

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (12:13): I rise to speak in support of the member for Richmond in moving to introduce a bill to amend and strengthen anti-vilification laws here in Victoria. There could not be a more appropriate time. At a time when our trans and gender-diverse communities are facing hate speech and are being targeted with vilification, there could not be a more appropriate time to allow – simply allow – a bill to go on the notice paper.

That is not even referring to the fact that members in this place do not have opportunities to debate their own bills and motions. The Leader of the House has stated that they should follow proper cabinet process. Well, there is absolutely nothing stopping a bill that is introduced in this place being considered by cabinet. It is a farcical and petty practice of this government to deny non-government members, whether they are from the Greens or other parties, even introducing a bill and putting it on the notice paper. It is a practice that needs to end, and I would urge all members to support the member for Richmond to allow this bill – this very important and timely bill – to go on the notice paper and to even go further so that we have non-government business in this place to allow very important laws like this to be debated and to be considered by cabinet.

Now is the time. The work has gone into this legislation by the member for Richmond. It is very important to make sure that our trans and gender-diverse communities are protected from the vilification and hate speech that they are facing, so I would urge all members to support it.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (12:15): I rise to address this motion put by the member for Richmond. It is important to re-emphasise that the Andrews Labor government believes that equality is non-negotiable. We believe that today; we believe that every day. We have delivered that in government, and it is a fundamental value of this government. But if you are going to make substantive change, if you are going to make sure that changes stick and if you going to make sure that they are properly considered, then you need to put them through the appropriate processes. It is not lost on members opposite, I am sure, that the lower house is the house of government and you need to have an appropriate set of processes around changes as important as the ones being foreshadowed by the Greens political party. I think it is just very, very important for us to understand that work is underway. It is very important work and it is subject to rigorous processes to ensure that what we land here is appropriate and proportionate, and that is why we need to let those processes work their way through.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:16): I rise to speak on the Greens' proposal to introduce a bill to expand anti-vilification laws to protect people on the basis of gender, sexuality, HIV status and disability. Many times in this chamber, in both this term and previous terms, this house has debated the fact that the government misuses this place and does not allow many important debates to occur on issues of importance in the community – issues that are raised by non-government members. Non-government business is stymied, and we see that here today with the government noting they will not allow the opportunity for the member for Richmond to introduce this bill. It is not necessarily about the substance of each bill, it is about the importance of non-government members being able to bring forward important issues into this chamber. The coalition will be supporting the Greens in their introduction, and it notes –

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** All the yelling of those opposite –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will be heard in silence.

**James NEWBURY:** All the yelling of those opposite does not take away from the fact that the government is about to oppose the introduction of this bill. Non-government members should be entitled to bring important debates into this chamber. Shame on those opposite – shame on their actions, not their words. Shame on them.

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (12:18): I think we know, at least on this side of the house, that actions are far more important than words, and standing by what you believe and making sure that you create legislation that actually matters and will make a difference is important. I appreciate what has been put before us. However, I would have to say that the unease which the Greens all showed as soon as they realised that the opposition would support them was pretty astonishing. This has to be done properly, and this government has been working incredibly hard to protect vulnerable people in our community, including our rainbow community. We will continue to do that, but it needs to be done in a way that is thorough. It needs to be done in a way that does not allow cracks and that does not allow holes. We need to do it properly, and that is exactly what this government is doing and will continue to do. We are not about stunts, we are actually about making a difference.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (30):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keefe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

*Noes (55):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated.**

*Business of the house*

**Notices of motion**

**Notices given.**

*Petitions*

**Hurstbridge pedestrian safety**

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) presented a petition bearing 122 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the lack of safety for pedestrians in Hurstbridge. Residents have observed drivers often failing to stop at marked crossings due to insufficient signage, lack of road markings, or overall poor visibility. Concerningly, pedestrians frequently cross the main Heidelberg-Kinglake Road throughout the township without the presence of marked crossings or pedestrian refuges due to a lack of safe crossing areas, including children disembarking from school buses.

Signage and road markings are considerably inconsistent across the suburb and inadequate at some crossings. The speed limit is greater than 50 kilometers an hour in one section of road that includes a crossing next to a kindergarten and differs from surrounding streets. Petitioners are deeply concerned for the safety of pedestrians in Hurstbridge and call for an immediate and thorough evaluation with community consultation and demand improved pedestrian safety measures across the Hurstbridge area as a matter of urgency.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly requests the Minister for Roads to increase the number of safe crossings, install adequate signage, implement appropriate road markings and evaluate the suitability of raised crossings. Petitioners call for permanent pedestrian crossings or refuges including on Heidelberg-Kinglake Road near Rose Avenue, near Anzac Memorial Park, and close to the Primary School. Petitioners request improvements to the existing marked pedestrian crossing near the Post Office, including an assessment of its position, and call for enhancements to the Arthurs Creek Road crossing to increase visibility from Monash Bridge. Residents also request a reduction in speed limit to 50km/hr along Arthurs Creek Road near Haleys Gully to Heidelberg-Kinglake to ensure consistency in the area.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

### *Documents*

#### **Victorian Law Reform Commission**

*Inclusive Juries: Access for People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind or Have Low Vision*

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (12:27): I table, by leave, the Victorian Law Reform Commission's *Inclusive Juries* report 2022.

### *Committees*

#### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Alert Digest No. 4*

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (12:28): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 4* of 2023, on the following bills:

Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023

Gambling Taxation Bill 2023

Operation Daintree Implementation (No. 1) Bill 2023

together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

### *Documents*

#### **Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Climate Change Act 2017:*

Determination of the interim greenhouse gas emissions reduction target 2035

Independent Expert Panel – Victoria's 2035 Climate Action Target: Driving Growth and Prosperity

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria – Strategic Audit of the Implementation of Melbourne Strategic Assessment Conservation Outcomes – Report 2022

*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* – Order under s 17B granting a licence over George Tindale Memorial Gardens

Parliamentary Budget Office – Operational Plan 2023–24

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

Glen Eira – C250

Greater Geelong – C441

Merri-bek – C208

Mount Alexander – C97

Port of Melbourne – C5

Stonnington – C312

Wangaratta – C93

Wellington – C109, C115

Yarra Ranges – C197

*Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994* – Documents under s 9 in relation to the Parkville Poplar Road Project

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*:

Documents under s 15 in relation to statutory rule 27

Documents under s 16B in relation to EPA Designation – classification of lead-acid batteries made under regulation 86 of the Environment Protection Regulations 2021

Victoria Police, Chief Commissioner – Report 2022 under s 96 of the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981*

Victorian Building Authority – Report 2021–22.

### ***Bills***

#### **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023**

*Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:30): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023 without amendment.

#### **Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022**

#### **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023**

#### **Human Source Management Bill 2023**

*Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:30): I inform the house that on 9 May 2023 the Lieutenant-Governor gave royal assent to the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022 and today the Governor gave royal assent to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Medically Supervised Injecting Centre) Bill 2023 and the Human Source Management Bill 2023.

#### **Gambling Taxation Bill 2023**

*Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:30): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.

*Business of the house***Victorian Auditor-General's Office***Financial audit*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:30): I move, by leave:

- (1) Under section 79 of the Audit Act 1994, Mr Kenneth Weldin of PKF Melbourne Audit and Assurance be appointed for a period of 12 months:
  - (a) to conduct the financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office for the financial year ending 30 June 2024;
  - (b) in accordance with the agreement for the provision of services for the financial audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office; and
  - (c) at a fixed fee level of remuneration of \$46,100 (plus GST) for audit services for the year ending 30 June 2024.
- (2) A message be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Standing and sessional orders**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (12:31): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 15, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business time, to be moved immediately.

**Leave refused.**

**Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:32): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 18 May 2023:

Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023

Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.

It is good to be back in the house for another week of important government business. Of course the Andrews Labor government, as our community expects, has hit the ground running. We are bringing to this place a number of very important bills to be debated. I want to take the opportunity to talk you through the bills that will be debated this week.

The Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 makes important changes to the structure of wagering and betting and will provide flexibility for government in awarding future wagering and betting licences in order to yield the greatest benefit for the state. The current wagering and betting licence was awarded in 2011 and is due to expire on 15 August of next year. The process for awarding a wagering and betting licence to operate from 15 August 2024 is underway. At present only one wagering and betting licence can be in operation at a time. This restricts the options that the state can present to the market to attract greater interest in a wagering and betting licence. The bill introduces an approach to increase competition for the 2024 wagering and betting licence or licences, and the bill will amend the act to enable the minister to determine the number of wagering and betting licences and any exclusivity periods for future licensing processes.

The bill also repeals the 'no less favourable' racing industry funding requirement for issuing a new wagering and betting licence. These changes are reflective of the changing wagering and betting environment with the proliferation of online wagering, and all of this, of course, will contribute to a more effective licensing process and a greater financial benefit for the state. I am taking the opportunity

just to outline the bill which we will be debating, and I look forward to all of the fulsome contributions from those on the other side of the house, especially all of those who constantly complain about the opportunities to debate bills in this place. We do look forward to a full debating list from those on the other side in relation to the gambling taxation bill. It is another important part of our government's agenda, and this bill of course acquits several recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence. I want to commend the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation on the speedy way in which she acted in relation to the very significant issues that were raised in relation to the operation of Crown Casino. The report of the royal commission, which was released back in 2021, found Crown Melbourne improperly claimed deductions from gaming revenue to reduce its tax bill. We know that it was found to have underpaid millions of dollars in casino tax to the state, and this bill acquits the royal commission's recommendation to introduce an enhanced taxation framework for Crown Melbourne.

I might also let the house know that it is this government's intention to debate the Education State motion, which is on the notice paper, and that is a motion that will give the house an opportunity to recognise the fantastic work that this government continues to progress in relation to realising our ambition for Victoria to be the Education State. On three occasions now we have gone to the people of Victoria with an agenda that has put education at the heart of all that we do. The vast improvements in our public school education system and indeed the many reforms that we have made that have also rolled over and been available to low fee paying and Catholic schools have been well recognised throughout the community. There will be an opportunity to discuss these and other matters, including making kinder free, putting over 70 courses on the free TAFE list, implementing One VCE, delivering hundreds of new schools and school upgrades and supporting student wellbeing.

As always, I look forward to the positive contributions from everyone on this side of the house, who I know will relish the opportunity to get up and talk about the delivery of the Education State in this house. And I look forward to the contributions from those on the other side, because this is a government that governs for all Victorians and makes sure that we deliver. I commend this motion to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:37): We have seen today proof positive that the government business program is nothing more than high farce. For the fourth week in a row, the government has been exposed as having no business and no legislative program and is having to effectively filibuster and waste the Parliament's time because it cannot get its act together. We saw that when the Leader of the House stood to speak on her own motion and had to read verbatim the talking points of one of the bills that is going to be debated this week. She had to read the government's talking points because there was so little to say about what the government is doing this week in the Parliament. The Leader of the House was reading the talking points and effectively debating the talking points of the bill because there is so little being done. This is the fourth week in a row where the government has run out of anything to do and is filling the Parliament's time with sledge motions, and we have gone from one sledge motion a week to now two. I mean, how long is it going to take? We have got two new bills introduced today, but how long will it take before this house is convened to just debate the government's sledge motions? We know that the government has not got any work to do. You could complete the work for what the government is proposing in a day. You could easily move the guillotine from Thursday, and that is something the house should consider. Should the house consider amending the government business program and moving the debate? Effectively what the government is doing is filling the Parliament's time because it has run out of anything to do, and it is using particular parliamentary tactics to cover that fact. Today we have seen two bills introduced, which will fill an entire week – two bills –

**Juliana Addison** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Wendouree!

**James NEWBURY:** Last sitting week we saw the government ram through one of its bills and only allow a 13-day community consultation, when we know that the Westminster system is built around a full consultation time, and that is a debate that this house had. How shameful it was to see the government ram through that bill and not allow the community the consultation that it deserved. The government is using parliamentary tactics to be tricky – to cover the fact that it does not have a full agenda.

We heard the Leader of the House refer to the fact that we will be debating two motions – two sledge motions – this week, one of them being an education motion. Let me tell you, I look forward to the opportunity to talk about how little funding is provided to Brighton. When you look at funding provided on the government's own website, there is one big carve out in education funding to schools, and guess where that is? If you look at the map, there is a black swan on the map – a black swan area in the map of government funding – and that is in the electorate of Brighton. We have a school in my electorate of Brighton where kids with hearing deficiencies are being forced to learn in a demountable next to a train line because the government refuses to invest money in kids –

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** You were reading out direct notes, so please!

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, I ask that you remind the Manager of Opposition Business that this is a procedural debate, and he is not to debate motions that are on the notice paper.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Eildon is not in her allocated seat. I remind members that this is a very narrow debate. I have allowed some expansion on that debate this afternoon, but I do ask members to speak to the government business program.

**James NEWBURY:** I understand why the government would be embarrassed by that point. The government business program is hiding the fact that the government does not have an agenda. It is using parliamentary tactics to be tricky and wasting the Parliament's time with what are effectively sledge motions every week, and it is a disgrace. We will be opposing the program.

**Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:42):** I might just take things down a little bit; the member for Brighton is clearly a little audible. Putting forward opposition to a motion while also saying that he wants the opportunity to debate the motion is an interesting contradiction, a bit like the current state of their party. But the context that has been put forward, particularly by the new alliance of the Greens and the coalition today in their request for more time, more bills and more opportunities to debate, is interesting.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I share the Leader of the House's concern about this being a tight debate. I would say to the member for Mordialloc that this is a tight debate, and we are straying somewhat from the motion.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Mordialloc has just commenced his contribution. I remind all members that this is a narrow debate about the government business program.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** It is important context for what is requested to be part of government business and the bills and the quantum that is on the government business program. If that is not relevant to the terms of government business program, I do not know what is. But the member for Brighton gets a bit edgy and a bit excited about this. What is key is that the two bills that have been put forward here are similar to previous bills and contributions from members. When you are asking for more time to debate more bills you wonder what the history or record was of those contributions. So far in the month of May we have had 43 government members speak on bills on the government business program. That is a significant contribution. The Nationals, with nine members, have

contributed 13 times to second-reading stages of bills. Disappointingly, the Liberals have contributed just six times and the Greens once.

**Will Fowles:** Six times?

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Six times. And when you count duplication from the member for Eildon and – the member for Eildon is carrying the team at the moment because she has made two contributions out of the six – when you look at that quantum –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member is straying from the motion. This is not a third sledge motion for the week. The member is straying from the motion, and I would ask for him to be called back to the motion.

**The SPEAKER:** The member was speaking in relation to previous business of the house, which I will allow. But I do ask you to come back to the government business program.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Thank you, Speaker. A consistent theme and discussion around the 60th Parliament has been the style the debate would take on and the level of bills, but the business program has been full, and it will be full again this week with these bills. So what we will be looking for this week is more contribution from all members of Parliament on these important bills. The Gambling Taxation Bill 2023 is a really important piece of legislation, underpinned by the journey that Crown has undertaken but also then streamlining the taxation levels across states and territories. That makes sense, and members of Parliament will have that ability to contribute. The Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 as well changes arrangements that have been 12 years in the making to a more flexible system.

The notion that there is an issue or problem with important policy areas coming through in motions on various other discussions is a curious point to take when we are thinking about government business, because all the criticisms of the Greens and the Liberals and the Nationals about the ability to open up further debate are around the things that they say are of substance. So when you have holistic policy areas that you are bringing forward for discussion, there is never a better time than during the program of the week to contribute and to show your values. If you are opposed to the government's particular motion or you are opposed to the substance of it, it is a chance to step up and speak. The only problem you have is that when the government members put their names down on the program, we outnumber those opposite sometimes 10 to one, and there is a consistent theme of members of Parliament not contributing and not stepping up on behalf of their community. When we swear an oath or an affirmation, we say that we will front up on behalf of our communities. Most of them are not doing anything at all.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, this has turned into a third sledge motion for the week. I would ask you, in line with your previous ruling, to bring the member back to the motion currently before the house.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** On the point of order, Speaker, the member for Brighton literally said this was a sledge of the government's, sledging the process and criticising the government business program. If he cannot respond to those things because it does not suit his agenda or he did not articulate it right and he wants to have his go again – that cannot be accepted. If the government business program and how it flows through the week –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Mordialloc –

**James Newbury:** What is this? Is this a debate?

**The SPEAKER:** Manager of Opposition Business, you will not question the Chair. Member for Mordialloc, that is not a point of order on the point of order, but I do ask you to come back to the motion that is before the house.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** There we are. *(Time expired)*



**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:47): Thank you very much, Speaker. I am pleased to rise because the member for Ovens Valley, as the member for Mordialloc has indicated, is not doing his job and I am going to step in for him. That is a joke; the member for Ovens Valley is an excellent local member and is always speaking on bills.

I am pleased that the member for Mordialloc had that point of order for the last 30 seconds, because he had clearly run out of things to say, a bit like the government has more broadly, and that is why we are debating this here today and why the Manager of Opposition Business has indicated our opposition to the government business program. This is actually getting to be unprecedented. I have been in this place for 4000 or 5000 years, it seems – no, a bit over eight years now – and in the first two terms that I was here we never had motions put up as part of the government business program or simply to fill the week's sitting of Parliament, because the government actually had an agenda. Very clearly we are seeing now a government that has got to its third term and has just completely run out of puff. It has blown the budget, it has got all sorts of problems happening with corruption, with IBAC reports coming out, and it now does not have –

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: On a point of order, Speaker, again I ask that you remind those opposite that this is a narrow procedural motion. It is not an opportunity to make a range of untrue allegations in relation to the government or indeed to cast aspersions on our intentions here in this place.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! A point of order needs to be succinct. The member for Gippsland South will come back to the motion before the house.

**Danny O'BRIEN**: Thank you, Speaker. The point remains that we are opposing this motion, the government business program, this week because the government is not focused on the things that will improve the lives of Victorians. It is putting up motions – as the Manager of Opposition Business calls them, 'sledge motions' – to play politics, to fill the Parliament's time with playing politics.

We just had the Minister for the State Electricity Commission put up a motion about the federal opposition leader. What sort of government with a strong agenda has to talk about the federal opposition leader and what they are doing? Here is a government that has run out of ideas. They have run out of ideas so they are putting up motions like this, and we saw them. The irony of the Leader of the House raising a point of order before that the Manager of Opposition Business stay on the topic of this narrow procedural debate, when she spent half of her contribution speaking about the bills that are before us this week, is unbelievable.

I want to make a point also on the procedures of the house, which this is actually about, and the comments about the 13-day situation. The government again is unable to manage its legislative program to have bills ready to debate on a Tuesday, so it has to actually circumvent the traditions of the house and go to 13 days. With the two gambling bills this week, the minute they were introduced in the previous sitting week we were out consulting with stakeholders, but there are stakeholders who are still coming back to us this week. Not us – I do not want to hear anyone saying, 'You're lazy; you're not getting your work done.' There are stakeholders still assessing the impact of the legislation that the government has brought in. You might just say, 'Oh, thirteen days – you haven't got time to do it', but it is the stakeholders, it is Victorians and it is people who are affected by legislation that need the opportunity to have as much time as possible to understand the issues that they are dealing with.

I take up the interjection and the comment from the member for Mordialloc before about those speakers and how wonderful the government backbench is because 'We have 10 speakers to your one'. Well, it is pretty easy to do 10 speeches when the Premier's private office has given it to you, isn't it? We sit here all the time, and with due respect, we hear the same speech over and over and over again. It is like last term, where we would regularly, every week, ask to go into consideration in detail and the then Leader of the House would say, 'We'll see; we'll see if we've got time'. We never had time because we had to hear the same speech 10 times from those opposite. It was just a lack of respect for the Parliament and for the ability to have all members, including non-government members, have their say.

The irony is that we have a government with no agenda having to put up motions to debate because it has not got the agenda and yet at the same time not allowing the Greens and not allowing the opposition to put forward private members business and have it debated. You can vote it down. You have got the numbers. You have apparently got some with wit and intelligence on that side who can debate against these bills –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair, member for Gippsland South.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** My apologies, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind members not to say 'you'; it is a reflection on the Chair.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Thank you, Speaker. The government needs to get its act together.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (12:52): It is an absolute pleasure to rise today to speak on the government business program and indeed to speak on the Andrews Labor government's positive plan and positive agenda. Contrary to the comments from those opposite, we are the only ones in this place with a positive agenda. We took a positive plan and a positive agenda to the election, and lo and behold, I think the Victorian public agreed with us. That is why there are 56 over here and not too many over there. As I said, it is an absolute joy to come here this week and to speak on the Andrews Labor government's agenda.

We went to the election and said that we would not waste a minute, and this week is no different. This week we have two bills that we will introduce and debate in this place. Those two bills are the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 and the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023. These two bills work in tandem to provide the best outcome for the Victorian racing industry, which I will go to in a little bit more detail in a moment, as well as venue operators, licensees and community groups. The gambling regulation bill works to amend wagering –

**The SPEAKER:** Members are reminded that the government business program motion is not an opportunity to anticipate debate on a bill.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Indeed it is not. Sorry, Speaker. The Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill works to amend wagering and betting licences, amongst other things, and obviously solves some current limitations in the existing legislation. An incredibly important aspect of this bill is that it gives the Victorian racing industry – an industry that we absolutely love on this side of the house and that I think probably across this chamber is incredibly important to the electorates of so many people in this place – a greater share of the turnover that –

**Ryan Smith:** On a point of order, Speaker, just to restate your instruction to the member already that the member is anticipating debate on the bills that he is currently discussing.

**The SPEAKER:** I do ask the member to come back to the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you, Speaker. Just to finish the point, as I said, it is incredibly important to the Victorian racing industry.

We are also, in tandem with that, introducing the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023. Both these pieces of legislation have gone through extensive consultation and obviously, as the Leader of the House says, we are picking up some of the recommendations from the recent Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence.

I would just briefly like to touch on the education motion that will be introduced into this house during the week as well. The Labor Party went to the 2014 election promising to make Victoria the Education State, and that is exactly what we did in the following years. Since 2014 we have rebuilt TAFE in this state after those opposite –

**Ryan Smith:** On a point of order, Speaker, just again to restate the points of order that have been made, the member is once again anticipating debate on the motion. This is a narrow procedural debate about the government business program.

**The SPEAKER:** I am aware of that, member for Warrandyte. Member for Tarneit, I have allowed other members some leeway. I have allowed you some leeway, but I do ask you to come back to the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT:** No problem at all. Thank you, Speaker. I said I would speak briefly about the education motion, which I think I have already achieved. Like I said, it is an absolute privilege to be back in this place to speak on the Andrews Labor government's positive agenda this week, and I look forward to the week ahead.

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:57):** I rise to support my colleagues in that we are not supporting the government business program today. If we have a look at the daily program, we can see that the items proposed for the government business program are pretty slim. We have got the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 and the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023. Both of those items will be guillotined on Friday –

**A member:** Thursday.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Thursday, so we have got a bit of a pickle. The government have a bit of a pickle here. They have got to try and work out what they need to do this week to fill up their program. They have got a very flimsy legislative program, which I think is reflective of a government that is tired and that has run out of ideas – one that probably spent January on holidays rather than thinking about their legislative program, and perhaps Easter as well. They have got a lot of new ministers, and I thought they would be itching to come up here with legislation to show what they are doing and to make some changes, but we see that the legislative program today is flimsy indeed.

I try to put myself in the shoes of the Leader of the House. I am thinking, 'What is the Leader of the House thinking as she's putting the program together?' And she is thinking, 'Right, okay, so what tools do I have at my disposal? I have got legislation.' Clearly not all the ministers have been working hard enough because we have only got two pieces of legislation, so she has to think, 'Then what? We would have had nothing to debate today if they had given the customary 14 days, which is normally what would happen. They worked out if we do 13 days, that at least gives us something to talk about on Tuesday, the first day of the government business program.'

Last sitting week we saw them have to say that for the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill they could only give 13 days notice. We have heard other members prosecute the fact that when we only have the 13 days, it affects the stakeholders coming back to us to contribute their thoughts so we can work out our position on the bills and on the government business program. We have had 13 days for one of the bills so at least they have got something to talk about today. What else are they going to do? Again, I am putting myself in the shoes of the Leader of the House, thinking, 'We don't have much of a program. We have got, you know, a tired government that have not got a lot of thoughts about what is going ahead. We have had the legislation, the 13 days, then what else? Let's introduce a couple of back-up motions, because they don't need to be guillotined and we can keep those moving on.' Previously on the government business program we have had the address-in-reply that has been able to be dragged out for ages – filibustering, dragging it out as long as possible. We are going to have the budget next week, so that will fill up your business program. The Leader of the House's business program will be very busy. On all sides, everybody in the house will be wanting to talk on the budget.

Then we have got the motions. They think, 'We'll introduce the motions.' Some of these motions are what have been referred to as 'sledge' motions. We have got the SEC motion that I have started on – I am about a minute into my 10-minute contribution. They have had a look at 'What can we do? Anywhere that we can have an attack on the opposition and sing our praises?' So we can see that that is done with.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Eildon in silence.

**Cindy McLEISH:** Thank you, Speaker. I greatly appreciate your intervention there.

They have had to introduce a couple of bills, and they have the SEC motion. Government members have their prepared notes and will come out and say that the Liberals privatised the SEC, when clearly we know that is not the fact and that it was Joan Kirner's Labor government. But again, the motion on the business program for the week and how the government will be filling their time will be an opportunity for them to sing their praises and for us to point out some realities. The other sledge motion is one about education. The government will use this opportunity to try and pull down the opposition rather than reflect on some of their failures in the education system.

**James Newbury:** In my electorate.

**Cindy McLEISH:** There are quite a number. The results are not good statewide, and I think the government should be having a good look at that rather than trying to filibuster and make up motions to just fill the time. The opposition will be opposing the government business program.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (54):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (31):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Sam Hibbins, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements*

**National Volunteer Week**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:08): Happy National Volunteer Week – I want to give a big shout-out to all our wonderful volunteers, particularly through my electorate of Caulfield, who do so much and give so much to our community. Access Inc. are in the process of running this week a pop-up cafe called the Trusty Toastie to involve and train people with disabilities. We have the Good Box running a Mother's Day program with a beauty box to help women fleeing domestic violence. FoodFilled on 8 May partnered with Rafiki Rovers, a youth-led Scout group in Malvern, to collect food donations for those in need. Socks4Support – good old Benjy again supported the Good Box by sending them 1500 pairs of socks. Thanks, Benjy. Caulfield South Community House, in recognition of Volunteer Week, are running free life-coaching sessions, and last week it was great to pop in for a cuppa with Caulfield South Community House. All Things Equal ran a cooking school with a strong equality focus, empowering disabled individuals to excel in the hospitality industry. C Care ran a giving day on 30 April to raise money to be able to provide food for those who needed it. We had the St Kilda Repair

Cafe doing work and local kids doing some work as part of Hatzolah. Everybody is doing their bit – even Love Our Street 3162 is cleaning up their streets as well. Thank you to our volunteers.

#### **Kalkallo electorate schools**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Suburban Development) (13:09): I was thrilled to recently visit the site of Lockerbie Central primary school for a site tour with the Minister for Education. Construction is now well underway and on track for students to commence in term 1 next year. Joining us was the school's inaugural principal Anthony Potesta, an experienced educator and principal at Meadows Primary School in Broadmeadows for the past six years. Anthony is focused on building strong relationships with his school community to improve education and wellbeing outcomes for students.

I also met with Maree Moyle, who is taking on the role of principal at Merrifield South primary school. Maree has worked as a principal for the past 10 years and is looking to develop strong community connections as she prepares to create an innovative and supportive learning environment for her future students. Congratulations to both Anthony and Maree. I am looking forward to working with them both as they prepare to welcome their first students next year.

I was also pleased to recently attend the official stage 2 opening at Elevation Secondary College in Craigieburn. The school now boasts additional facilities, including a gymnasium; performing arts, music and food technology classrooms; a canteen; two new learning communities; additional hard courts; and a sports oval. Congratulations to principal Colin Burke and team, and thanks to all the students that helped out on the day. Elevation Secondary is a terrific school that opened in 2020.

With these two new schools commencing in 2024, this brings it to 11 new government schools in my electorate since 2014, and there are more to come as my community continues to grow and this government continues to support it.

#### **Country Fire Authority Heyfield brigade**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (13:11): The Heyfield CFA is a very, very active brigade. They are located right on the interface of the Great Dividing Range and along with the other brigades in that area service a whole range of communities in relation to fire protection. They have currently got a volunteer emergency services equipment program grant in for a big fill appliance, and I would encourage the minister to look very strongly on that application. They certainly need this piece of firefighting equipment to supplement what they already have to protect those communities at the western end of my electorate.

#### **Cape Conran boat ramp**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (13:12): Another matter I want to raise is in relation to the Cape Conran boat ramp. The new ramp has been very well received, but we have got a bit of a problem there at low tide. When you are getting on or off the boat it is a long way up to the jetty, and a number of –

**A member:** Is that from personal experience?

**Tim BULL:** Yes, for old blokes like me it is a bit difficult. So we have had a number of requests from the community to install ladders on the jetty to enable boaters to get in and out of their boats at low tide. I have heard that Better Boating Victoria are quite supportive of this, but it is running into a few roadblocks, and I would hope that it is not another Parks Victoria hold-up. I encourage that to occur.

#### **Bendigo Bank, Lakes Entrance branch**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (13:12): I also just want to say the Bendigo Bank in my electorate has a really good reputation as a community bank. They have done a lot of good work. I am very disappointed to hear they are closing their Lakes Entrance agency, and I would encourage the bank to reconsider this. They promote that they are better than the big banks, and I hope that they are.

**Buddhist of the West festival**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (13:12): I was delighted to attend the Buddhist of the West multicultural festival in St Albans celebrating the life and teachings of Buddha. The Quang Minh temple and the Kwan Im temple are pillars of compassion, care and cultural and spiritual enrichment in the west.

**St Albans Secondary College**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (13:13): On another matter, congratulations to the students of St Albans Secondary College for hosting their breakfast business partnership. This partnership gives the students the skills and the confidence to organise events with the local business community. Well done to the students and the school community.

**St Albans Heights Primary School**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (13:13): On another matter, congratulations to St Albans Heights Primary School, who were proud recipients of the gold award for Victorian school-wide positive behaviour support. This is the second year in a row that St Albans Heights have received this award. Well done to Mr Glenn Groves and the school community for their commitment to our young people. I am very proud of our local schools, the staff and students and the wider community.

**State of the Future youth forum**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (13:13): On another matter, last week the Victorian Parliament held the State of the Future youth forum. Young people from across Victoria came together at Parliament to discuss the issues that matter to them most. It was fantastic to meet such an inspiring group of young people, who shared their stories, their lived experience and what they would like to see addressed by Parliament. This was a fantastic opportunity to meet and network for young people and for peak stakeholders as well.

**Sandringham electorate infrastructure funding**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:14): Next Tuesday the Treasurer will hand down this year's Victorian state budget, and on behalf of the electorate of Sandringham I have written to the Treasurer posing the following much-needed funding commitments. An upgrade to Sandringham Hospital is much needed in my community. Local public transport improvements, including the removal of the Highbury Road and Wickham Road level crossings, which are to be replaced by a rail underpass, is desperately needed, as are funding for local schools, including Sandringham College, Beaumaris Secondary College, Beaumaris Primary and Beaumaris North Primary, and a commitment to keeping the Latrobe Street level crossing open. I will continue to fight to ensure that these local projects receive the attention that they need.

**Sandringham College**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:15): School facilities at Sandringham College are in a dilapidated state, with one student sharing their story about a ceiling falling in their classroom just before they were to take an exam. A petition by the Community Action for Sandringham College group with close to 2000 signatures is calling for proper funding. The students, staff and parent community deserve much better than what they are getting at the moment. I call on the Andrews government to urgently address the needs of this school community by delivering the second stage of funding, \$10 million, to improve Sandringham secondary college.

### National Volunteer Week

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:15): Finally, this week is National Volunteer Week, and I wish to acknowledge all of those in the Sandringham electorate who volunteer for local community organisations, who give of themselves for the benefit of others. Later this week I will be attending a thankyou morning tea for Bayside Community Emergency Relief, which I am sure will be a wonderful opportunity to pay tribute to these wonderful people.

### Marie Hodgens

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (13:16): I rise with sadness to recognise the recent passing of Labor comrade and much-loved mother, grandmother, great-grandmother and community advocate Marie Hodgens. Marie was a dedicated and passionate member of our patch, with a tireless ability to organise the grassroots causes she believed in, dedicating countless hours to bettering the community that she lived in.

As a proud conservationist, Marie was actively involved in the Friends of Wattle Park group for 30 years, receiving the best friend award from the friends environment network in 2007. Marie served on the school council of the former Burwood high school, which is now the site of Deakin Uni, and served on the board of directors for Box Hill Hospital. An active and passionate member of the humanists society and the rationalist association, Marie served in many positions on the executive of both organisations that are dedicated to the values of building a more humane and compassionate society.

In her career as an electorate officer Marie was an advocate for many who found themselves in a tough spot and was always ready to lend a hand. In recognition of the significant contributions Marie made to our community, she was a most worthy recipient of the Caroline Chisholm award for voluntary service in 2005. Marie will be remembered as a proud and devoted member of our community who will be greatly missed. Vale, Marie Hodgens.

### Cost of living

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (13:17): The spiralling cost-of-living crisis is biting hard in the Latrobe Valley and is now one of the most prevalent concerns for the people in my electorate. Whether it be the ever-increasing price of power, gas, fuel or food, these basic items that we need to keep the family warm, safe and fed are slowly putting more and more stress on the family budget. With school fees, sporting costs and the cost of other social activities also rising and an impending horror state budget on the doorstep, it is no wonder welfare services are experiencing incredibly high demand across the board.

But it does not stop there. Our local small business community are also feeling the strain, with most of the weekly takings being spent on just keeping the doors open. One such shop in Morwell, Claudia's Cafe, is dealing with massive financial pressures on a daily basis. The cafe has been open for 16 years and survived the Hazelwood mine fire and COVID, but Claudia came to me last week in search of answers. 'The Andrews government promised it would be working hard to bring down the cost of living, but when will this happen?' she asked. 'When can we expect to see some relief from the crushing financial strain?' In fact they are now starting to see the exact opposite happening: prices are going up. They all want to know: when will the prices start going down?

### Marie Hodgens

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (13:18): I rise to honour the late Marie Hodgens as well, a steadfast pillar of the Labor movement in the east whose many local contributions have already been eloquently addressed by you, Deputy Speaker. Marie was a much-loved member of the Burwood community, which I had the honour of representing in the 59th Parliament.

Marie's dedication to the local Labor movement began during Whitlam's It's Time campaign in 1972, and it was a passion that never waned. I fondly recall her involvement in my 2018 Burwood campaign and her enthusiastic and loving personal support of me, alongside that of her late husband Howard.

Marie's commitment extended well beyond election campaigns. She devoted years of her life to serving the movement, the Parliament and the community as an electorate officer. Marie supported key Labor figures in the east, including former Labor member for Box Hill Margaret Ray, former federal member for Chisholm Helen Mayer, former federal member for La Trobe Tony Lamb, as well as a giant of our movement Senator John Button. Additionally, her years of service in party leadership roles laid the foundation for Labor's success in the east. She was half, along with the late, great Halina Strnad, of a dynamic duo of humanist, feminist and rationalist campaigners who enlivened branch meetings, community forums and the letters pages of Melbourne's newspapers with humour, intelligence and charm.

We are enormously grateful for Marie's unwavering enthusiasm, her passion for progressive causes and her genuine care for her fellow human beings. Vale, Marie Hodgens – a life well lived.

### **Man from Snowy River Bush Festival**

**Bill TILLEY** (Benambra) (13:20): Last month I had the good fortune and privilege to be up at the Man from Snowy River Bush Festival in the heart of the Upper Murray in Corryong. It is the largest event of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, with about 25,000 people through the gates, where we have 300 volunteers and three full-time and five part-time staff, which in total brings about \$7 million into the local economy. It is a celebration of High Country heritage, with 26 events from bush poetry to bands, art shows, the challenge, which demonstrates the best horsemanship in the country, the re-enactment of Banjo's *The Man from Snowy River* poem, and Riley's Ride, where 50 riders plus crew follow in the hoofprints of Jack Riley's – aka 'the Man' – final and fateful ride from Tom Groggin to Corryong. Akubras off to Travis Bandy, the 21-year-old who won the Man from Snowy River Bush Festival challenge for the first time, and he is no stranger to the event: his father Scott has etched his name onto the honour board five times previously.

It was another massive effort by all the volunteers and the community in the wider Corryong district – I thank each and every one of you. A big thankyou also to the iconic Australian brand RM Williams, which was the naming rights sponsor – the event would not have happened without them – and to the chairman of the board, Cameron Jackson, for his leadership.

### **Eureka electorate youth disability advocates**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:21): I am delighted to rise today to highlight some extraordinary youth disability advocates that we have in the electorate of Eureka. Firstly, I would like to give my congratulations to Gabriel Gervasoni of Ballarat for his Victoria Young Achiever Award nomination. Gabriel, who is vision-impaired, passionately advocates for inclusive education and safer environments for those with low or no vision. Gabriel's work has made some of our most iconic local spaces, like Sovereign Hill, more accessible.

In Bacchus Marsh, Noah Barlow is making incredible progress in stroke awareness. At just 12 years old Noah is writing books, co-producing podcasts, and was involved in launching Wheelchair Auskick. Noah's advocacy has earned him the Stroke Foundation's Stroke Warrior Award, so well done, Noah. Finally, a big congratulations to Keeley Johnson of Ballan, named Young Woman of the Year at the 2023 Women Changing the World Awards. At 13, Keeley founded Keeley's Cause, a charity providing iPads to children with communication disabilities. I am really looking forward to the Keeley's Cause fundraiser Girls Night Out this Friday to support this exceptional charity. Gabriel, Noah and Keeley show us that there are no limits to motivation, inspiration and a genuine desire to make a difference.

### **Rowville electorate infrastructure funding**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (13:23): Once again it seems I am forced to rise to speak in this place to condemn another federal Labor budget. Since being elected in 2022, the Albanese-led government has negligently ripped out over \$600 million from the electorate of Rowville. Key infrastructure projects, Rowville rail and upgrades to dangerous main roads have all been axed by this federal Labor



government. It was my hope and indeed the hope of many constituents that reside in the outer eastern metro that the Labor government would finally make right the funding that they have stolen, while the only thing Labor is committed to delivering for Rowville is actually budget cuts.

The last state budget saw Labor make no mention of any suburb contained in the electorate of Rowville, choosing instead to waste taxpayers money on infrastructure blowouts and the Premier's Facebook page. Will the Treasurer finally include, just for a change, Rowville, Knoxfield, Scoresby, Lysterfield or Wantirna South in this year's Labor budget?

### **Port Phillip EcoCentre**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (13:24): I was delighted to welcome the Minister for Environment to Albert Park to officially turn the sod on the new Port Phillip EcoCentre in the St Kilda Botanical Gardens.

**A member:** Hear, hear!

**Nina TAYLOR:** Yes! The EcoCentre has been transforming the way Melbourne and in particular Albert Park understand wildlife, waterways and climate change since 1999. To continue its critical work, such as educating youth about best caring for our planet and undertaking citizen science, the centre needs improved facilities. That is why this \$6.7 million project, towards which the Victorian government has invested \$3.35 million, is so important. With a new sustainable centre designed to operate – get this – with net zero energy and water usage, the EcoCentre will be one of only 500 buildings worldwide that produces more clean energy than it consumes, offsetting all carbon used during construction.

Community support for this project cannot be understated. To Pam O'Neil, Neil Blake and April Seymore, I want to thank you for your unwavering advocacy on an issue so important to our local community. A hearty thankyou to them, and we are very pleased to back them in.

### **Container deposit scheme**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (13:25): Just a quick mention of the visit by the Minister for Environment to Albert Park to announce a start date for Victoria's container deposit scheme: it is going to go off in November.

### **Vacant residential property tax**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (13:26): The vacancy tax in Victoria is failing. In my electorate of Richmond the number of available rentals is at a record low. Meanwhile, across Victoria there are over 80,000 homes that are sitting empty. Our current vacancy tax expects owners to voluntarily report that their property is empty. The opt-in method is clearly not working. Meanwhile, holiday homes across Victoria that are empty for 48 weeks a year are exempt from the vacancy tax while people are sleeping in their cars.

Raising the vacant property tax to 3 per cent of the property's value, expanding it to all of metropolitan Melbourne and ending the inept self-declaration system that allows property developers and investors to dodge the tax just by doing nothing would raise over \$3 billion over the next 10 years. Not only that, but a decent and enforced vacancy tax would motivate investors to lease out, occupy or sell their properties, alleviating the supply shortage for renters and first home buyers who we know are struggling to get by.

The Greens are calling for an urgent inquiry into the rental crisis, part of which would review the effectiveness of property taxes, and I urge the government and the opposition to support this chance to find solutions.

**Bentleigh electorate schools**

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (13:27): Last week I had the pleasure of seeing the musical production *School of Rock*, another collaboration by Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College Bentleigh and De La Salle College, Malvern. I congratulate all students on a stellar performance. Congratulations to Jordan Genovese, Aria Pisano, Skyler Sahely, Halle Schroor, Zoe D'Allesandro, Archie Cannington, Noah Ockwell, Jackson Lewis, Adi Smit, Ari Hopkins, Scott Sisson, Max Jones, Charli Arvanitakis, Grace Martinez, Niki Georgas, Emilia Brusco, Sarina Azad, Ruby Sonogo-Sassman, Isabel Stewart, Ella McKinnon, Alex Roach, Darshan Jangir, Anton DeClerck, Oscar Smith, Miles Ristevski, Wesley Kim, Stanley Trilsbach, Madeleine Di Conza, Poppy McLaughlin, Jasmine Barton, Amelie Philipz, Vavara Pekarín, Chloe Whitfield, Lara McGuinness, Ryon Bullard, Oliver Walsh-Dummett, Liam Murphy, Sophie Littlefair, Kristina Tsagatzones, Tily Westaway, Phoebe Bull, Charlotte Johnstone, Eva Hunter, Riley Woods, Rolando Phillips Michael, Ava Ronchi, Jasmine Gutierrez, Niki Rayzman, Aidan O'Flynn, Seb Hall and Carmen Thomas-Scrutton, and the fantastic crew: Kristian Ristevski, Lachlan Frazer, Armaan Mulcahy, Adrian Jackson, Christopher Wilson, Eve Morphett, Lauren Atherton, Frida Nolan, Zara Longton, Matti Fleming, Eimear Atkins, Alex Donnelley, Sienna Shepard and Grace Pribilovics. Congratulations again, and I apologise for any mispronunciation.

**Nepean electorate infrastructure funding**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (13:29): In the lead-up to Victoria's state budget next week I want to take the opportunity to reflect and ask the government to fund the following projects for my community that are much needed down in Nepean. The first and most notable is Rosebud Hospital. After years of issues at the hospital, and they have been raised many times in this place, there is still no action from the government to address the health catastrophe unfolding on the southern peninsula. There is also the Jetty Road overpass, which is a major piece of infrastructure the state has not put any funding towards. Recently the local landmark of Flinders Pier was granted heritage status, and I ask that the necessary funds now be allocated to ensure its long-term preservation.

But it is not just major pieces of infrastructure in Nepean that need funding. I want the Labor government to commit \$10 million to restoring Dromana Pier, \$1 million for a new skate park in Dromana and \$9.5 million for the rebuild of Eastbourne Primary School as well as funding the new playgrounds at Rye Primary. It is time for this government to prove that, while a lot of them go down to my area and have holiday houses there, they do not have a blind spot for the peninsula and to start funding these vital projects.

**Yan Yean electorate schools**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (13:30): Mernda Primary School and Upper Plenty Primary School epitomise the theme of Education Week – active learners: move, make, motivate. At Upper Plenty Primary School last week, I was given a school tour by school captains Ruby and Lachlan, who were deeply impressive people. I was there representing the Minister for Education for the official opening of their inclusive play space, which is a total hit with the students and remarked upon by the teachers as providing a quiet space for students when needed.

At Mernda Primary School I was deeply impressed by the creativity and compassion of principal Janet Hamer, staff, students and teachers. This school has used ingenuity to create a green screen production space, where they make all manner of fun projects. The life-sized astronaut in the garden symbolises, for me, this school – it is creative and imaginative, and it reaches for the stars.

There are little stars all over the district of Yan Yean. I have received many entries in my Big Bridge Build competition, which is celebrating the new bridge being installed over Plenty River this weekend as part of the Bridge Inn Road upgrade.

### **Narre Warren North electorate healthcare providers**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (13:31): Last week I had the pleasure of visiting three incredible healthcare providers from my electorate, alongside the Minister for Health: the Narregate Priority Primary Care Centre, the brand new Palliative Care South East community wellbeing hub and of course the Casey Hospital. What an incredible showing of the Andrews Labor government's investment in local accessible health care in the south-east. The team at the Narregate Priority Primary Care Centre in Narre Warren do such a fantastic job providing a free alternative to visiting a very busy emergency department, with or without a Medicare card.

I also attended the opening of a brand new palliative care wellbeing hub, also in Narre Warren. Palliative care is so important and often gets forgotten about, but I am really glad that our government is investing in these services for all Victorians. A social enterprise cafe also runs in the centre, with 100 per cent of the profits from the cafe going to support palliative care services for people diagnosed with a life-limiting or terminal illness in Melbourne's south-east.

It was also great to be able to take the minister to visit Casey Hospital, along with my colleagues the member for Pakenham and Michael Galea and Lee Tarlamis in the other place. We discussed the plans for the expansion of the emergency department, thanks to the investment of the Andrews Labor government. These works are well underway. Thank you to the minister for visiting these three incredible healthcare providers in my electorate.

### **Monbulk electorate healthcare providers**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (13:33): Last Friday was International Nurses Day, and a few weeks prior we celebrated international midwives day. I rise to acknowledge and celebrate the hardworking nurses and midwives across Victoria but especially those who serve at the Angliss Hospital in Upper Ferntree Gully. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to these dedicated healthcare professionals, who go above and beyond to care for their patients. Their commitment to patient care and professionalism has been even more pronounced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

I am pleased to share that the Angliss Hospital redevelopment project stage 2 early works have commenced with the demolition of the old nursing home, and the architects have just been appointed. These works will deliver a new multistorey building with 32 inpatient beds, four operating theatres, a new entrance, a central sterile supply department and outpatient and allied health capabilities. This will create a modern, state-of-the-art healthcare facility that will better serve the people of my electorate of Monbulk and the outer east more broadly.

Whilst I am here I do urge all people in Monbulk to please support our hardworking emergency department nurses, doctors and staff by attending the priority primary care centres wherever and whenever appropriate. These priority primary care centres provide GP-led care to people who need urgent care but not an emergency response. Each PPCC is partnered with a busy emergency department. I would encourage all my constituents to consider our nearest ones in Narre Warren or Bayswater. I personally experienced their exceptional service last week when my daughter broke her arm late on Tuesday night. The service was incredible, and there was no wait time. So once again, I extend my sincerest gratitude to them all.

### **Preston Market**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (13:34): I hope the member for Monbulk's daughter is okay. I rise to update the house regarding a community meeting that was held on Friday to discuss the future of Preston Market. The event was held in the Preston shire hall and was very well attended, with hundreds of people packed into the hall and others turned away for safety reasons. There were a lot of great contributions throughout the evening, but I would like to particularly note the contribution of George Kanjere, who MCed the event very well and who has been a key community leader in the campaign. Bonnie Gordon and Chris Erlandsen provided a lot of the technical detail. I would also like to mention

Con Lambros, who has been another key community leader in that campaign, and Jenny Hibbert and Laura Fazio, who have gathered more than 12,000 signatures on a petition that we hope to table in this place at some point. I will not try and recap the entire meeting now, but it was clear that the Minister for Planning's announcement last month has been very well received and also clear that there does remain significant concern and apprehension. Certainly there was a lot of interest and input from the community into what kind of state government or local government decisions – or indeed decisions by the owners – might ensure that the market remains at the heart of the precinct and at the heart of Preston for a long time to come.

#### **Ciara Jeffs**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (13:36): Congratulations to Ciara Jeffs, who competed recently in the Victorian swimming championships, winning an astounding eight gold medals and one silver. Ciara is 12 years old and trains eight times a week with Yarra Plenty Waves under the coaching of Alex Hirschauer. She works incredibly hard to balance her passion for swimming, netball and school, often waking up at 5 am to train. This is an incredible achievement for Ciara, and we are all very proud of her.

#### **Diamond Valley Lions Club**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (13:36): It is volunteer week, and we have many incredible local volunteers, such as the Diamond Valley Lions Club, who recently celebrated their 50th anniversary at Bridges Restaurant. Thank you for decades of work to our community. Thank you also to president Fiona Kates, Richard Keeling, Daryl Schrader, Anita Hillier, Barry Backman, Graham and Roslyn Bryant, Peter Talbot and Peter Muhling. Diamond Valley Lions has donated thousands of dollars for flood relief in Victoria and offered support for Turkish Lions clubs for earthquake victims support. In recognition of their 50th anniversary a local sensory garden is in the planning, to be enjoyed by people with mobility and accessibility issues, intellectual disabilities, neurodivergence and low vision. The Lions are also to be congratulated for the Lions V Districts Cancer Foundation, providing free skin checks and education regarding important skincare. On behalf of our community, thank you, Diamond Valley Lions, for 50 years of dedicated service to our local area and those in need in the world.

#### **National Volunteer Week**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (13:37): It is volunteer week, and I want to give a huge shout-out to all those who volunteer to support our rainbow communities. Hatred has no place in the community in which I live, inclusion does, and our volunteers are absolutely leading the way in my community.

#### **IDAHOBIT**

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (13:37): Frankston stands in solidarity with our diverse, inclusive community on the peninsula and in Victoria, especially on IDAHOBIT tomorrow. We will not be threatened by hateful little dickheads in the area – little bigots. We will not encourage some of the actions that we saw this morning, the virtue signalling from the Greens, because this is a government that has made its legacy in that equality is not negotiable. There is no need to virtue signal that when you are on this side of the house. We do not use that just for Facebook taglines. We actually live that and work with our communities, for those communities and for the whole community here in Victoria.

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

##### **Notices of motion**

**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) (13:38): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 1 today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

*Bills***Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (13:38): It is a good start to the week to start talking about the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. I begin my contribution by noting that this legislation is really part of a package that will be debated in legislation this week. Sometimes we have these situations in Parliament where it is a bit unclear who is responsible for certain legislation. It is a little bit odd that the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023 this week is really about casinos and gambling and yet it is the Treasurer's bill, and this bill, the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, is really about the racing industry but it is in fact the bill of the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and me as the shadow minister.

I thank my colleagues the member for Sandringham and the member for Gippsland East. The member for Gippsland East has brought the full weight of his punting experience to deliberations on this side to help us understand the implications of this legislation, but it has been a very collegiate process with the member for Sandringham and the member for Gippsland East in consulting with the industry and with stakeholders and getting a full understanding of both pieces of legislation as they relate to the forward interests of the Victorian racing industry in particular and the Victorian taxpayer when it comes to the wagering and betting licence. And there it is: the first time I have messed up the words 'wagering' and 'betting', which I am sure I am going to do several times before this debate is out.

It is important to support our Victorian racing industry. It is a fundamental part of our local economy in Victoria but also our culture. It is a very important industry in Victoria. I will come to the details of the bill, but in understanding the impacts of this legislation and how it will assist and support the Victorian racing industry we need to understand how important that industry actually is.

The industry prepared a report – *Size and Scope of the Victorian Racing Industry* – which was released in April 2022, and it has some key findings that I think are worth putting on the record. The total value-added contribution of the industry is \$4.7 billion per annum. I hear the Minister for Racing cheering for that figure. Total full-time equivalent employment is 34,900. That is a very big figure. There are basically 35,000 people employed directly and indirectly in the Victorian racing industry. Half a billion dollars in taxes is generated for the Victorian government – I am sure the Treasurer is happy about that – and that is spread across the three racing codes of thoroughbred, harness and greyhound, with obviously thoroughbreds being the vast majority of that.

Some further figures on direct participants and employees in racing across the three codes in Victoria: in 2018–19 there were 147,952 people directly involved in the industry; that figure is made up of breeders, trainers, owners and volunteers, of which there are about 100,000. The total directly employed in racing was another nearly 22,000 and the total employed in support industries was 26,855, so it is very significant. It is a significant employer and a significant generator of economic activity in the state.

It is important to note who some of those employees are. There are 5399 stablehands and kennel employees. They are not the Danny O'Briens – not the member for Gippsland South, but the trainer Danny O'Brien, a Melbourne Cup winner. They are not the Damien Olivers of the world, the ones that get the publicity, but the stablehands, the kennel employees, the strappers and all of those who perform such an important role in the industry – there are 5500 of them and 7500 racing club staff. Particularly in rural and regional Victoria our racing clubs are the heart and soul of many of our communities, and in many communities they are also significant employers in their own right.

I would like to just in passing mention my own clubs in the Gippsland South electorate. We are talking about racing club staff: Brad Evans, the CEO of the Sale Turf Club, does a magnificent job with David

Wilson, the president, and their committee. Sale is the biggest club in Gippsland and has the most meetings per year. Then there is little Stony Creek, headed up by Adam Olszanski, who is also well known as race caller for the industry. Stony Creek has I think four meetings a year currently, mostly from Christmas to autumn, but the Stony Creek Cup is an absolute ripper of a day. I have missed one since I got elected in 2015 as member for Gippsland South. Fortuitously for me the Stony Creek Cup was the week before the by-election in which I got elected. We as the Nationals in our campaign in fact sponsored the Stony Creek Cup that year, and that was a successful event for us. But, sadly, the Stony Creek Cup has been mostly less successful for me throughout the last eight or nine years; I do not think I backed a winner until this year, and I backed one at very short odds. Both those clubs are very important to our community. Sale in particular is more of a centre for trainers, so there are a considerable number of trainers, strappers and staff engaged in the district and the area.

I would like to mention, particularly from a greyhound's point of view, that there are no harness clubs in Gippsland South, but the Sale Greyhound Club is one of the bigger clubs in regional Victoria, and we are very much a centre for greyhound training and breeding around the region. I cannot mention the industry without mentioning my adopted greyhound Maisy, who had a sum total of one race and then went sour, according to her trainer. She did not want to race again, and I can see exactly that spirit in her to this day; she does not really want to race very much at all. Despite what some newer members of Parliament in the other place would say, and indeed the Greens, there is great credit to be given to Greyhound Racing Victoria for GAP, the Greyhound Adoption Program. In my mind, certainly from my household's perspective, it has been very successful. I do not think you ever have a dog that costs you \$70 to buy and then \$7000 in vet bills over its lifetime – not quite. But GRV has done a good job responding to the need for that industry to have social licence, and they are vastly improved from what they were just a few years ago. The GAP has brought joy to many families across the state, as well as given former racing dogs the opportunity to retire into a happy situation.

I think it is important to place on record the value of the racing industry and to highlight to those who are opposed to it – I mentioned a member in the other place and the Greens – that this is an industry that has value, not just economic value but cultural value for our state. Many people get enjoyment from the industry, as well as there being many people employed by it. I would expect that there will be a division on this legislation, because those Greens members are always out to capitalise on anything opposed to the industry. I am happy to say that we will not be opposing this legislation, the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill. Should there be a division, we will vote in favour of it.

I will turn to the bill itself a bit now. Despite the fact the bill is 29 pages, it is actually relatively straightforward. In effect there are two things the legislation does. It allows the minister the opportunity to issue more than one wagering and betting licence. Currently we have a licence process, and the licence was awarded in 2011, to begin from 2012, to Tabcorp. Tabcorp currently holds that until August next year, if I am not mistaken. What this legislation does is allow the minister to issue more than one licence. That is in the context of significant change that has occurred in the wagering and betting sector, where since the last licence was issued there has been significant change and growth in the corporate and online bookies, which has no doubt impacted the likely sale price that would come from the issuing of such a licence. That raises an issue of concern not only for the state of Victoria and the taxpayer but of course for the industry that I have just spoken about.

So what this legislation does, if you look at clause 24, is allow the minister to issue any number of licences effectively – if I just turn to that. Clause 24 inserts a section that says:

The Minister is to determine from time to time the number of wagering and betting licences that may be issued.

Although it is 29 pages long, the bill otherwise largely incorporates changes to the principal act, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, literally to change the wording in multiple clauses from 'the wagering and betting licence' to 'a wagering and betting licence', recognising the possibility that there will be more than one as under the current process.

There are a couple of other minor amendments in clause 43, recognising that in the future there may be more than one licence and that if there are changes requested by a licensee of the minister that there be a process of notification to any other licensees. For example, as I said, clause 43 inserts a new section that ensures that if an amendment to a licence is requested by a licensee and it is likely to have an impact on the other licensee or licensees, then there are requirements for them to notify those licensees and also for a right of reply from those licensees. They are, I guess, amendments consequential to the fact that we are moving from a monopoly situation to one where there may well be competition. That is the guts of the bill, without going to the 'no less favourable' treatment of the racing industry, which I will come to in a moment.

The question I have, with respect to the prospect now of the minister issuing multiple licences, is: what exactly will happen with that? We see in the second-reading speech that the minister refers to the possibility of a 20-year licence being issued but with an exclusivity period of only 10 years, after which there might be additional licences. But it is not clear, at least from the bill or from the public statements of the government so far, how that process will actually come about.

Now, the intention of this legislation – again, as indicated in the second-reading speech – is to try and maximise the value of the awarding of licences to both the state of Victoria and to the Victorian racing industry. We do not oppose that idea – the notion that in today's changed world for wagering and betting you might look at different models I think is worth pursuing – but it is unclear from what the government has said so far what exactly that involves. Once this legislation has passed, is it providing further advice to potential bidders on what it is they might like to include? Is that, for example, straight competition between two licensees in the same venues, the same locations, the same retail areas? Is it perhaps a geographic split of the state, whereby there might be one licence for the eastern half of the state and one for the western half of the state, or for metropolitan Melbourne and for regional Victoria? That is not clear. It may well be that the government has provided that sort of information to the potential bidders that are currently involved in a confidential process, but it is certainly not clear to the general public and to those of us here in the chamber as to what in fact will happen.

I assume that that is something that will need to happen – that the government will have to provide some further advice – because while we would like bidders to innovate, clearly a bidder cannot put forward a bid that says 'Well, we only want the metropolitan area' if that does not equate to what the government's intentions are and to what other bidders might put forward. So it is a little bit unclear and it would be useful if government members decided to respond to that question and give us some clarity on how the process will evolve, because there are significant risks in this process and there is a risk that it still could go pear-shaped. I will again come to that in a little bit.

I would like to now turn to the 'no less favourable' issue, which is listed in the bill under clause 29 and removes what is known as the 'no less favourable' treatment for the Victorian racing industry. I will go back a step: particularly at the moment there is a joint venture agreement between Tabcorp as the current holder and the Victorian racing industry. The proceeds from gambling – of wagering and betting – are shared between the operator – the licensee – and the Victorian racing industry, that is, the thoroughbreds, the harness racers and the greyhounds. The act as it stands now basically says that when issuing a new licence, there must be 'no less favourable' outcomes for the Victorian racing industry. Now, this bill removes that clause both for the licence but also for any temporary licences that may be issued – unlikely, but that is there in the act. It does so in a circumstance – as I indicated, the world has changed significantly since 2011, when the current licence was issued – where it ensures that we can go ahead with a competitive process and other arrangements are going to be put in place for the Victorian racing industry.

This is something that when you are first reading it, if you are a supporter of the industry, and you see that the words 'no less favourable' are going to be removed, you will be alarmed. This is being dealt with, though. The industry, as I understand and I am informed, is comfortable with this arrangement, because in return and in recognition of the fact that online and corporate companies have come in and are now active in the market there will be an increase in the point-of-consumption tax. The point-of-

consumption tax was introduced in 2019, and the government intends through the other legislation this week to increase that from 10 per cent to 15 per cent.

I will be very careful here not to anticipate debate on the forthcoming Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, but it is a little bit difficult not to, because the two bills are interrelated. As I said, removing the ‘no less favourable treatment for the industry’ clause is offset and compensated for by the fact that the government intends to increase the POCT, the point-of-consumption tax, from 10 per cent to 15 per cent, and of that 5 per cent increase, 4 per cent will be going to the racing industry directly and 1 per cent back to government coffers. So the racing industry will have 7.5 per cent of the POCT in total, and that is intended to offset the loss of the ‘no less favourable treatment’ and the expectation that this tendering process for the wagering and betting licence will achieve significantly less than it did previously and less going forward as we have these changed circumstances.

That is also, we understand, subject to an MOU between the government and the racing industry, but that is something that we do not know anything about. Neither the Parliament nor the Victorian public has any understanding yet of what is in that MOU. We have heard that the industry is satisfied that it will be getting vaguely equivalent funding going forward under the new arrangements. We were told in the briefing that there is about \$119 million, \$120 million expected to go to the industry per annum over the next four years as a result of the increase in the POCT. There are some other arrangements in this MOU, we understand, that will ensure the industry is ultimately no worse off – or not dramatically worse off. The figure that we have heard is that there is effectively a guarantee from the government that the industry will have at least 90 per cent of what it previously had, yet we have not heard anything from the government. I think the government probably should actually provide some clarity on what that arrangement is. We are comforted by the noises from the racing industry that they are satisfied with the new arrangements, but there is nothing on the record that I am aware of from the government to give everyone comfort that both the industry and the Victorian taxpayer will be looked after. We suspect that perhaps the 1 per cent that the Treasurer will pocket from the increase in POCT this time around may well in fact end up going to the industry to satisfy the MOU that the government has made with the Victorian racing industry.

It would be good to get some clarity on that. I think it is something that taxpayers, punters and participants in the industry should know. I am not suggesting there should be full commercial disclosure given that there are issues of confidentiality here, but we do need to have a bit more clarity on what the industry will be likely getting, given future projections, and how the government will ensure that it is as close as possible to no worse off and able to adapt to the changing environment.

It is true too that this is likely to be a positive deal for the industry, and I think my colleagues will probably have more to say about it than me, but it is important to note that this will be a long-term deal. I expect that there will probably be a 10-year licence and that that provides some certainty to the industry, and the industry needs to ensure that it does use those funds wisely. It should not be under any illusion that it can come back to the taxpayer in future for additional money. That is something that will be pretty much set by this legislation and that coming up in the next day or two.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Members*

#### **Minister for Mental Health**

#### *Absence*

**Daniel ANDREWS** (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:01): I rise to inform the house that the Minister for Mental Health is absent from question time today. Questions for the portfolios of mental health and ambulance services will be answered by the Minister for Health, and questions for the portfolio of treaty and First Peoples will be answered by the Minister for Education.



*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Melbourne Airport rail link**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Federal funding for Melbourne Airport rail is now at risk of being cut. Why has the minister caved in to federal Labor and not fought harder for Victoria's fair share?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:02): For the last eight years the Andrews Labor government has been consistent. It does not matter whether it was a federal Labor government or a federal Liberal–National government. It does not matter if it was any one of the eight or nine different federal Liberal–National infrastructure ministers that I had to deal with, as it was a revolving door – it was Barnaby, then it was Darren, then it was Warren, then it was Jamie, then it was Paul –

**David Southwick**: On a point of order, the minister is debating the question. I ask you to bring her back to answering the question: why has the minister caved in to federal Labor? It is a simple question.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! There is no point of order. The minister was being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: That was exactly the point that I was making. We have been consistent. I think with any federal infrastructure minister that I have dealt with over the past 8½ years and any federal member of the Liberal–National government we have been constant and consistent and we have put Victoria's case consistently. The Treasurer remembers well that period of time between 2014 and 2018 when 10 per cent of the federal infrastructure allocation came to Victoria – 10 per cent, thanks to your mate and your mates in Canberra. And what was the consequence of that? Well, there was the investment we have made in the Metro Tunnel – the Metro Tunnel that is on schedule to be delivered a full year ahead of schedule, with test trains running towards the end of this year. Not one single dollar of federal infrastructure money has gone into that project.

**David Southwick**: On a point of order, the minister is not being relevant. This is all about airport rail and the government canning airport rail. I ask you to bring the minister back to the question: why isn't Victoria getting its fair share when it comes to airport rail?

**The SPEAKER**: Order! A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was being relevant to the question. I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: To remind the member for Caulfield, his question went to the specifics of a project – and I will get to that project – but it also went to a fair share of infrastructure funding from Canberra. We could not have been clearer over the past 8½ years as to how we have pushed consistently and constantly for Victoria to get a fair share of infrastructure projects. The Metro Tunnel project that I referred to, if that was the Sydney Metro Tunnel project, it would have received 50–50 funding from the former federal Liberal–National government. Indeed whilst we were advocating to the former federal Liberal government for funding for a project for the airport rail, the then former federal Liberal–National government was busy funding a rail line to a second airport that had not been built yet in New South Wales.

**David Southwick**: On a point of order, Speaker, again the minister is clearly debating the question. This is not about the past and Liberal governments; this is about the current Labor government, what the Labor government is doing and the minister standing up for our fair share. The minister is not being relevant, and she is debating the question.

**The SPEAKER**: Order! The question related to federal government infrastructure funding. The minister is being relevant to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Speaker, I will end on this point. Not once in the eight years that the Liberal–National government were in office did I get a question about our fair share of infrastructure funding from those opposite when it was their mates in Canberra dudding Victorians on their fair share.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:06): Why has the minister supported the federal Labor government’s prioritising of the Cheltenham to Box Hill line over the Melbourne Airport rail project?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:07): Just so the member is clear, that is the Suburban Rail Loop you are referring to – the project that those opposite have told the Victorian community repeatedly that they would scrap. I note that just yesterday the Leader of the Opposition – I am sure the member for Glen Waverley might be interested in this; the member for Ringwood, if he was here, would be interested in this; and the member for Box Hill and the member for Clarinda – committed once again to that great Liberal policy to scrap the Suburban Rail Loop. You absolutely committed to scrapping the suburban – you cannot say one thing on Neil Mitchell and another thing in here.

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, again the minister is debating the question. Question time is not the time to attack the opposition. I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question, particularly about airport rail and why that has been canned at the expense of the Cheltenham to Box Hill line.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant, but I do ask her to cease attacks on the opposition.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Just to conclude, the federal government have been clear in the terms of the review that they have commissioned that their election commitments are not included as part of that review and importantly they have committed that the funding will remain in Victoria.

#### **Ministers statements: energy policy**

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:08): I am proud to update the house on this government’s world-leading emissions reduction targets. Today we officially set Victoria’s 2035 interim targets to slash our emissions by 75 to 80 per cent and we are the first jurisdiction in Australia to set a 2035 emissions target. By meeting this target, our economy will be more than \$63 billion better off. We will also create tens of thousands of jobs and deliver lower energy prices for Victoria.

Since coming to government in 2014 we have cut emissions by more than any other state in the country, smashing our 2020 target, and we are not slowing down. In fact we are decarbonising at one of the fastest rates in the world and we are bringing forward net zero to 2045. We will continue to drive down emissions because our targets are backed by strong action across all sectors of our economy.

We have already tripled the amount of energy that comes from renewable sources and by 2035 we will make 95 per cent of our energy renewable, accelerated by us bringing back the SEC. And we are cutting transport emissions by helping Victorians switch to zero-emission vehicles and to carbonising public transport. We are planting millions of trees to store carbon and we are helping our farmers to reduce their emissions, both of which are protecting our environment and protecting of course our vital agricultural exports. We are driving the creation of a circular economy, slashing our waste emissions.

There are some who simply want to spurt out words that make no real difference. They think that is a good job well done – a good job well done. Then there are those who do nothing or worse still, want to go nuclear, which will only put our environment at risk and send our power bills skyrocketing. I ask: why would anyone want to do that? Not this government – we are getting on with it. Victorians are absolutely behind us: big ambition – (*Time expired*)

**Transport infrastructure projects**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:10): My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Minister, how many Victorian transport infrastructure projects have recorded cost blowouts since the 2022–23 state budget was released in May last year?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:11): As the member knows full well, Tuesday 23 May has been set aside for some time in the parliamentary calendar to be the day that the state budget is handed down. As the member knows full well also, in-between the budget that was handed down in May of last year and this budget, there have been regular budget updates – the midyear budget update. There was a pre-election budget update that was provided as well, which provides details in a full and transparent way about the investment that we are making in transport infrastructure projects. That investment is going into projects like the West Gate Tunnel, the Metro Tunnel and the North East Link, all projects that have been long talked about but not delivered. Indeed, I remember well projects like Avalon rail, Doncaster rail and Rowville rail that were long promised by those opposite but never, ever –

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is not being relevant. We have asked for a number, a simple number: how many projects have blown out under the minister’s watch? How many? What is the number? Just give us that number and then you can sit down.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister was being relevant. The question related to budgets for transport infrastructure. I ask the minister to return to the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was saying, the state budget is being handed down on Tuesday of next week. The Treasurer will be providing the budget to the house. That will have the budget papers that, in the usual way, provide for an update on the government’s entire expenditure, and that will include the investment that we are making in our infrastructure program that is supporting tens of thousands of Victorians right now on projects around the state, where Victorians have got confidence that they have got a pay packet that they can take home because there is a transport infrastructure pipeline. Unlike those opposite, who once again just yesterday have committed to cut into this program as a consequence of the Leader of the Opposition’s –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister was asked for the number of projects that have blown out. I understand why the minister would be embarrassed and would not want to give the number, but that was the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I rule the point of order out of order, and I ask the minister to return to answering the question. The minister has completed her answer.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:14): Minister, by how much has the cost of the North East Link Project blown out over the past 12 months?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Manager of Opposition Business can leave the chamber for 1 hour. The member for Bentleigh can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

**Members for Brighton and Bentleigh withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:15): Well, there goes 18–11. There he goes. Off he goes. You are down to 18 now. Your numbers man has left the building.

As I have just indicated in the substantive question, the budget will update in the usual way. The investment the Andrews Labor government is making in transport, in education, in health, in mental health, in investment in prevention of family violence –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

**Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN:** and the budget papers will be tabled in this place next Tuesday.

**Ministers statements: transport emissions**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (14:15): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is tackling transport emissions, because we know transport emissions are a critical element of tackling climate change. We know they are the second and fastest growing source of emissions, and three-quarters of our road transport is a major source of transport emissions. Victorians know our pathway to net zero is tackling transport emissions right across our public transport network and right across our road network.

With the Premier and the member for Ivanhoe recently I visited the depot out in Ivanhoe, Ventura’s bus depot, and saw firsthand the 26 electric buses being rolled out – and with the member for Sunbury, who is not here. The member for Footscray is here, and she knows what we are doing in Melbourne’s western suburbs. We are making Melbourne’s western suburbs the home of electric buses. The member for Kororoit, the member for Laverton, the member for Footscray, as I have said, and the member for Williamstown right here are also doing it.

Now, unfortunately only one-half of the Bayside city rollers is here – there he is, the member for Caulfield – because we are rolling out electric buses in their electorates too because we know how important they are right across the network. We know they struggle when it comes to tackling climate change. We know they struggle to actually believe in climate change.

**A member:** I think your colleagues believe in change.

**Ben CARROLL:** Oh, well. I should not take interjections. We know they cannot fill up a full coach, but we know 11 will fit in a minibus – and guess what, we are rolling out electric minibuses. And guess what, there is only one way they are going, and they are going to throw the Leader of the Opposition under it very soon. I have just been given a thumbs up – you are in trouble, mate.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Malvern is warned.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Eltham can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

**Member for Eltham withdrew from chamber.**

**Commonwealth Games**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (14:18): My question is for the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery. The federal budget includes a commitment of around \$3.5 billion for the 2032 Brisbane Olympics. How much did the federal government commit to Victoria for the 2026 Commonwealth Games?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:18): I am delighted to talk about the opportunity that Victoria has to be a host of the 2026 Commonwealth Games and regional

Victoria has to be home for the 2026 Commonwealth Games. In terms of the opportunities, I was with the member for Ripon just last Tuesday when we had a great opportunity to invest in new sporting infrastructure facilities for that growing country community of Miners Rest, and gee, they are glad to have a Labor member in Ripon. Gee, they love you in Miners Rest, member for Ripon. They were just so pleased to hear about the investment that is being made in Miners Rest as a consequence –

**Paul Edbrooke:** 15–love. Foot fault.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Frankston, I think you know what I am going to say. You can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

**Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.**

**Sam Groth:** On a point of order, Speaker, I ask you to bring the minister back to the question. She is not being relevant. It is a simple question based on how much funding was allocated to the 2026 Commonwealth Games.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The minister was being relevant in that the question referred to the Commonwealth Games and budgets. I ask the minister to answer the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Thank you, Speaker. I was very deliberately referring to the investment that we are making in Miners Rest as a consequence of hosting the Commonwealth Games and as a consequence of investing in the upgrade to Eureka Stadium, which my colleagues in Ballarat know very well and are greatly supportive of. This is one of the key reasons why we grabbed with both hands the opportunity to have regional Victoria as the home of the games, because of the investment that is going to be made. And yes, we have been having conversations with the federal government about their partnership –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order!

**Jacinta ALLAN:** There is a lot of hot air and agitation over here, but not a lot of it is based in any fact or indeed any substance. There is not a lot of substance that is going on over here.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair!

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I will not take up the interjection, but I was exactly going to go to the federal government's budget paper. I think it was budget paper no. 1, if my memory serves me correctly, it is page 71, but I am happy to correct the record, where they explicitly make a reference to the Victorian 2026 Commonwealth Games and how they are continuing to work with the Victorian government, because here is –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Nationals is warned. Minister, through the Chair.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I think they are just glad they have got no party room meetings this week. This is where we are going to continue to work with the Commonwealth government. And as the Premier referred to last week, there are more budgets between now and March 2026. There are more opportunities to talk about investment partnerships with the federal government because that is how we operate – whatever government is in power in Canberra, we have consistently and constantly advocated for Victoria to get a fair share of infrastructure funding, no matter what the policy area, and that is the approach we will continue to take.

**Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:22):** Can the minister guarantee that the \$2.6 billion of Victorian funding for the Commonwealth Games is still available?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Would those on my left like the minister to answer the question? I would ask you to come to order.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:23): We have talked a bit this afternoon about budget and budget day and budget papers. I know he was not here at the time, but I am happy to have delivered to the member for Nepean a copy of last May’s budget papers and Labor’s financial statement that clearly indicates that we are committed to delivering the Commonwealth Games with that \$2.6 billion of investment. I will say this: unlike particularly the National Party, when it comes to regional Victoria, we will deliver sports, not rorts.

**Ministers statements: senior secondary education**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:23): I rise to update the house on this government’s investment in education, very proudly. Not only are we reforming climate change action but we are also reforming our senior secondary education to create the leaders of the future. And in this Education Week we are celebrating how the new One VCE is transforming how we support the passions and aspirations of future pathways of our young people to get jobs in tech, clean energy and sustainability.

Whether students study VCE, VCE vocational major or VET pathways, there are meaningful pathways into careers that we know kids are very passionate about. We know that bringing back the State Electricity Commission will require us to find and train the next generation of tradespeople; whether that is maintenance workers, electricians, painters, welders, mechanics or tech specialists, we know we are going to need them. And that is why from 2024 we are introducing a new clean energy pathway into our VCE vocational major. This is a popular topic for students; when I go to schools or techs I am always approached by students about this. Additionally, 10,000 senior secondary school students will get an opportunity to do some work experience in the clean energy sector and make a tangible contribution to reducing emissions.

Now, I know those opposite would rather go nuclear with their policies – I am not quite sure if that is a description of their policies or the actions of their party rooms – but a clean energy future has been a feature of my recent visits to the Trades Fit expo, an expo for girls in trades, and the Morwell tech school, and I have seen firsthand students getting involved in hydrogen, in solar panels and in renewables. I know that our teachers and our VET educators are doing what they can to support students and encourage them in their future careers in clean energy.

**Federal health funding**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:26): My question is to the Minister for Health. Last week’s federal Labor budget slashed \$810 million from Victorian health services next year. Why has the minister caved in to federal Labor and not fought harder for Victoria’s fair share of health funding?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:26): I really welcome this question because it provides an opportunity to outline to those on the other side of the house the way in which the federal budget works and the way in which indeed the funding that was provided to Victoria for COVID worked. If the member had actually read the budget papers properly and had bothered to understand the detail, she would know that there was an allocation for COVID that had been provided and that in fact it had already been determined by the previous Liberal government that it would be taken out of state governments’ funding.

There are a couple of things that I would like to say in relation to this. One is that we welcome the federal government’s investment in health. For the first time in almost a decade we have a government that wants to partner with us, a government that actually wants to work to fix the great problem of our

time, which is primary health care – Medicare. Medicare has been completely broken, and this is after almost a decade of neglect. Not once did the member get up and ask a question about Medicare – not once – and yet what we saw from the previous Liberal government was year on year of neglect, to the point where our government has had to lean in to a federal government responsibility. We have been pleased and proud to do that with the establishment of 25 priority primary care centres, but we make this point: primary care, Medicare, is and always has been a federal government responsibility. The promise of Medicare is that it is free, fast and local, and as a government we will continue to advocate to the federal government for more.

Let me make this point: we have got a reform agenda when it comes to our healthcare system. We stand by our healthcare workers. We work with them, not against them like those on the other side did. We will never go to war with our healthcare workers, and we will continue to fight for more funding for our hospitals. The current funding agreement is one that we will continue to advocate to change because we want to see a 50–50 funding agreement for health care. But again, and I will finish on this note: not once did we get a question when the Liberals were in power and they neglected Medicare. It has been broken in this state, and we will work with the –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, it is not a time for the minister to attack the opposition. Perhaps she can speak more to the question, which is explaining why the \$810 million cut from their federal Labor mates is okay for –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I have heard the point of order. The minister has concluded her answer.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:29): \$810 million represents 139,000 elective surgery cases, which would clear the backlog due to COVID closures. What is the minister going to do to reverse this savage cut by federal Labor to Victorian health funding?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:30): I have made the point before and I will make it again, because it seems that the member for Lowan is having difficulty in understanding. The funding was for COVID specifically, and it was announced by the former Liberal government that it would be ending – the former Liberal government, who neglected their key responsibility, which was primary care. Our government is investing in primary care. What is more, we have a \$1.5 billion COVID catch-up plan when it comes to dealing with planned surgery. We have got \$12 billion which we are delivering as part of our pandemic repair plan, and under our government we will work with our healthcare workers to –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was specific: what is the minister going to do to reverse the savage cut of \$810 million – 139,000 elective surgery cases?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Lowan, there is no point of order. Order! Leader of the Opposition! Member for Lowan, a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Minister for Health has concluded her answer.

#### **Ministers statements: Big Housing Build**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (14:31): We all know that the Andrews Labor government’s \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build is delivering more than 12,000 social and affordable homes for Victorians right across our state. We know that every Victorian deserves the dignity and security of a home. That is why we are making the biggest investment –

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

**Colin BROOKS:** in social housing in the history of our state. Don't worry, I am coming to you.

This calendar year we are unveiling more than 3000 new social homes, the most ever delivered in a single year. But the Big Housing Build is delivering so much more than a roof over people's heads. It is also delivering on the Andrews Labor government's emissions reduction targets. All the new homes under the Big Housing Build will meet a minimum 7-star rating under the nationwide house energy rating scheme, NatHERS. It does not matter what postcode you live in, the Big Housing Build is delivering the same modern and energy-efficient homes right across the state. These brand new homes will be cool in summer and warm in winter and, critically, will ensure that lower bills are available for social housing renters. You can see the standards firsthand when you visit any of the 7600 homes completed or under construction.

Over the last few months I have joined local members of Parliament visiting some of our Big Housing Build social housing projects, and what we see is incredibly impressive. Just last week I joined the member for Ashwood and the Minister for Planning at the brand new Markham estate in Ashburton – 178 social and affordable homes, just another one of the social housing developments opposed by the Greens and the Liberals. It is not just in Canberra that the Liberals and the Greens oppose more social housing. There have been no questions today about housing funding coming from Canberra. That is because the Liberals and the Nationals and the Greens are blocking more funding from the federal government for social housing here in Victoria. I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that he should walk straight out of the chamber, get on the phone, ring Peter Dutton, stand up to Peter Dutton and deliver more social and affordable housing for Victoria.

#### **Federal health funding**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:33): My question is to the Minister for Medical Research. Will Victorian children miss out on vital brain cancer treatment because the Andrews Labor government has failed to secure federal government funding for its promised \$400 million proton beam therapy facility in Parkville?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:34): Once again I welcome the question as it relates to medical research here in the state of Victoria. I had the great opportunity to present to the American Chamber of Commerce yesterday about our investments in research. Of course Melbourne, Victoria, under our Andrews Labor government is one of the top three leading states when it comes to the delivery of medical research. We have many significant research institutes. We have some of the best universities in the world. We have industry. The Premier and I were recently at the sod turn for the establishment of the Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery.

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was specific to the proton beam therapy facility in Parkville. I ask you to bring the minister back to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, I ask you to come back to the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Thank you, Speaker. The member has asked me a question in relation to medical research, but I might also say it is our government that took to the people of Victoria a commitment to deliver eight additional PET scanners here in Victoria, and we will deliver, because the substance of the member's question goes to medical technology. Indeed no government has invested more in medical technology, be that in our precinct in Parkville or of course Clayton, and the south-east of Melbourne is also –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, this question is specific to the \$400 million proton beam therapy facility in Parkville. We have heard over the table that they do not recall what that project is all about. Can you please ask the minister to take the question on notice if she is unaware of what this very important facility would deliver for Victorian –



**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant to the question, particularly based on the point of order, and I ask her to come back to answering the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Again, thank you very much, Speaker, for your guidance there. Our government has a range of investments in medical technology. Indeed we are constantly talking to our healthcare services and to the research institutes about the technologies that they need. The member may not know this, but there are a range of licences that are required when making investments into significant technology such as the proton beam.

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:37):** Why did the Andrews government fail Victorian children by not submitting a business case on time and therefore losing federal funding to South Australia?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:38):** I thank the member for her supplementary question. I make the point that our government will always fight for Victoria's fair share of funding, and indeed we are very proud of the funding that we attract, because everyone knows that Melbourne, Victoria, is the home of world-leading medical research and technology.

**Ministers statements: energy policy**

**Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:38):** I am delighted to rise to add to the comments made by the Minister for Climate Action earlier on. Of course today marks the formalisation of our emissions reduction targets from 75 to 80 per cent. We have made those official. They are now not merely commitments but they are, through our nation-leading climate change legislation, on the books for everyone to see. It is about turning climate change as a challenge into an opportunity for the future by bringing back the SEC – a fundamental recognition that there is a better way than privatising our essential services.

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Honestly! He is back on this again.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition! Premier, through the Chair.

**A member:** Nuclear fission.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Indeed. Radioactive over here. No-one is surprised you support nuclear, John. You are, after all, toxic, absolutely toxic – toxic, radioactive.

But I digress, Speaker. There is a billion dollars worth of investment, as we indicated prior to the election, to bring back the SEC and 59,000 jobs. We are investing not just in reducing emissions as a challenge – of course it is a global challenge – but we are investing and turning it into an opportunity, whether that be through 6.3 gigawatts of storage by 2035, 100 neighbourhood batteries –

**Jacinta Allan:** 100.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** Yes, 100. Not 19, not 11 – 100 neighbourhood batteries.

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** They are a lot more solid than your numbers, mate, let me assure you of that. Keep the interjections coming; you are doing so well, as all your colleagues look at their feet. I would not be bragging or boasting or shouting about the fact that one in three cannot stand you.

**Ryan Smith:** On a point of order, Speaker, I just want to raise the issue of non-adherence to the sessional orders in relation to constituency questions. I asked a question of the Minister for Education on 7 March. It was due on 6 April. It is question 58. It has not been answered yet. I would appreciate your assistance in having that answer brought to me.

**The SPEAKER:** It will be followed up.

*Constituency questions***Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:41): (140) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Last night two people were tragically killed in a horror crash on North Road, Caulfield South, in my electorate. It was reported that a black BMW was travelling along North Road at about 10:45 pm when it hit a sedan with such force that it caused the sedan to roll. Both occupants died at the scene, and my thoughts are with their loved ones. I have spoken to a shaken-up first responder who said that speeding along North Road has been a problem for a very, very long time. It is one of those things where the best way to save lives is to have a camera that gets people to slow down. I would implore people to slow down and to do the right thing. In November 2021 I wrote to the minister and laid on the table a petition on behalf of concerned Gardenvale Primary School parents along with a number of other constituents calling for road safety. We must get road safety, and we must get it now.

**Northcote electorate**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (14:43): (141) My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and I ask for information on the measures the Andrews Labor government is taking to ensure our extensive rental reforms are well understood amongst renters, landlords and property managers. As you know, Speaker, this government has a proud record of real reform in the rental space, underpinned by our fundamental view that every tenant should feel safe, secure and comfortable in their home. Over 130 reforms have meant that renters now have significantly more protection when it comes to things like evictions, rent increases and bonds. Simple things like being able to hang a picture, fix furniture to walls to make them child safe, plant a veggie garden or have a pet are already making a big difference in people's lives. Our minimum standards are ensuring everything from having locks on the doors and windows that can open to hot water and a working heater. My community is home to a large proportion of renters. One of them recently contacted me seeking help when his landlord had not provided any heating and claimed they did not have to. My office helped him to understand his rights and his landlord's obligations. We have all heard rental horror stories – mould, dodgy appliances, no windows – and that is why we introduced these reforms.

**Ovens Valley electorate**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:44): (142) My question is to the Minister for Environment on behalf of Mr Robin Brewer of Koonoomoo. However, this issue can be attributed to many others in the Cobram region. Mr Brewer has made multiple formal complaints to the EPA at Wangaratta regarding excessive use of scare guns at Koonoomoo – in fact four times since 2022 he has made those formal complaints. Mr Brewer requests a response urgently and to be briefed on where his complaint is currently at. The use of multiple illegal scare guns is unacceptable, and it is vital that he is responded to urgently because the next fruit season is just around the corner.

**Melton electorate**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (14:44): (143) My question is for the Minister for Veterans, Minister Suleyman. The Andrews Labor government committed to introducing the Victorian Veterans Card in July this year, the first of its kind in Australia, which will be a \$37 million investment in the veterans community. Can the minister please outline to my constituents who will be eligible for the card and how they apply? I recently had the opportunity to catch up with the minister and discuss the important contributions of our state's veterans. Victoria is home to more than 100,000 veterans, who have given so much for Victoria and Australia. I regularly meet with our veterans and veteran organisations throughout my electorate and at community places like the Melton RSL, and they have told me they would like to learn more about the Victorian Veterans Card and how they can apply. Veterans' contributions do not end when they leave the defence force, and this government recognises the service of our brave veterans and delivers the support they deserve. I know the Victorian Veterans Card is just

one of the many ways our government is showing our gratitude to those who have put on our nation's uniform and served and given so much. I would ask the minister to respond.

**Warrandyte electorate**

**Ryan SMITH** (Warrandyte) (14:45): (144) My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning. Peter Collins of Doncaster East has been raising concerns about the lack of support from the Victorian Building Authority and Cladding Safety Victoria for several years now. Mr Collins's building has a large amount of combustible cladding plus multiple roofing defects causing mould growth, leaving the building's owners with soaring repair costs and general safety concerns. The fact that the building's original builder has died obviously has left very little room for the owners to receive adequate compensation for repair work. Mr Collins has been fighting on the other residents' behalf, raising this issue successfully in the media, but has received zero response or support from the VBA or CSV. This lack of assistance from the VBA and CSV has caused a great deal of stress and anxiety for the building's tenants, especially the many elderly who live there. I ask the minister: considering the monumental failings of the VBA, will the minister launch an immediate investigation into the VBA and the CSV through the form of either a royal commission or an independent judicial inquiry; and if not, could she please let me and Mr Collins know why not?

**Preston electorate**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (14:46): (145) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my question is: what measures are being undertaken by the Andrews Labor government in collaboration with local councils to increase awareness of safe driving behaviours around our schools? In recent conversations with principals around the Preston and Reservoir area we have heard about some unfortunate driver behaviour. Most people are very good, but of course we have heard about people speeding near schools, and we have heard about some parents who choose to ignore the road rules or ignore the school's instructions when dropping off or picking up their children from school. As we approach Walk Safely to School Day this Friday I would like to thank those principals and teachers who get out in front of the school to direct traffic and ensure that their students get to school safely. Of course our road infrastructure and our rules are important for our road safety, but driver behaviour is also a factor, and we look forward to the minister's response.

**Brunswick electorate**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (14:47): (146) My constituency question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Rental vacancy rates are at an all-time low in Victoria, and some landlords are exploiting the situation by jacking up the rents to the point where some of my constituents are genuinely concerned that they may not be able to afford somewhere to live. But in my electorate there are more places listed for short-stay tourist accommodation as Airbnbs than there are places listed for rent, and some of these short-stay accommodations can sit idle for long periods, such that some cities around the world are now regulating short-stay accommodation to ensure an adequate supply of rental properties. So the question for the Minister for Consumer Affairs is: will the government now regulate short-stay accommodation so that my constituents can have somewhere to live and so that we can free up some these properties?

**Ashwood electorate**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (14:48): (147) My constituency question is for the Minister for Equality in the other place, and I ask: how is the Andrews government promoting acceptance and validity of identity to all my constituents of Ashwood? Recently we have seen some shameful scenes in Monash City Council of abuse, childish theatrics, unfounded criminal allegations and threats of violence and harassment, none of which have any place in Monash, Ashwood, Victoria or indeed this country. I am all for us having debate with different views regardless of how wrong or hurtful I may think those views may be, and I will do my best to respect someone's right to have them, but if you stoop to the shameful actions we saw at Monash council – if you have swapped constructive debate

for the worst of mob mentality – then I have stopped listening. You should get in the bin, and those people should know better. To the Monash mayor and councillors, CEO and staff and our wider community, I am sorry that you had to put up with that. Every Victorian has the right to be respected and accepted for being who they are. We must continue to stand for inclusion.

#### **Morwell electorate**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (14:49): (148) My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, has a high-density public housing project been signed off by the Andrews government and the developer without the knowledge of local council and residents in the Traralgon Dunbar Road precinct? Residents en masse have raised concerns over the proposed 52-dwelling development, citing a range of real and valid concerns that will impact their day-to-day lives if the build goes ahead. Residents acknowledge the need for more public housing in the Latrobe Valley but have concerns about the alleged secret deal to deliver high-density public housing to this particular site. From traffic management in the already congested area, which comes to a standstill at school drop-off and pick-up times, to the impact on our medical and emergency services, which are already near impossible to access, the residents rightly ask: Minister, what has the Andrews government agreed to behind closed doors and without proper consultation?

#### **Bellarine electorate**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (14:50): (149) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, could you please investigate what could be done to clean up the rubbish along the side of Murradoc Road between Drysdale and St Leonards? St Leonards is a beautiful coastal town on the Bellarine. Like all towns on the Bellarine, St Leonards residents are rightly proud of their town's unique charm and character, but local residents and the St Leonards Progress Association have rightly pointed out in correspondence to me that the considerable amount of rubbish alongside the verge of Murradoc Road poses a risk of ending up in our bays and is also problematic for our farmland and our farmers. It is a blatant eyesore. I proudly stand with my community in wanting to see our beautiful towns kept clean for our residents and our visitors that come to experience the Bellarine. I ask the minister to investigate what can be done to improve the cleanliness of this stretch of Murradoc Road.

### ***Bills***

#### **Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (14:51): Before the break I was speaking on the 'no less favourable treatment to the industry' requirement. I now want to move on to an issue that is more pertinent to the wagering and betting licence, and that is the issue of the intellectual property held by the joint venture – that is, Tabcorp and the Victorian racing industry – in relation to the current licence. There is a dispute, as I understand, within the industry as to who in fact owns some very commercially valuable IP, and that is effectively the data of many thousands of customers that have been –

**Danny Pearson:** You always were a big data guy.

**Danny O'BRIEN:** Not like the minister at the table, the Minister for Government Services; I am sorry. But this data is a significant part of the bid. Basically there are a whole lot of customer details that currently sit with Tabcorp and the joint venture, and there is debate as to whether that data should go forward.

Clearly Tabcorp has one view; potential bids have another. What I want to raise here, and we certainly are not taking a view either way, is this is likely a technical and legal issue in respect to the intellectual property rights and who owns what – there are potentially privacy issues – but nonetheless it is quite fundamental, in our view, to the awarding of a new licence. I can go to a report in the *Australian* of

16 February this year by John Stensholt. The headline is ‘Tabcorp’s rivals cry foul over customer data rights in Victorian betting licence process’. The introduction says:

Tabcorp is in the box seat to retain its exclusive Victorian wagering licence, potentially at a company-friendly price, as doubts emerge about the bidding process due to question marks about customer data ownership.

It goes on to say:

Without access to a customer database – which Tabcorp claim it owns – then Tabcorp’s rivals are increasingly unlikely to join in a competitive bidding process ...

The irony, in the context of this legislation, is the intent of this bill is to increase the competition in this process and make sure that both the state of Victoria and the Victorian racing industry get a better deal. That will all be for nought if we do not have some clarity on this issue of intellectual property. There is, as I said, clearly debate as to who owns the IP. There are some questions potentially of privacy with respect to customers of Tabcorp now, and what we have seen is the government has been completely silent. I am calling for the government to provide some clarity to the public and to the market as to this situation because, as the article in the *Australian* indicates, there is a potential loss to the state of Victorian and the racing industry if this issue is not dealt with. The article goes on to say:

A lack of competitive tension for the licence could in turn put pressure on funding to Victorian racing, which is locked in a bitter battle with counterparts in NSW for public and wagering attention on their biggest race days of the year.

Tabcorp would not comment –

of course –

The Victorian government was approached for comment.

In other words they did not give one, so nothing was said. It continues:

Racing Victoria chairman Brian Kruger told Melbourne radio this week that the “longer [the bidding process] goes on and the longer we don’t have [funding] certainty, it will make investment decisions challenging for us.”

That is what this is about. This is about providing certainty. As I said, this legislation before us today is about providing increased competition in the process and ensuring that we get the best value for money for the Victorian taxpayer and for the Victorian racing industry. We on this side support the intention of that, but what we think is absolutely pertinent for the government to address is this issue of IP.

Now, I mentioned that there may well be a reduction in competition. Let us not be under any illusion: there are not 30 or 40 bidders for this licence, there is a very, very small number – perhaps three, perhaps four at best. One of those bidders I believe told the government on Friday that it is withdrawing from the process because this issue of the IP has not been addressed. I understand that if the issue of the IP is addressed and there is clarity on it, then the likelihood is that that bidder will go back into the process. But we have heard nothing from the government on this. My colleague the member for Gippsland East, who has joined me in the chamber, asked in the bill briefing about this issue and whether it would be addressed by the government before the process proceeds – before this legislation proceeds – and we got zip; we got nothing. There is no commitment for this issue of IP to be addressed. It is curious in the extreme I think to have legislation designed to increase the competitive tension in a public bidding process for a publicly allocated licence, to seek innovation, to seek a better return for the Victorian taxpayer and to seek a better return for the Victorian racing industry but, on the other hand, not actually address the issue that is fundamental to that competitive bidding process.

The government has, as I said, been silent on this. If it has got information that suggests the matter of the intellectual property and ownership can be settled one way or the other, it should be telling the market that, because at the moment it is leading to the situation where there will be less competition in the bidding process. We can have this legislation before us now – this bill before us now – that actually allows the minister to allocate two licences. There may not even be two bidders if they do not address this issue. We also do not want to see a situation where the current monopoly provider is left

holding all the cards, basically having the government over a barrel and able to submit a lower bid to get what it wants.

As I say, I am not passing any judgement on what the legal situation will be with respect to this intellectual property. We do not have access to the government's legal advice. We certainly do not have access to the potential corporate bidders' legal advice. But what I say to the government is: you should sort this out, because until you do, this legislation before us is unlikely to have any impact. It is important that we have the competitors being able to put in the best possible bid for this wagering and betting licence and that we make sure that we do get the best returns for the Victorian taxpayer and the Victorian racing industry.

The government did advise in the briefing that the government expects a decision to be made on a new bidder by the end of 2023. So the clock is ticking. We are heading towards the end of May. There is a process afoot, but the government really does need to address that issue or risk messing this up. We saw it messed up in Western Australia, where the Western Australian Labor government attempted to sell its TAB over there. It had three bidders – probably some of the same bidders that will be active here. Ultimately one pulled out at the last minute, having been awarded the licence, and the TAB is staying in public hands, contrary to what the government had intended. This is an issue that needs to be addressed, and I encourage the government to do so.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that we are not opposing this legislation, because its intent is good. I hope the Greens will not try to torpedo this bill and the other one – we will support the bill if it comes to that – and I look forward to further debate.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (15:00): In my enthusiasm to make a contribution on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 with my racing portfolio hat on as opposed to my police portfolio hat – although the two do cross paths at different times – there are a few different elements that I want to touch on.

Firstly, to draw myself across to perhaps more of the racing content of what I want to capture in my contribution today, I will just go to a couple of the amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, in particular the amendments to the licensing structure for the wagering and betting licence to permit multiple licences after the expiry of the current wagering and betting licence, which we have heard about from the lead speaker for the opposition, the member for Gippsland South; providing the minister with the discretion to determine any periods of exclusivity for future wagering and betting licences; and the removal of the 'no less favourable', NLF, requirement, which is the requirement to enable the minister to issue future wagering and betting licences without being required to determine that the licensee has entered into an NLF funding arrangement with the Victorian racing industry.

This brings me to some of the elements that I want to touch on today. The government has recognised that the current wagering and betting licensing arrangements reflect market conditions that just no longer exist. The gaming landscape has changed very significantly. Those changes, particularly over the past decade, have led to developments in technology and the associated growth of online gambling we have seen – subjects perhaps for other debates and other discussions, but all the same still matters that need to be regulated and still matters that have an impact on and input into the racing industry in particular.

As a result of those changes what we are seeing is that wagering and betting markets have become a national market and that wagering and betting licensees are subject to far greater competition from bookmakers licensed in other states and territories. However, the NLF clause has also provided vital funding and certainty for the racing industry, ensuring it gets its fair share of the funding generated from wagering on its product – a very significant product across the three codes.

Importantly, as part of the removal of that clause from the GRA, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, the government has provided a long-term commitment to and long-term certainty for the racing industry. Certainly not wanting to pre-empt the debate in relation to our other bill, the Gambling

Taxation Bill 2023, I think it is still reasonable to draw attention to some public statements that I was able to make on behalf the government on 2 May. In our media release ‘Supporting Victoria’s racing industry’ we touch on the fact that:

The Government is also removing –

which we are doing in the discussion and the debate in relation to this bill –

the “no less favourable” requirement which has required the wagering and betting licence holder to enter arrangements with the racing industry that are no less favourable than those in place under the previous licence.

Changes in the wagering market –

we just touched on. Then we go further to probably the last point I want to make, which just draws the distinction between and also the alignments of the legislation we are debating now and through this week:

The long-term certainty provided via the wagering and betting taxes is one key element of a proposed new industry funding framework supported by an MOU between industry and Government that will be delivered by the renewal of the State Wagering and Betting Licence which expires in August 2024.

That draws those elements together. We have a betting and wagering licence process dealt with by the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and I would not be surprised if the member for Gippsland East in his contribution as Shadow Minister for Racing notes there is a very strong element here that requires the engagement and involvement of and is critically important to the racing industry. In securing those agreements and that work with the racing industry and with the support and the work of my colleagues, the racing industry and its leadership, what we then want to be able to do is to start to make those legislative changes, which is in part a two-step process: the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill before us today and the further work that we will be able to do with the Gambling Taxation Bill.

Also, as I said before, we are going to be able to ensure that those wagering taxes in the other bill, which we will get to later in the week, are in line with other states and that our racing industry has a framework to ensure its long-term sustainability. I have touched on, again, how those increases in the wagering and betting tax to 15 per cent of net wagering revenue, with half of that revenue to be shared of course between the racing industry, will ensure it remains a strong and healthy industry into the future. Again, having long-term certainty for the industry will also ensure it continues to be funded from the wagering generated on its product. That is what we are doing here across those bills but in particular the two elements in the agreements with the racing industry. One relates to this bill and the removal of the ‘no less favourable’ clause, amongst other elements that are in the amendment bill, but it is the one to which I particularly wanted to speak, and then there is the funding certainty that will come further to light through the discussions and the debate we will have on the Gambling Taxation Bill.

When we talk about the racing industry as a major contributor to the state economy, there are a couple of key elements that I want to mention in relation to that: \$4.7 billion in economic activity for our state’s economy and 34,900 full-time equivalent jobs. These things are not made up; they are absolute facts. They come from a range of research, from the IER report but also on an annual figures basis. But you only need to visit regional communities to see that, and we did that just recently with the Warrnambool carnival, and we were in Ballarat just last week with many of our colleagues in relation to the work that we are doing on a range of jobs programs to support the local industry in Ballarat, which obviously has a very strong history and tradition and is a strong provider of jobs to the industry of racing.

Also right across the state what we have seen is how you can break down that \$4.7 billion to the different codes and the contributions they make: the thoroughbred industry in Victoria, some \$3.43 billion of economic activity in the state and over 25,000 full-time equivalent jobs; the harness racing industry, some \$600 million in economic activity that is generated and nearly 5000 full-time equivalent jobs locally; and Greyhound Racing Victoria and the greyhound industry, \$643 million generated in the Victorian economy and helping to sustain some 4700 full-time equivalent jobs. These are significant, and I have met those people – many of us have in our communities – who work in

these industries, who rely on these industries, and the investment we were able to make more broadly through our \$72 million Victorian Racing Industry Fund makes sure that the quality of the services and the infrastructure in rural and regional Victoria and in metropolitan Melbourne keep our participants safe and those workers safe and makes sure that we are able to provide quality facilities for those in the community who may not have a direct interest in racing but may also want to deal with using those facilities for other community activities. We have seen some really significant examples, with some 650 community organisations and not-for-profit organisations that are able to use those racing facilities, and the investment that we are able to make is really significant in making sure that racing, which is at the heart of so many rural and regional communities and of course across metropolitan Melbourne, has an opportunity to continue to play that role.

That is what really brings us right back to some of the amendments and particularly around the removal of the ‘no less favourable’ clause in this bill and why it is so critical, because again the removal of that clause will allow the wagering and betting licensing process that the minister needs to take forward over the coming months and over the coming year to take the next step forward. But in doing that we have been able to reach, as I touched on just earlier, a broader MOU and funding agreement with the racing industry that secures those 35,000 full-time equivalent jobs right across the state and also continues to secure that economic output that we get, that \$4.7 billion in economic activity that the racing industry generates across the state.

When I touched earlier on our \$72 million Victorian Racing Industry Fund, that is also money for infrastructure that creates jobs for people to do the building works, whether that is new tracks, grandstands or other infrastructure and investment that goes in, so you are seeing that contributed in the industry as well across the state.

What is really important is for members to also understand that it is not just about some technical, ‘no less favourable’ amendments in the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill, it is also about how we release opportunities to affirm again and deliver on the broader funding agreement that the government has with the racing industry to secure in advance the industry’s role in the community as an economic driver – a significant economic driver in our community – and to secure those 35,000-and-growing jobs that mean so much to families right across Victoria. There is a broad suite of amendments in this bill, and I commend them to the house.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (15:10): It is a pleasure to rise and talk on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, which allows the government to issue more than one wagering licence, as my colleague the member for Gippsland South has gone over before, and removes the requirement for the racing industry to receive ‘no less favourable’ treatment under the new wagering licence. Finally, after all this time and all sectors of the industry wanting some action on the wagering licence, we have got something on the table. We have obviously still got a long way to go, but it is pleasing to see that we actually have some movement, because many stakeholders in this field have been asking for some movement for quite some time.

We have obviously got two bills in the chamber this week – one that relates to the wagering licence, which we are talking on now, and the other that relates to the point-of-consumption tax. Obviously those two are very heavily related bills because they go to the heart of the core funding that the industry receives, and we need to look at these two bills in a similar context to provide the security that our industry needs. The issue with the other bill of course – and I will talk on this tomorrow when that bill comes into the chamber – is that not all of that rise in the point-of-consumption tax is going to the industry. The government is clipping the ticket on the way through, but we will talk a little bit more about that one tomorrow.

We have got this history: whenever we have a racing bill come into this chamber, we have a little group that sits up the back here that wears a different shade of green than I do and that tries to use these sorts of bills, which support a magnificent industry like we have in Victoria, to make commentary about how bad it is and to make commentary about how it should not exist. I just hope,



and I notice the Greens on the bottom of the speaking list here, that we do not have that sort of rhetoric when they come into the chamber.

As we heard from our lead speaker, the member for Gippsland South, there is a considerable amount of conjecture over who owns the IP in relation to the current joint venture arrangement. It was a bit disappointing that the Minister for Racing – I know it is probably not technically under his portfolio, but it goes to the heart of his portfolio – in his 10 minutes could shed no light on the issue that all stakeholders who are interested in securing the new wagering licence are keen to know about. I find it extraordinary that the government is at a stage where it is bringing in this bill today to talk about the wagering licence but we still have that very basic question unanswered about who owns the IP. When we are talking about IP, we are talking about the details of the current Tabcorp account holders. Does it belong to the current operator? Is there provision in there for it to be shared with a new licence-holder? All the stakeholders in the game here want to know the answer to that basic question, and there are some fairly strong views with some fairly strong arguments on this matter. We need a statement from the government to provide clarity not only for the current licence-holder but for those that are thinking about it and the many, many people who are account holders. They want to know that the information they have provided in setting up their accounts is indeed secure, so I hope that the government very, very shortly will have some more detail on that.

In the bill briefing – and I thank the people who provided the informative bill briefing to us – we were told that the government hopes to have the wagering licence settled well before the end of this year. Well, we are halfway through May, and we have not had a decision on the IP. I think we were told that late September or October was the goal to have the wagering licence settled. By the middle of May we should have all this detail on the table.

The current operator should know; those who are interested in securing the licence should know. It is appalling, and it is embarrassing for the government. We know the government has to maximise its income from this licence, and there are many ways that the government can do this. Obviously who owns the IP is one, but there are a number of other ways the government can do this that I really do not think it is considering in the detail. I have not heard any commentary in the second-reading speech or from the racing minister about how they are going to secure absolute maximum dollars out of the wagering licence. There are just a couple of areas I will mention in this contribution. For a start, we cannot really have all the corporates using the TAB derivatives. I know the member for Nepean puts on the odd quadrella from time to time. If he puts that on with a corporate bookmaker, they just use the TAB dividends. Nothing is paid. All the corporates use the TAB dividends on quaddies, quinellas, trifectas, trebles – on all the exotic bets ‘We’ll copy the TAB’. There is an IP issue there where the TAB is running its tote and the corporates are coming in and getting a free ride. If the corporates had to pay for that element of that, whether that is to the TAB or whether it is through another arrangement, that would derive more income from the wagering licence. We have people going into a TAB – there is one down the road in Bourke Street that I might have been into just on the very odd occasion – and you can go and sit in a TAB, watch the races on the telly and bet with a corporate bookmaker. The technology exists that if you are in a venue, you should be betting with that TAB and for there to be exclusive options to only bet with the licence-holder, whether that be the TAB or whether it be anyone else who wins the licence. That is another way that you can maximise the returns ultimately to the industry – by making some simple arrangements around exclusivity, if you like, in venues.

There are just two areas of a whole range. We went through the poker machines sale some years ago. The government completely stuffed that up and did not get the money out of that that it should have. I just hope that they explore all the options, talk to people in the industry who know what they are talking about and whoever is the winning bidder the government maximises the price that they can get. The concern we have is that they do not maximise the price. The racing minister in his speech spoke about a memorandum of understanding, or side letter or whatever it is you want to call it, saying that the government will stump up to 90 per cent of the funding. The first point I will make on that is if the government is looking at spending taxpayer dollars to top up what it maybe does not get out of

the wagering licence, that memorandum of understanding should be made public, because taxpayers would have an interest in that and they would want to know what the arrangements are – if the wagering licence falls short, that memorandum of understanding kicks in.

We will discuss the point-of-consumption tax tomorrow. The government is hanging on to 1 per cent of that, which we think equates to about \$30 million a year based on previous figures. When we talk about that, they say ‘We’ll hang onto that because the punters and the racing industry should make a contribution to schools and hospitals and roads’ and da da da. That is an insurance policy. If the wagering licence does not get the value that they would hope it is going to get, that money will be going back to the racing industry. I will be very interested to see how that plays out and how much does make it into the health and education budgets.

We also have the issue that as we transition from the current joint venture arrangement to the licensing arrangement we need to make sure that there is no shortfall in funding during that transition period. As we cross over from the joint venture to the new wagering licence we need to make sure there is not a gap or there is not a little black hole there where the industry is not funded to the current level.

Before I finish up I just want to make a point. We read this glowing media release from racing industry spokespeople when this announcement was made about what a great deal this is and how happy they are. I just make the point that when New South Wales fires its next missile in relation to prize money levels, if this is a great deal and the racing industry is happy for the government to click the ticket and take \$30 million out of the point-of-consumption tax increase, please do not come back to government and us as politicians and say ‘New South Wales has got a better deal. We need to stump up more money for our racing industry here in Victoria’.

Our government should not be involved in this petty prize money war, and I think it is incumbent on the racing industry to work really hard – it is a great industry and I am a really strong advocate for it, but they need to also work on establishing their own revenue streams to maintain their overall income, not be coming cap in hand to government when New South Wales increases its prize money. So as our lead speaker said, we have a ‘not oppose’ position on this bill and we will support it if we have a silly division from the Greens.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (15:20): I too rise to make a contribution to the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. I note at the outset that the bill will make changes to Victoria’s wagering and betting framework and that the changes are there necessarily to provide flexibility to government when awarding the next wagering and betting licence to maximise the benefit to the state through the licensing process. The bill primarily has two proposed functions – namely, to make amendments to permit the award of multiple licences with exclusivity periods determined by the responsible minister; and secondly, to remove the ‘no less favourable’ industry funding requirement for the wagering and betting licence.

The amendments in this bill are in essence technical changes, but you know it would be remiss of me not to talk about gambling harm whilst speaking to this bill. I raise that in the context of a government which sees where reform needs to be made. Indeed it sees what the operating environment is, it sees where that operating environment is going and it is not scared to make the changes and to have the sort of engagement that it needs to have with all stakeholders before it comes to forming a bill. On that scale or at that level I also see the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, which is about to be debated in this house. That enhanced taxation framework for Crown is in essence a result of the recommendations which came out of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence. I see the stakeholder engagement that is happening with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. It was only back in 2019 that there was a budget allocation by this government for four years to really attack that nub of those who were experiencing or were at the risk of experiencing gambling harm. There was some \$153 million that we can be very proud this government put towards that over four years, and it represented the nation’s largest commitment to addressing gambling harm. The foundation delivers

great communication and education strategies, commissions research and works with gamblers help agencies to deliver counselling and treatment services to people experiencing harm from gambling.

I usually give a shout-out to the Alliance for Gambling Reform as well when speaking to these bills, and this time is no exception. For those who do not know the work that the alliance does, I can tell you that they play an absolutely pivotal role in reducing gambling-related harm, and I am very proud of our government's engagement with them. Their public health approach to a problem that has grown in my community of Narre Warren South has reduced the stigma that comes with gambling addiction, and I congratulate them personally on their evidence-based information and particularly their use of story and education programs that assist many, many people in my community.

I also note that in this Parliament, the 60th Parliament, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee has launched an inquiry into the follow-up report on regulating gambling and liquor and the report on reducing the harm caused by gambling tabled by the Auditor-General in the previous Parliament. I know government members will be engaging very strongly in that committee process as that takes place.

I turn now to the substance of the bill. The bill will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to permit multiple wagering and betting licences and remove the 'no less favourable' racing industry funding requirement for awarding a wagering and betting licence. The current wagering and betting licence is held by Tabcorp and commenced on 16 August 2012. It expires on 15 August 2024. The licence permits the licensee to conduct authorised betting competitions, defined as 'wagering'; approved betting competitions; approved simulated racing and a betting exchange; and to operate the only off-course wagering and betting retail network in Victoria.

The bill amends the act to enable the minister to determine the number of wagering and betting licences and any exclusivity periods for future licensing processes. Currently the act only permits one wagering and betting licence to be in operation for the duration of the licence term. This bill removes the restriction on the options the government can consider and present to market as part of the wagering and betting licence award process. This additional flexibility will allow the state to attract greater interest in the licence and maximises the value of the licence to the state. The bill substitutes in relevant sections the words 'the wagering and betting licensee' with 'a wagering and betting licensee' and prohibits the awarding of an additional licence while the current licence is in effect.

In terms of exclusivity periods, the bill will provide the government with the discretion that it needs to determine any periods of exclusivity for the next licence or licences. Having an exclusivity period means that the government would not be able to issue another wagering and betting licence during that period, and changes to the act that add the flexibility to determine periods of exclusivity mean that the government will be better placed to maximise the value of the wagering and betting licence.

The act currently stipulates that before granting a licence application the minister must be satisfied that the applicant has entered or made a binding offer to enter into arrangements with the Victorian racing industry which are 'no less favourable' to the Victorian racing industry than the arrangements under the current wagering and betting licence. That 'no less favourable' requirement arose from the concurrent privatisation of the TAB and the introduction of gaming machines in Victoria. It addressed concerns from the racing industry that it would be disadvantaged by the privatisation of the TAB and lose out on wagering revenue previously provided to the racing industry by the Victorian TAB.

The government does recognise that the current wagering and betting licensing arrangements reflect market conditions that no longer exist, which is why this reform is necessary. There have been significant changes in the gambling environment over the last decade, and these have included developments in technology, the growth of online gambling and the removal of advertising restrictions on bookmakers who are licensed in other states and territories. As a result of these changes, the wagering and betting market has become a national market and the wagering and betting licensees are subject to far greater competition from bookmakers licensed in the other states and territories. These changes have resulted in significant changes to gambling expenditure, consumer preference, product

offerings and the types of gambling products that are available to consumers. It is necessary that this section of the act be removed as it is a significant barrier to the awarding of the next wagering and betting licence.

Further, the Victorian licensee or licensees will be subject to the strongest regulator in the country. On 1 January the government established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission to provide stronger, more focused regulation of Victoria's gambling industry. There is oversight of all gambling and gaming activities within Victoria, from pubs and clubs through to the casino.

In conclusion, the amendments that are made in this bill are important amendments as they provide for a more competitive wagering and betting licence process and greater flexibility for government in awarding the licences. Ultimately they should also lead to a much greater financial benefit for the state of Victoria, so I commend the bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (15:30): Gambling and horseracing are very intertwined. I think everybody in this place will understand that relationship, which sometimes is complex and at other times is not. We have had a licence in place for quite some period – since August 2012 – which expires on 15 August 2024. Tabcorp have had the licence here in this space for a considerable period of time. In the middle of next year it is going to expire, so the government have to have a look at what they are going to do. There has been considerable change in the gambling space over quite a period of time. It has become more and more complex with the increased number of players through the introduction of online betting that people can do very readily on their phones or on course. The landscape has changed quite a lot even in the on-course gambling associated with this. What we have here is a bill which is not particularly voluminous and that only makes a couple of changes. The changes are related to the government being able to issue more than one wagering and betting licence at a time. It also removes the requirement for the racing industry to receive 'no less favourable' treatment under the new wagering licence.

There are a couple of things that are quite important here. Being able to have multiple players in this space changes things quite significantly. Tabcorp have had this licence, and in 2012 they paid \$410 million for that right. As they have operated as the only operator in this space, that means that they have had certain advantages that have come over that period of them doing business. We have got a bill here now that is looking to open this up to a greater number of licences. A lot of the changes relate to changing the wording from 'the wagering and betting licence' to 'a wagering and betting licence'. It has been no secret that the government are looking at multiple players. There are not many, many players; there is less than a handful of people who might operate in this space. But things are getting a little bit testy in that space at the moment, and this is something that the government really needs to get a good handle on because at the minute I do not think that they have that great a handle.

Racing, as the Minister for Racing and the Shadow Minister for Racing have outlined, is particularly important in the Victorian economy. Picnic racing and regional racing have been at the heart of my electorate for quite some period of time. Then we have larger events in the city, with the big tracks and spring carnivals and things like that. Looking at the certainty that my picnic clubs in particular are after from the government, it is certainty about the number of days each year that they are going to be able to hold a meeting. It is really difficult for people to put on a meeting consistently when they are subject to so many challenges. That can be abandonment through heavy rain and that can be problems with a track that has opened up because of the age of some of the drainage systems underneath. There have been a lot of issues that have really put pressure back on the clubs. I note, during National Volunteer Week, that all of our picnic clubs rely very heavily on volunteers to do the work.

One of the issues, though, is the funding that they receive. For me, having 'no less favourable' treatment makes sure that they still have access to the supports that they need from the government. Too many picnic clubs are worried about the changes that the government might make. I would like to think that with 'no less favourable' they take this into consideration and that they really do look to the survival of smaller picnic clubs in particular, who do not have the facilities, the toilet blocks, the ability to have

permanent fixtures for their bookmakers and things like that, like at some of the larger tracks such as Yarra Glen. They have got different systems and set-ups, and the volunteers do an amazing job. I just want to give a quick shout-out to the Healesville Amateur Racing Club and the president David Purcell, which for the last year, the 2021–22 racing season, was the racing club of the year.

One of the other really important elements of this bill – other than what I have just outlined, ‘no worse off’ – is that of the intellectual property. So as I have said, Tabcorp have operated in this space on their own for the last decade. First of all, we are not sure of the terms of any new licence – so the time period that a licence may be issued for. We do know that the second-reading speech refers to an example of awarding a 20-year licence with an exclusivity period of 10 years, after which it will award additional licences. So does that mean that they are looking at saying ‘Okay, Tabcorp, you’ve got your 10 years, and then we’ll issue it to a couple of the other small players that are in that’ or not? But I guess that is part of the uncertainty that exists at the moment.

The lead speaker, the member for Gippsland South, referred to an article by John Stensholt in the *Australian* in February this year. I have a different article which covers similar material from the *Casino Guardian*, and the author of this is Daniel Williams; it was at about the same time. Tabcorp has been the legitimate operator over the last decade, and:

According to reports, **Tabcorp is currently in an advantageous position to retain its exclusive betting licence** in Victoria, potentially at a company-friendly price, as more doubts regarding the bidding process have emerged because of some **uncertainty in terms of customer data ownership**.

Tabcorp during their normal course of operations have collected data on customers, and this is very key to any business that relies on customers. Their customer relationship management model, the data that they use and how they connect with and engage with those customers is critical to business success. So Tabcorp have this, and Tabcorp claims it currently owns this customer database. For the operators who may want to enter and may want to come in, well, what does it mean for them? They are looking at this major advantage that Tabcorp have and how they will get to compete in that space. If you are doing your due diligence about whether or not you want to operate in this gambling and betting space, if you are looking at how it is going to work for you, you have got to crunch all the numbers and have a look at the models that you need to operate. If you need access to a good, strong customer database – you may have a database already, but you might not have that one – it is unlikely that you have that to the extent that Tabcorp have, because they have been operating in that space. So it is really up to the government to get a move on and create some certainty or greater clarity in this space so the process can go ahead, because at the moment we have already heard – I think last Friday – that one of the major players is looking at withdrawing from this process. As I said at the start, there is only a handful of players, maybe even less than a handful, and if they drop out one by one, the more that they drop out then Tabcorp is certainly in a particularly strong position. Further quoting from this article, there have been reports:

... that Tabcorp’s rivals have been vigorously protesting about the aforementioned customer data issues, with many of them sharing that they see almost **no point in bidding for the licence without having any access to customer information** originating from the current joint venture.

I know that the government need to issue the new licence because it is about to expire next year, but they will want to maximise the revenue for the state. They want to make sure that we have clubs that are, you know, no worse off. So there is a lot that they want to do, but at the moment I do not think that they are fully addressing the issues.

They know about these issues – absolutely they know about the issues – but they need to give it a lot more serious attention, because the longer it drags on, the more difficult it is for others to say ‘We should really be playing in this space’ because of that uncertainty. The opposition here are not opposing the bill. The industry are happy to accept it, the racing industry accepts the situation and there are no real concerns with the bill itself. The concerns are with the ownership, the IP I guess you would call it, of the customer database and the advantage that that gives Tabcorp as the incumbent. I encourage the government to get a wriggle on and to make sure that this can happen effectively and quickly.

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (15:40): Once again the member for Eildon is doing the heavy lifting for the opposition. She is just on her feet, isn't she? She is up and about and on her feet, and she did not need any protection at all this time, so it was very, very good.

I welcome the opportunity to stand and contribute to this debate in support of the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, and I am pleased that the opposition are supporting it. I would like to thank the Minister for Racing and the member for Narre Warren South for their contributions. As many people know, I am a big fan of racing. I am a member of the Ballarat Turf Club and I am a member of the Ballarat & District Trotting Club, and I am pleased to be supporting this Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 that will provide certainty for the Victorian racing industry.

This bill will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to permit multiple wagering and betting licences and to remove the 'no less favourable' racing industry funding requirement for awarding a wagering and betting licence. This bill will also make consequential amendments to references to the wagering and betting licence in the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. I would really like to thank the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, her office and the department for the work they have done to bring this bill to the house.

Racing is a major economic driver for Victoria, contributing \$4.7 billion annually and supporting more than 34,000 jobs, including more than 700 full-time jobs in Ballarat. It was great to have the Minister for Racing in Ballarat just last week, meeting with the Ballarat Turf Club, Ballarat greyhounds and the Ballarat & District Trotting Club.

The bill before us today alters the phrasing of several definitions and clauses within the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to facilitate the possibility of multiple wagering and betting licences operating simultaneously. Phrasing in one section of the Casino Control Act 1991 and one section of the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 are also similarly amended.

The bill itself does not prescribe an exact number of wagering and betting licences to be issued. Instead, it inserts a new provision in the Gambling Regulation Act that assigns this decision to the minister. The minister may also decide upon periods of exclusivity for future licences, which at their discretion may be set for a shorter amount of time than the overall length of the licence. If this exclusivity period is applied to a licence, then no new wagering or betting licence may come into effect during that time. Exceptions are allowed for incoming licensees to undertake necessary preparation with certain constraints before their licence comes into full effect. Together, these proposed changes will facilitate a move from the current framework, where only a single wagering and betting licence can be in effect at a given time, to one which allows for multiple licensees to operate concurrently.

In light of this, this bill specifies that if a licensee seeks an amendment to their licence, the minister may require them to notify any other licensees that may be adversely affected. Any objections may be lodged in writing within 28 days of notification and must be taken into account by the minister when considering the amendment proposal. Alterations are also proposed to the criteria that must be met before a licence is granted. Existing provisions require a proposed licensee's arrangements with Racing Victoria and the racing codes to be no less favourable than those before them. But this now poses an insurmountable obstacle to the awarding of future licences. As such, for any licence taking effect after mid-August 2024 the minister will no longer be required to consider the funding arrangements between the licensees and the racing industry. Removing the 'no less favourable' requirement is vital to ensuring a competitive licensing process. The requirements reflect market conditions from past decades, prior to the entrance of bookmakers licensed in other states and prior to the proliferation of online betting.

In the current market, this hampers the state's ability to award a licence that will provide Victoria with the greatest possible benefit. It also poses the real risk of no licence being in place after 2024, which would (1) negatively impact employment (2) forgo significant government revenue and (3) see wagering activity shift from retail locations to online services, where the risk of harm is even greater.

The 'no less favourable' funding condition is no longer tenable, and as such this bill proposes that it be appropriately removed from the act. A transitional provision is included, which will apply to the forthcoming licence expiration only, ensuring that arrangements between the existing licensee, VicRacing and Racing Products, must have the opportunity to conclude satisfactorily. Additionally, this house this week will be debating separate legislation to provide vital long-term funding certainty for the Victorian racing industry. It is very important that that is before the house this week. If passed, the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 will commence the day after royal assent. However, the bill does stipulate that any future licences cannot come into effect before the current licence expires, which, as I have mentioned previously, is due to occur in August of next year.

The Andrews Labor government is committed to a strong and sustainable Victorian racing industry that makes a positive contribution to Victorian communities, including in Ballarat and the electorate of Wendouree, home to the Ballarat Greyhound Racing Club and the Ballarat & District Trotting Club in Redan. I visited the Ballarat Greyhound Racing Club on Thursday 11 May 2023, just last week, with the Minister for Racing and the member for Ripon to announce the allocation of funding from the Victorian Racing Industry Fund to support the upgrade of the kennel buildings at the Ballarat greyhound racecourse. I wish to thank Ballarat Greyhound Racing president Craig Fletcher, board member Paul Armstrong and club general manager Jodie Faralla for warmly welcoming us to the club.

Ballarat Greyhound Racing Club holds 125 greyhound race meetings annually, and approximately 100 trainers operate out of the venue, with 527 greyhounds in training. The new purpose-built facility will set a standard for greyhound care in Victoria, prioritising animal welfare and the health and safety of trainers and participants. The project will deliver a fully enclosed building that is more energy efficient and provides improved accessibility. The design provides more natural light and includes 112 kennels, wash areas, a swab kennel bay, private isolation kennels, a stewards room and storeroom and a grassed outdoor area. I am pleased that local builder CIQ Construction Management is delivering the project and supporting local subcontractors and local jobs. Further supporting infrastructure projects, such as the new kennel building upgrade at Ballarat, ensures greyhounds and participants have the necessary facilities to be working in a safe environment.

The Victorian government is also investing in Victoria's racing industry in Ballarat and across Victoria through the Jobs Victoria Ballarat racing project and the Jobs Victoria statewide racing project. I am very pleased that the Victorian government is investing \$3.1 million through Jobs Victoria to fill 200 roles in the racing industry with disadvantaged jobseekers. Significantly, 100 of these roles will be filled at the Ballarat Turf Club, with Skillinvest delivering the remaining 100 elsewhere in regional Victoria and in metro Melbourne. Roles on offer through the Jobs Vic Ballarat racing project include stablehand, track rider and grounds management. These projects include paid pre-employment training, including Racing Victoria's employment start project, and participants can also complete certificate-level qualifications for racing stablehand or racing track work rider roles.

It was fantastic to be at Cumani Racing at the Ballarat Turf Club on Thursday with the owner Matt Cumani, the Minister for Racing and the member for Ripon to meet stablehand Nyandeng Sallivanmusyoka, who is a participant in the Jobs Victoria racing project. Nyandeng and her family arrived in Australia as refugees, and she has now commenced a new career with the support of the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council and Jobs Vic. We are delivering great outcomes for the people of my electorate in Wendouree and in Ballarat and the state. I commend the bill to the house.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (15:50): I rise to speak on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, and I do so because, as most people would know, South-West Coast has a very proud history with the racing industry of all codes. The bill seeks to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. I do not oppose the bill, but I call on this government to cooperate more with the racing industry in rural and regional Victoria to ensure transparency in the bidding process. The silence on the issue of ownership of the IP has been outlined already by my colleagues who have spoken in this place, and some of the issues there are quite concerning – particularly the silence.

Thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing all play a significant role in the cultural and economic landscape of South-West Coast. The sports are not only popular pastimes but also major contributors to the local economy, providing employment, attracting visitors and generating revenue. It may be a surprise to some in this house that Australia's unofficial anthem, *Waltzing Matilda*, owes its origins to the 1894 Warrnambool May races. In 1895 Christina Macpherson was staying with her brother near Winton in Queensland and played a tune she had heard the previous year at the Warrnambool races. Banjo Paterson was present, and it was to this tune that Banjo set his famous words.

Racing in all its forms contributes over \$112 million to the South-West Coast economy annually. Racing provides direct employment to over 900 people in South-West Coast and indirectly employs many, many more. South-West Coast's veterinarians, accountants, feed merchants, fencing contractors, hospitality venues, accommodation providers, milliners and fashion shops all benefit from racing. The value of the social interaction gained from a day at the races cannot be underestimated. Large numbers of regional and rural Victorians are engaged in agriculture. Farming by its very nature is largely a solitary pursuit. Leaving the farm or the workshop for a day at the races is significant for the mental health of many rural Victorians, and we need to preserve this important outlet. I was just recalling that we actually moved our calving date because it was the first day of May, which often meant we could not get to the races and continue to successfully calve. So that is how significant the May races are to many people in my community.

The continued success of the three strands of racing in South-West Coast through world wars, pandemics, fires and floods is testament to the stewardship of generations of committees, presidents and volunteers who have sought to improve the facilities of their clubs, the welfare standards for their animals and the benefits to the wider communities. Stewardship must be a key consideration for this government if the bill is passed. The bill is unclear on how the government will handle the bidding process and what will happen if more than one licence is issued. Transparency is not a strong point of this government, and the people of Victoria need to be assured that the bidding process will be aboveboard and that this will not be yet another example of government awarding contracts to their mates, because Victorians really do deserve better.

With the livelihoods of over 900 people in South-West Coast alone directly impacted by this bill, it is imperative that this government provides clarification on what will happen if more than one licence is issued. The ability to issue multiple licences is one of the main objectives of this bill, and it is disappointing the government has not treated the people of Victoria with sufficient respect to detail what will happen if more than one licence is issued. It is reasonably foreseeable that multiple licences will be issued, so it is equally reasonable to expect that the government will provide a road map for this scenario. A failure to plan is a plan to fail, and when Victorians are paying \$10 million a day to service this government's debt, Victorians cannot afford for racing to fail.

Racing is one of the few industries in Victoria that generates a profit. The funds generated by racing must not be squandered or frittered away. Unfortunately waste is part of this government's DNA. This government has created a financial emergency for which every Victorian is now paying. Victoria is the highest taxed state in the Commonwealth, with a debt greater than those of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania put together. With this record, you can understand my concern that the funds generated by the issuing of multiple licences may be squandered on more projects that never get finished and eye-watering interest payments. Waste and spin, spin and waste, are all we get from this government. At the last election the Premier stated that he would govern for all Victorians. I know it is just six months since the last election, but it is time the government started walking the walk, because they are so good at talking the talk.

Racing is part of Victoria's vibrant and diverse social fabric. Its contribution extends beyond the financial; it has a distinct cultural legacy and unites Victorians from all backgrounds. Victoria has a great racing heritage, and it deserves to be protected. I do not oppose the bill, but I call on the government to finally do the right thing and ensure that there is transparency with the bidding process and the road map for what will happen if multiple licences are issued.



**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (15:56): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 and to follow the member for South-West Coast. I hope the member for South-West Coast was down at the 'Bool. It was a big event, I think, during that time –

**Roma Britnell**: We were in Parliament, I think.

**Tim RICHARDSON**: Oh, you didn't get away? Oh, well, maybe next time.

**Roma Britnell**: I think we were here.

**Tim RICHARDSON**: Yes. I mean, the contributions weren't stellar, though. There were not too many second-reading speeches, so maybe some of the crew could have got down there, but who knows? Even though this bill is quite technical in its scope, we heard about debt and everything else from the member for South-West Coast. That was an extraordinary contribution for what is really a narrow bill and reforms that apparently are supported or not opposed – or whatever language the opposition likes to use. But then the member for Eildon and the member for South-West Coast went through all of their oppositions to the bill. Can you pick a position on the bill and what you are going to do rather than picking bits out? Line up with your shadows, and work out what on earth is going on, because when you come in and you actually listen to some of the contributions they are just truly extraordinary, contradictory and make absolutely no sense. This is quite a narrow change to how licences in the current wagering and betting arrangements are provided. Of course Tabcorp at the moment are the licence-holder. That was issued on 16 August 2012, and that expires in August 2024. The changes, as members have outlined, are about providing greater flexibility to look at multiple licence-holders and what that means and the flexibility that that creates for any revenue that is sourced.

In my contribution on this bill I want to reflect on some of those changes but also to acknowledge that in any change in gambling reform that we bring before the Parliament there needs to be equal if not disproportionate thought given to those that are impacted by the harm of gambling. Over 70 per cent of Victorians gamble. In the last 12 months on average it has been that 70 per cent number. About one in five, though, are at risk of experiencing gambling harm, and as the Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention I think it is something that we need to reflect on each and every day. Four in five of that 70 per cent number are not subject to that risk or that progression of risk, but one in five are, so in any reforms that we make we need to make sure that we are supporting those that experience gambling harm or have a risk of gambling harm over time, because about 39 per cent experience comorbidities with their gambling harm, and that also intersects substantially with mental ill health.

I obviously acknowledge the contribution that gambling makes across sports, and we see that across communities, we have heard about how that interacts with sports, the racing industry and other things. You can even bet on politics these days and get your odds about how you are going on who will be the next Leader of the Opposition. You can actually track that right now. Sportsbet and Tabcorp will give you those odds, I think. It could be the member for Berwick. The member for Nepean does well on *Postcards* – in one take he does pretty well – but maybe he has got some tickets on himself. The member for Brighton – you can get odds on him. He is a bit of a long shot, but when he is fronting up to doorsteps with the Prime Minister at the Brighton hotel, it is very interesting.

Gambling and odds are part of a range of different things, but we need to make sure that there is support and care for people experiencing mental ill health, because if we are not treating those challenges and those issues, as played out substantially in the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, then we are failing Victorians. Thankfully the Andrews Labor government has an extensive program of support. I am really proud to see the increased awareness and increased scrutiny, some of which has arisen from the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission changes. Some of that stems from what we have seen with some of the atrocities at Crown and then that broader application across the sector. On behalf of my community I am really proud to see that Victorian licences and licensees will be subject to those stronger regulations across our state. They are

nation leading in that support, and they provide a stronger, more focused regulatory arrangement for the Victorian gambling industry and its oversight of all gambling and gaming activities within Victoria – from pubs and clubs through to casinos and licence-holders. That is a really important thing. We have heard people talk about the impacts on gambling harm and those changes as well.

This bill intersects with the racing industry, which is a significant employer in Victoria. I do not know; maybe I have missed the program or maybe I have missed those contributions of members of the Greens political party. They have averaged one bill, one second-reading speech, across the four of them in the month of May – one. I know they subscribe to a four-day working week, but they do not even turn up on things that they grandstand on to support and stand up for their communities. They barely rock up to votes. I am not sure if they are around the patch. Luckily Parliament does not sit on a Friday; we would not see them. Where are they on these particular bills and these interests? They are a substantial part of this Parliament now – it is nearly 5 per cent that they make up – but they do not make 5 per cent of contributions in this place, and they have not contributed on where they stand on this bill, on the racing industry and people that are employed in my electorate and the ancillary industries that are supported. It just cheapens the Parliament and our democracy when political parties grandstand for 5 minutes and then come into this place and do not even contribute – literally one bill second-reading speech. We do not see anyone ever in this chamber making those contributions. Maybe they will step up and talk about some of the intersections with employment and jobs and outcomes across our sector.

The racing industry and its contribution to Victoria is substantial – \$4.3 billion annually. It supports nearly full-time equivalent 34,000 jobs, and more than 21,000 people are directly employed, volunteer or participate in the racing industry. The member for Wendouree summed it up substantially. The member for South-West Coast on the other side talked about the impact on and the benefit to her community as well. They are key tenets of some of these reforms, and other legislation that will come forward this week will provide that longer term funding certainty and support.

I note some of the comments around the ‘no less favourable’ test that has been changed and removed. That is to obviously create greater flexibility in awarding those licences. There might be multiple ones or it might be exclusivity that is provided as well. It goes without saying that the Victorian government has made substantial investments in the racing industry. At the last budget estimates hearings the former member for Keysborough and Minister for Racing Martin Pakula, a passionate racing advocate, had been down at the ‘Bool – he took probably about 300 selfies according to Twitter – but when you look at his budget estimates contribution you see the substantial investment over eight years that the Andrews Labor government has made through the Victorian Racing Industry Fund with capital project after capital project, supporting regional and rural communities. You cannot look at the bill in isolation without all the other actions the Victorian government undertakes to support this industry – tens of thousand of jobs, many millions invested to support those communities in regional and rural areas into the future. Going to the ‘no less favourable’ test, on a point that was made by the member for Eildon and touched on by other members, it should not be read in isolation but considered with the substantial work that we do. I have seen from his Twitter and Facebook accounts that the current Minister for Racing is out and about supporting communities. He is a really significant contributor as well.

This bill makes a couple of key technical changes that allow for greater flexibility and a change in the revenue mix as well, at all times considering along that journey the harm – the disproportionate harm – to people who are at risk of experiencing gambling harm and its comorbidities. As I said before, one in five of the 70 per cent of Victorians who gamble experience that impact, and 39 per cent have comorbidities. There is a huge presence of mental ill health in there as well. So we need to, for any gambling bill that comes forward, always pay attention to the impacts and make sure that we are protecting Victorians because 70 per cent gamble anyway, and that is a part of a number of different cultural things, whether it is sport or whether it is other outcomes. But I am really pleased that the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation has been funded by this government with \$153 million over four years.

Now, this is separate to the online gambling issue, and that is something that is so much more far-reaching, impactful and invasive in our communities. We need to do more in the online gambling protection space, whether it is off-page advertising that impacts or whether it is betting during certain times and exposing people. We know that there has been a federal review, and that might lead to greater discussion of the Victorian jurisdiction as well and the work that our government has done. We have got a great track record of supporting communities when it comes to the impacts of gambling harm, but we know that the online betting scene is really so much more dynamic and impactful than some of the changes here, and that is an important thing to note in the framework as well.

So it is an important bill, and I am glad it has the passage of major parties, but where on earth are the Greens? Rock up!

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (16:06): I rise to make a contribution on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, and I want to thank first of all the member for Gippsland South for the work that he has done on preparing this and mention as well the contribution from the member for Gippsland East, with his thorough knowledge of the racing industry. And I thank the member for Sandringham for his work on the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, which we are going to talk about later in the week. I do not want to pre-empt debate, but these bills are very closely related.

This bill amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to allow the government to issue more than one wagering and betting licence and removes the requirement for the racing industry to receive ‘no less favourable’ treatment under the new wagering licence. The Victorian wagering and betting licence allows the licensee exclusive rights to conduct several gambling activities. It is basically the modern equivalent of the old TAB – and for those that do not know, my old man actually ran a TAB for 10 years, so I am very, very familiar with the way that works in the racing industry. We know that the licence is going to expire in August 2024 and that Tabcorp paid about \$410 million to the government up-front in 2012 for this licence.

The primary purpose of the legislation is to allow the government to issue more than one wagering and betting licence – and the 29 pages pretty much go through changing a lot of the words ‘the wagering and betting licence’ to ‘a wagering and betting licence’ – and it affords the minister important flexibility when it comes to the awarding of these licences, but the government has not fully explained the potential arrangements around the concurrent issuing of multiple licences. The new legislation will allow for the issuing of multiple licences to any number of licensees, and we know that process is ongoing at the moment. The second-reading speech indicates there may be exclusive agreements for some licence periods, for example – and we heard the member for Eildon mention it – 10 years of exclusivity in a 20-year licence. But the exact arrangements around how many licences will be managed have not been fully explained either through the briefings that we have had or through the second-reading debate. It is important for industry to have this conversation, because we need to have a full understanding of this new commercial landscape.

We have heard a lot about – and I know the Minister for Racing touched on it – how the racing industry has entered into a confidential memorandum of understanding with the government. Unfortunately, up until this stage the government has been less than forthcoming with those details. We were advised in the briefing that that had been entered into and we understand these things are confidential, but I think the public, the taxpayer, deserves to know what exactly the agreement is that the government has entered into with the racing industry. We also understand that this memorandum of understanding guarantees the racing industry at least 90 per cent of its current level of funding, but the ministerial staff that we spoke to have not confirmed any other details of this agreement. That leaves significant uncertainty around the assurances that have been given to the industry and what facts we can rely on when assessing this agreement.

We know the bill, as well – as we mentioned – seeks to remove the ‘no less favourable’ clause from the legislation. This is a change accepted by the industry. Although on its face this seems like a negative change for the industry, seeing that they may only get up to 90 per cent, it does not reflect the

new commercial reality in the wagering and betting marketplace. This change been accepted by the industry as a necessary step in the broader reforms that will take place in licensing across the sector.

One of the big points that has been brought up in this debate, though, is in relation to the intellectual property that Tabcorp currently holds. You can understand a company the size of Tabcorp would love, I am sure, to hold onto the licensing. I am sure it is a big profit maker for them, and they have got a great arrangement with the racing industry. But there is a big dispute right now over the ownership of Tabcorp's customer data and whether this should be connected to the current licence. Tabcorp of course is refusing to release the data to the new licensee, which has forced a couple of the players to question whether they want to stay in it. We understand that at least one player has already dropped out because of this data and the question around the IP ownership. I think that it is actually fundamental to the bidding process and also to the people of Victoria to know whether their data is going to be shared if a new licensee comes on board or whether Tabcorp is going to hold onto it. They should probably also be reflected in the price that is paid for this new licensing.

The racing industry is always continuing to improve and adapt. I think we have got to recognise the changing commercial conditions that they are dealing with. They have had to adapt in recent years with the welfare of horses and jockeys. We know about major initiatives like the MRC Foundation's Stable Wellbeing program, in conjunction with Link Health and Community. However, as the industry adapts on all these fronts, it has also got to adapt to the changing commercial landscape around wagering and betting. The realities are reflected in some of the changes made by this bill and they are accepted by the industry as part of its changing face in Victoria.

I do not want to pre-empt debate, but I know we are going to touch on the other bill that will come across, with the increase in the point-of-consumption tax from 10 to 15 per cent and how 4 per cent will go back to the industry and 1 per cent back into the government's consolidated revenue. We understand that will go back to industry, and hopefully it covers off some of that drop in revenue that could come from the 90 per cent no worse off for the industry. We also understand the government has to maximise its income from this process, but that is really no excuse not to provide the market, the taxpayer and the Victorian people with the basic, important details and the things that we have been missing so far. While on many fronts the government can maximise the licence, I do not think they are considering some of these things at present.

The other thing to note around the intellectual property is that at the moment – and we heard the member for Gippsland East touch on this – a lot of the bookmakers and the other licensees, the other corporates, take their odds on the exotic bets straight from Tabcorp. Has that been included as part of the licence? Are they going to need to pay a fee to take that intellectual property around what gets paid out on a trifecta or a quinella? I think there are still a lot of questions around those parts of this bill that have not yet been answered. I did think that the member for Gippsland East made a great point. I do not know if anyone here bets, but when you do go into a TAB you can turn on venue mode. With everyone now betting on their phones, with so many different bookmakers, you could log on now and have a bet while you are sitting here in Parliament. Hopefully no-one is; I know the member for Mordialloc likes to think that on our side we were checking the odds on what is happening, but there are a few other important matters at hand. I wonder whether that actually needs to be looked at, the exclusivity around in-venue betting for some of those online bookmakers as they move forward.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Sam GROTH:** I'm not sure. You might know. I'm not sure if you have looked it up.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Sam GROTH:** Oh, jeez.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Sam GROTH:** On the wider industry front for racing, there are a couple of points. We know with this 90 per cent of revenue that the government is going to stump up the 90 per cent. I think the extra 1 per cent, which we will discuss tomorrow, will go back into industry. We would like to see it go obviously into consolidated revenue for hospitals and schools and roads, the things that we are currently missing out on, but I think it will end up going back into the racing industry when this licence is signed. Just because of the way the betting market has changed over the last period of time, this licence cannot be worth as much as it was in the past. You know, people are gambling in a different way. I think overall the bill covers off a lot of these things.

Look, we are not going to oppose the bill. The member for Mordialloc made a point: why do we bring up all the negatives? I think it is our job to scrutinise the bill and go over it. While this bill is widely supported by industry and we will not oppose it, there are a few questions around the intellectual property with Tabcorp and how that is going to be managed and making sure the Victorian people get the most out of this that they can. We do not want to see either the industry, which supports so many jobs right across this state, or the Victorian taxpayer miss out.

Overall I think it is a great bill that we will not be opposing. I just want to thank everyone, including the member for Gippsland South for the work that he has done on this bill so far.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (16:16): I rise to speak today about the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, but before I get there, with the indulgence of the Acting Speaker, I would like to make mention of the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. It was an absolute honour for me to be elected to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation two weeks ago in a joint sitting. We had our first board meeting on Friday just past, and I am also joined on the board by the member for Shepparton Kim O’Keeffe and the member for Malvern Michael O’Brien.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation is a statutory authority created by the Victorian Parliament specifically to address the challenge of gambling harm in the Victorian community. It funds research and other activities that add to the knowledge and understanding of gambling harm. It works with partners and communities across Victoria to inform people about the risks of gambling and to provide support to those who need it, including people affected by someone else’s gambling. As the member for Mordialloc mentioned, the Andrews Labor government provided the VRGF with \$153 million over four years in the 2019–20 state budget. This represents the nation’s largest commitment to address gambling harm.

It is a privilege for me to represent the Labor Party on the foundation’s board, and I give my word that I will use my seat at the table to advocate to the very best of my ability. It was kind also of the member for Narre Warren South to give the VRGF a shout-out, along with the member for Mordialloc. Anyone, including family or friends, who is experiencing any harm from gambling should reach out to the VRGF.

Problem gambling, or gambling addiction, is a blight on our community. Its social costs and impacts are enormous, and it is simply devastating. It tears apart families, and too often it destroys lives. I will be blunt and say that I absolutely loathe pokie machines because I have seen firsthand the destruction that these stupid machines can cause. In my teenage years I worked for a while in a hot chicken and chips shop in Williamstown. It was called Hot Wings. It was right next to – and it still to this very day has great chips and chicken – Williamstown’s high-rise public housing estate. It is also next to the Williamstown RSL. Every day that I worked there, elderly people from the housing estate would come in for a meal. These were people who were completely dependent on the age pension to get by. They would come to the shop for a meal as soon as they had cashed their pension allowance. The first time that you saw them after they had cashed their pension, they would order a full meal: chicken, vegetables, salad, you name it. The next time they came in they would simply order the \$2 chips. Why? Because it was all that they had left. In the meantime they had gone down to the RSL. They had had their pension in their pocket, and they had lost all of their money at the pokies – every single time, and it always broke my heart.

Kororoit is a diverse community, picking up Deer Park all the way to the cusp of Melton. We take in two local government areas, Brimbank and Melton, and it goes without saying that we are one of the most disadvantaged areas in Victoria. Some of you may not know that Brimbank has the highest losses to gambling of any local government area in Victoria. That is correct. We are ranked number one, literally number one in the state. It is not a stat that any LGA wants to achieve. Gamblers in Brimbank LGA lost almost \$104 million to electronic gambling machines in the first seven months of the financial year alone. Almost half a million dollars a day are being lost to these pokie machines. It is terrible in our community. This means that urgent action to tackle problem gambling in my electorate is needed now.

That preamble brings me to the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill, which is before us today. This bill makes changes to Victoria's wagering and betting framework. These changes are necessary to provide flexibility to government when awarding the next wagering and betting licence and to maximise the benefit to the state through the licensing process. The bill will make amendments to permit the awarding of multiple licences with exclusivity periods to be determined by the responsible minister and will remove the 'no less favourable' industry funding requirement for the wagering and betting licence. The current wagering and betting licence is held by Tabcorp and commenced on 16 August 2012. It expires on 15 August 2024. The licence permits the licensee to conduct authorised betting competitions defined as wagering, approved betting competitions, approved simulated racing and a betting exchange and to operate the only off-course wagering and betting retail network in Victoria. The process for awarding the next wagering and betting licence to operate from August 2024 is currently underway.

Legislation in Victoria currently only permits one wagering and betting licence to be in operation for the duration of the licence term. By amending the law to permit the awarding of multiple licences with exclusivity periods determined by the minister and to remove the 'no less favourable' industry funding, the state will be able to consider a broader set of options for the market. This additional flexibility will allow the state to attract greater interest in the licence and maximise the value of the licence to the state and is consistent with the provisions for the public lottery licence and keno licences.

The bill will provide government with the discretion to determine any periods of exclusivity for the next licence or licences. An exclusivity period means that the government is not able to issue another wagering and betting licence during the period of exclusivity. Changes to the act that add the flexibility to determine periods of exclusivity mean that the government will be better placed to maximise the value of wagering and betting licences. For example, if it maximises value to the state, the bill will allow the government to issue one wagering and betting licence for a set term that concludes before the licence term ends. After this the government could issue additional licences. This is achieved by the bill inserting a provision in the principal act that allows the minister to specify one or more periods of time as the exclusivity period for a wagering and betting licence.

The act currently stipulates that before granting a licence application the minister must be satisfied that the applicant has entered into or made a binding offer to enter into arrangements with the Victorian racing industry which are no less favourable to the Victorian racing industry than the arrangements under the current wagering and betting licence. The 'no less favourable' requirement arose from the concurrent privatisation of the Victorian TAB and the introduction of gaming machines in Victoria. It addressed concerns from the racing industry that it would be disadvantaged by the privatisation and lose out on wagering revenue previously provided to the racing industry by the Victorian TAB.

The government recognises that the current wagering and betting licensing arrangements reflect market conditions that no longer exist. Significant changes to the gambling environment, including developments in technology, the associated growth of online gambling and the removing of advertising restrictions on bookmakers licensed in other states and territories, have occurred over the last decade. As a result of these changes the wagering and betting market has become a national market and the wagering and betting licensee is subject to far greater competition from bookmakers licensed in other states and territories. As such, it is unlikely that a new licensee will be willing to purchase a

Victorian licence if it is required to enter into a 'no less favourable' funding arrangement with the Victorian racing industry.

The Victorian licence is principally oriented towards the provision of retail betting due to the highly saturated market for wagering. Noting that online wagering is considered more harmful, the granting of multiple Victorian licences will not increase participation or player losses. Research indicates that there is a higher risk of gambling harm associated with online wagering. If the state is unable to award a new licence, those who shift to online for the first time or increase their online gambling activity will be at higher risk of harm than if retail wagering is retained.

The increased risk of harm for those people is likely to outweigh the benefits from the estimated small proportion of retail-only wagering customers who are likely to stop all wagering if retail wagering is not available. Further, the Victorian licensee or licensees will be subject to the strongest regulator in the country, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, otherwise known as the VGCCC. The VGCCC has oversight of all gambling and gaming activities in Victoria, from pubs and clubs through to casinos. It is required to undertake activities to minimise gambling harm, and harm minimisation considerations are central to their work.

I commend this bill to the Assembly. I will work to ensure the state regulation of the gaming industry will continue to be strengthened under this government, and I will have much more to say in the area of gambling reform in this place during my term.

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (16:26): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 with a few comments that I have here. As we have heard before, this bill amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to allow the government to issue more than one wagering and betting licence and removes the requirement for the racing industry to receive 'no less favourable' treatment under the new wagering licence. The Victorian wagering and betting licence allows the licensee exclusive rights to conduct several gambling activities, including parimutuel and fixed-odds betting, operating the only offcourse wagering and betting retail network in Victoria and establishing and operating a betting exchange.

The bill, as we know and we have heard in this house, is a fairly straightforward bill consisting mostly of amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act to change the wording from 'the' wagering and betting licence to 'a' wagering and betting licence, and this obviously allows the minister the flexibility to issue more than one licence, maximising competition and potential returns to the state. A new tender process is underway, with the successful organisation or organisations as they might be – there might be multi – to be announced in the near future, and this will potentially have huge consequences for the racing industry. It is important that the government provides certainty to the racing industry and the financial security to continue employing a huge number of Victorians.

In Wangaratta, in my electorate, there is the local turf club, and it provides huge direct and indirect economic benefits to the local community through their grounds team, their catering team and their administration as well as supporting local businesses through purchasing food, groundskeeping supplies and other day-to-day materials. But the turf club, for example, is not just used for racing; it is a venue that is used for many other activities as well. So when we continue to support our racing industry, we continue to support the community. As someone who enjoys a punt, I am always keen to make sure that the racing industry is in a sound financial situation because of the benefits it brings to the rest of the community.

The Wangaratta Turf Club, as I say, was supported extremely well by the Napthine government from 2010 to 2014, and, as I have said before in this place, Minister Pakula as racing minister did an exceptional job to make sure that Wangaratta stayed current and up-to-date and had the improvements that it has today. I was very impressed with Minister Pakula, and I do hope the current Minister for Racing, Minister Carabine, can make time to get to Wangaratta Turf Club in the near future and meet up with Sean Barrett and those of the turf club, because they really are going from strength to strength.

Bill Carlisle and the board have ensured that racing is family friendly. It is a safe environment, but it also appeals to the whole community. And that is what you are trying to create – a social atmosphere that is not just for punters; it is for people who go out and enjoy horses and social activities. It is a great opportunity for people to get with others and enjoy what the Wangaratta Turf Club has on offer.

As I say, it has built a supply chain around Wangaratta, creating more jobs and delivering positive outcomes for the community. Cutting funding would be detrimental to the local economy in Wangaratta but also in other communities that have got vibrant racing clubs like we do. I also know that for those in the Ovens Valley who enjoy race days it provides an opportunity to come together and for the community to enjoy themselves. It is a good revenue raiser for the government through taxes on these gambling companies, but I also see a fair amount of money reinvested back into the industry. Even the smaller communities get a massive lift out of picnic days. For example, Dederang, up in my electorate, out near Mount Beauty, have a one-off picnic day. Although it was cancelled this year, I am sure it will be back in all its glory next year, and I look forward to that.

Currently only one wagering and betting licence can be operational at one time, and this restricts the competitive nature of the licences and the ways the government can gain more interest when they are tendered, which they are in the process of now. This bill introduces the ability to issue multiple licences and incorporate exclusivity periods with a licence to ensure that increased competition for the 2024 wagering and betting licence or licences. We are advised that this approach is consistent with provisions for the public lottery licence and the keno licences, and the idea of exclusivity, hopefully, will provide an incentive for the gaming companies to provide a competitive tender process before extra licences can be issued to drive competition in the industry.

However, there are some concerns that this could lead to some issues around the database and the ownership of said databases, and if that database is considered owned by the licensee, will this database be transferred, or will this allow smaller licences access to the database? We do not know that. I do note a few more concerns with the bill and the broader process that is yet to unfold. I understand that that is currently in dispute about this database, and my concerns are that the TAB or Tabcorp believes it is their data – and it could very well be their data – whereas any other bidder or potential bidders will want access to this data if they are going to put in a significant bid for this licence.

My colleague from Gippsland South – who I may say is an excellent advocate for his community; he is a very hard worker and also across his portfolio – has confirmed that there is a genuine chance that competition for this licence or licences could be severely reduced due to the concerns around this IP. We have already had one withdrawal, I understand, from the bidding process due to the uncertainty around who owns this IP and will this come with a licence or will it not. The Victorian government appears to have been very silent on this, and I implore the government to speak up now so that Victoria has a genuine chance to receive the highest bids so that revenue base and selling that licence will be a benefit to all Victorians.

As someone who has stepped off the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, which I was a founding member of, I am very proud of the achievements of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. It is a foundation that works very hard, and it is in an extremely competitive environment with all the bookies and the advertisements that we have got. I will mention that in just a moment. I have certainly handed the baton over to the member for Shepparton who, again, is a tireless worker for her community, and I think she will do a wonderful job in the gambling foundation. I feel it is in good hands.

As a passing message I will say also that the gambling ads that we see on TV – I know it is a federal issue, but it is just crazy, the amount of gambling ads that we see on TV. I think we should all in this place, whether it is a federal or state issue or whatever it is, put our heads together to make sure that we can certainly put some restrictions on the amount of gambling ads that are out there and have restrictions about whether it is on when sport is on. We do not need our kids and our families to be having to sit through that pile and pile of gambling ads. I mean, there is a time and a place. It is just



that I think it has got a bit out of control. And from the gambling foundation perspective, there is no way they have the resources. If you doubled the amount of resources of the gambling foundation, you still could not compete with the betting agencies.

I also want to quickly cover the ‘no less favourable’ aspect of issuing a new licence. Whilst the removal of the requirement should open up the process to a more diverse range of companies and allow for a more competitive process, there is also a very real risk that the overall investment from the licence could be less than when the last licence was issued, and this could then have a flow-on effect in terms of government funding to the industry, particularly in some of the smaller regional towns where the facilities and race day events are not as popular as others. I do note this clause was not removed, and it may have led to the licences falling over due to not meeting the legislative demands. The main cause of this seems to be the prevalence of online gambling which, understandably, helps to avoid the queues at the TAB – I get that – but also has greater access to data and special offers at the touch of a button.

With the trend to online gambling most likely to continue, I do wonder whether the government has factored that into consideration of the next licence tender process after the current ongoing one. In 10 to 20 years time we may not have TAB booths at the grounds. The banks in our regional towns are disappearing very, very quickly, and this could happen with TAB booths as well. I think we need to be very mindful about that. We would need legislation to reflect that situation and to ensure that there is some financial gain for the industry.

In conclusion, this is a relatively straightforward bill, as I have covered. It does cover some important areas for the racing industry. As with all things this government does, I want to see the outcome of the licence process, and I hope it does not go terribly wrong. The intentions are good – to get multiple licences if need be – but sometimes things tend to go wrong and I want to make sure that there is the best financial benefit to Victorians. We are not opposing the bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (16:36): I am delighted to rise once again today to speak on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, another important bill and another gambling-related amendment being delivered by this government. As we know, a great deal of the legislative program this week is being directed and dedicated to gambling-related legislation, which is great to see.

This is not my first time speaking on such a bill. In fact over the past five years I have had the honour of making contributions on a number of gambling-related amendments. Last year we had a number of casino, gambling and liquor legislation amendments. It is testament to this government and its commitment to this issue, and it is testament to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation for her great work. We have seen this government’s strong commitment to delivering on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, its strong oversight of our gambling institutions and the casino and its commitment to addressing problem gambling. We see that again here this week with this bill and the legislative program this week.

Again I have to take the opportunity to acknowledge that problem gambling continues to be a real issue in my community in the south-east. As has been mentioned – I heard the member for Kororoit – the City of Greater Dandenong in particular continues to suffer, and the statistics are quite alarming. In 2021–22, \$103 million was lost to pokies in the 14 gambling venues in the City of Greater Dandenong. That is very high considering the socio-economic formation of this local government, with some of the highest rates of pokies loss per adult in Victoria. Since the introduction of pokies in Victoria in 1992–93 over \$4 billion has been lost in the City of Greater Dandenong alone, the equivalent of more than \$77,000 per household. As we know, the highest gambling losses are generally experienced by the least affluent communities, which we have seen in the City of Greater Dandenong, where residents of this community with one of the highest levels of gambling losses are also among the least able to bear such a financial loss. We heard from the member for Kororoit, who spoke about people on the pension who would go to an RSL, for example, and the next day were left with only enough for the \$2 chips, which is very difficult to comprehend.

In addition to pokies losses, an estimated \$150 million is also lost by City of Greater Dandenong residents each year to other legal forms of gambling, bringing together an annual loss of approximately \$206 million. We see the financial impact but also the social, emotional and health impacts to the community, as well as the associated family breakdowns and family violence stemming from problem gambling. I am sure that we have all come across family members, friends or people in the community who have suffered such losses due to gambling issues.

There is some great work happening in the community – and I have spoken about Make a Difference Dingley Village. I have also mentioned the work of the Cambodian Association of Victoria and the work of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation’s prevention partnership program. They deliver an impactful project engaging the Cambodian Buddhist temples in gambling prevention partnerships throughout the south-east. This project involves delivering training and community events to build the capacity of Cambodian community leaders and community members in the south-east to raise awareness of gambling harm.

There is also some really important work taking place in partnership with councils. There is the Libraries After Dark program, with the City of Greater Dandenong taking part in that. The program focuses on reaching at-risk communities and those most vulnerable to social isolation, a known risk factor for gambling harm. The mayor, Cr Eden Foster, is also a passionate advocate in this space. I am also looking forward to working with these groups, individual community leaders and our council to do what we can to tackle problem gambling in our community and mitigate its effects. The City of Kingston, just on the southern side, are also doing powerful work under their *Gambling Action Plan*. They are campaigning and supporting services.

We are committed to tackling gambling problems as a government. We have seen this in the delivery of the royal commission and in the delivery of the recommendations of the commission. As mentioned, we delivered some really positive legislation last September, with a strong focus on harm minimisation and improved oversight, and we are delivering again here this week with this legislative program, which includes both the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 and the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.

This bill here makes several amendments, and I would just like to take this opportunity to spell them out. In terms of the amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, the bill will amend this piece of legislation in several ways: firstly, to make amendments to the licence structure for the wagering and betting licence to permit multiple licences after the expiry of the current wagering and betting licence; further amendments will also provide the minister with the discretion to determine any periods of exclusivity for future wagering and betting licences; and lastly, the bill will also make consequential amendments to references to the wagering and betting licence in the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998.

As we have heard, the changes will enable a flexible market approach to attract interest in wagering and betting licences and enable government to effectively respond to the latest market conditions as we move on into the future. They are positive and sensible changes that I am very happy to support here. More broadly I am happy to support further legislation that improves and strengthens Victoria’s gambling framework. We have seen the government has shown its commitment to better regulating gambling more broadly, with strong oversight and strong frameworks. This work continues here today and will continue across the sitting week. A consistent overview and oversight of the industry has a positive effect on gambling-related harm. It is really important that we have strong frameworks in this space to protect Victorians from all communities, including migrants and diverse communities, to ensure comprehensive oversight. This is particularly important to my community in Clarinda and to the south-east.

I would like to thank the minister for her work. We have seen her commitment in delivering strong legislative changes over the last four years, delivering on recommendations of the royal commission and improving and strengthening oversight of the industry. I have been so proud to have the

opportunity to make a contribution on some of the many gambling-related amendments that have come through the Parliament. It was an exciting part of the debate last year, delivering legislation that implements most of the remaining recommendations of the royal commission, delivering legislation with a real focus on harm minimisation and improved governance.

Lastly, I would like to again thank the community organisations working to deliver services and support to vulnerable community members and working to address and mitigate problem gambling in our community. These include all those working in the interconnected services, particularly those related to family violence. I commend the bill to the house.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (16:45): It is my pleasure to rise today to contribute to the debate on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. Gambling regulation is not a bad thing, obviously, in fact possibly we need more of it. I do not mind a punt. I do not mind going to the country races in particular. I do not mind going to the city races either, and I do not mind betting on sports, but we will get to that little bit later. There are some venues, particularly racing venues in my electorate and indeed throughout regional and rural Victoria, where the culture of racing is alive and well and it not only contributes on an economic level but it is part of the very social fabric that holds these communities together, particularly when times are tough. You will see this during a trip to the Manangatang races, even when drought –

**A member** interjected.

**Jade BENHAM**: Manangatang! Even when drought was rife and the ground was dry, the Manangatang races offered an outlet for that community. The Manangatang races hold their own place in Mallee folklore, so I would invite everyone to have a weekend in Manangatang in October. It is a sight to behold.

The Mildura Racing Club, too – they have actually been underwater. We go from drought to flood. The Mildura Racing Club has been underwater for three or four months during the floods. They are right on the river in Mildura, and because of that they have now lost all of their races for this year. They have lost their buildings as well. Obviously they are insured and are waiting for things to rebuild, but because of the water and the waterlogged situation there the shadow minister and I visited the Mildura Racing Club recently and had a look at that. However, even though they have lost all their races for this year, they are playing host to the Mildura Field Days this Friday and Saturday, which will be a wonderful day out, and it is an event that the racing club can still hold there.

There are other events at racing clubs, such as Derby Day in the Country at the Wycheproof turf club, also one of our favourites. Birchip is not only known for the best vanilla slices in Victoria but they also have a very, very rich racing history. They are currently actually seeking support to dedicate what could be the newest piece of silo art, after Walpeup, to Ray Neville. Ray Neville won the Melbourne Cup at just 15 years of age on Rimfire in 1948. Tomorrow we will debate the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023, of course, and maybe this would be a perfect community project that the proposed extra 4 per cent going back into the industry could support – things like that.

The racing industry is still very, very supported in country Victoria – all codes. The Charlton harness races of course and the Mildura Harness Racing Club – again, the shadow minister and I visited the Mildura Harness Racing Club recently. They are now having 45 meetings a year, with an average prize pool of 85 grand per week. That is 45 weeks per year out of 52 weeks per year. They do not have enough stalls. There are drivers and horses that come from as far away as Bendigo and sometimes Geelong, depending on the meet. They do not have enough stalls to accommodate all of the horses and drivers and everyone that comes with them to stay there the entire night. Again, this is industry infrastructure that could be funded with the taxation bill that we will debate tomorrow. Now the interest and the influx, I suppose, or the growth, of female drivers means that the old drivers change rooms for females that were built for one to four people cannot now house comfortably the nine female drivers that they get on average. So there are some ways to invest in the gambling industry. They need

investment urgently, and that is another great way to invest that proposed extra 4 per cent that will go back into the industry. While we are talking about country racing it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge and pay my respects to the family of Dean Holland, who was killed in a fall at Donald on 24 April. I send Dean's wife Lucy and their four children my sincere condolences.

We are speaking about gambling regulation, however, so let us talk about it. Let us talk about gambling advertising regulation, like the member for Ovens Valley spoke about earlier. It is always a conversation. It is even a conversation in my house when we are watching our beloved Melbourne Storm, our beloved Richmond Football Club or even Hawthorn now, seeing as I have got a son who has decided to jump ship to the Hawks thanks to his father and probably Seamus, so thanks for that. But I do not need a five-year-old and an eight-year-old asking what the odds mean or what the bloke riding a rocket on the ad means or what that is all about. And I do not need to hear stories about an 11-year-old kid going to the football with his dad and saying, 'The Tigers are going to win this today, Dad; they're odds-on favourite.' That is not what kids should be worried about. When kids are watching sport on TV they should be watching their sporting heroes and idols and enjoying the movement, colour, discipline and all that kind of stuff rather than worrying about what the odds are, who is odds-on favourite and all of the sports gambling ads that absolutely bombard us. Mind you, Richmond probably have not been odds-on favourite all year to win; it was just luck and hard work that won us the game on Saturday.

**David Hodgett:** Friday.

**Jade BENHAM:** Friday. Thank you. It was a good start to the weekend after a Storm win and Richmond. But we do not need to be bombarded for hours when watching sport with our kids. I do not mind betting on sport, I do not mind betting on international sport. I enjoy a good punt. As the member for Mordialloc was saying, you can bet on politics, and I was paying decent odds at this state election, which paid off. That is fine, but we do not need to be bombarded with these ads all the time, particularly during hours when kids are watching sport. Even the banners around the ground – there has to be more regulation. I know it is a federal issue and is not to be debated in here, but it is something that we do need to talk about.

Like I said before, I do enjoy the races, especially the country races, and I really do – from the winter racing carnival down the road and the Spring Racing Carnival that happens right through the Mallee, the Southern Mallee and into Mildura to the Mildura harness races that happen all year round. We are not opposed to this bill that we have heard many, many members speak on. I think there is still a long way to go with gambling regulation, and this is a good place to start.

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (16:53): I rise to speak on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. The wagering and betting industry has changed considerably in recent years with the entrance and proliferation of many online bookmakers. The bill makes important changes to the structure of wagering and betting and will provide the necessary flexibility for government in awarding future wagering and betting licences in order to yield the greatest benefit for the state. A wagering and betting licence is issued under chapter 4 of the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. The current wagering and betting licence was awarded in 2011 and is due to expire on 15 August 2024. It is worth noting that Tabcorp first came into existence in 1994 when Kennett privatised the Totalisator Agency Board – another privatisation from those across.

Many people in this chamber know about my personal experience. I talk about it quite often, and whenever we discuss gambling I choose to talk about it because I think that it is only through listening to people with lived experience that we can really see change. So it comes as no surprise to anyone who knows me that talking about gambling for me is really talking about gambling harm. It is interesting, because this bill specifically focuses on racing, and racing was the *bête noire* of my ex-husband. To this day, I cannot listen to the sound of the calling of races. It quite literally causes me a great deal of pain. But I understand that for many people it is a pleasure, and I absolutely understand

the importance that this industry has. It is the betting that I have problems with, and I am looking towards harm minimisation rather than the industry of racing itself.

I know that so many people and their families rely on it for their livelihood. From happier times, my own experience of the Ararat races was of how incredibly important it was for regional communities. In my electorate obviously many people work and enjoy racing at the turf club in Ballarat, but there is also the Ballan racing club, which meets in Geelong. I did listen keenly on the impact that racing has on our economy. Of course it was with great interest that I listened to my good friend and colleague the member for Wendouree – there you are – and her contribution really acknowledging the visit that we had from the Minister for Racing but also the incredibly important jobs that came out of that announcement, or will come out of that announcement, for jobseekers who most need our support. I did not go along to those events, because the reality is that the harm that gambling did to my family is still – 10, 11 years later – incredibly raw.

Despite my personal experience, I understand that this industry has a place in our economy and a place in many people's lives. In this instance, I have got to agree heartily with the member for Gippsland East in his fervent hope that the Greens do not oppose this bill. I care deeply about minimising gambling harm, but I do also appreciate that many people's lives rely on this industry. I do not want to see the kinds of holier-than-thou stunts that we get from the Greens around this stuff. Just last year I was on a panel event, as someone with lived experience, for Gambling Harm Awareness Week. A local Green – my friend the member for Wendouree will know who I am referring to – had the audacity in that panel situation to call out that if I really cared, I would do more. I did want to bop her on the nose, but I did not; I was civil about it. But we come again and again to the Greens in this space, with their thinking they are kind of holier than thou. It is the middle-class doctors who are so happy to ride on their high horse of morality and forget that there are people out there whose livelihoods depend upon it. Alcoa left Anglesea, where my parents live. They are very, very keen environmentalists, but they were also aware that there were jobs in Alcoa and that it was about making sure that we had a just transition. In the same way, I know that the Greens can – as this particular woman did – stand up and say 'Why don't we pull out all the pokie licences?' Well, that is grand, but it does not pay heed to the very, very important thing that we should all know in politics: this is the art of compromise. As Camus said, democracy really is about defending the minority, not just going with some sort of majority.

As much as I have suffered from gambling harm, I also appreciate that it has a very real and important place in other people's lives. To that end, I really want to acknowledge our current Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. She has done some extraordinary work, and she meets with me whenever I ask to look at gambling harm minimisation. This is the space that we have got to work into rather than some sort of rainbow-like, unicorn idea of the perfect, where we get rid of all these things. Let us work towards looking after people that are experiencing gambling harm.

There has been some really important work done by this government. The national consumer protection framework for online wagering from the Commonwealth and the states is replacing gambling responsibly with new evidence-based messages. It is one of those things: if you are not really in this space and do not think it through in detail, things like gambling responsibly sound all right but they are not. It is a very hard thing to hear when you have watched a loved one really suffer at the hands of gambling harm to have some sort of suggestion that perhaps if he had been a better person he would have gambled responsibly. So things like that language change are very, very important, and I am delighted that the minister gazetted some of those changes. You see those ads now. We are all talking about the television advertising, but I am pleased to see at the end of those online ads a black screen with some pretty punchy messages: 'Chances are you're about to lose' or 'You win some. You lose more'. That kind of messaging is very important.

I know other people in the chamber have talked about the \$153 million to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation over the next four years. It is of course the largest commitment to address gambling harm. This government has done what it can do in the advertising space, and I was delighted back in 2018 when there was decisive action taken to ban static betting advertising within 150 metres

of schools or public transport infrastructure and on public roads and road infrastructure. So where we could step in in the advertising frame this government did that. It certainly did do that. There are many other reforms that we have seen under this government around gaming venues: prohibiting ATMs in venues – Victoria is the only Australian mainland jurisdiction without ATMs – capping the total number of gaming machines in the state and improving responsible gambling codes of conduct. All of these things may not be, as I say, the unicorn ideal for the Greens, but they are about making sure that we continue to support people who are experiencing gambling harm without demonising them or creating a moral position against other people. I think that is incredibly important to remember.

Finally, I really want to acknowledge the many players in this space, the people that have worked so hard – from the cafes in Ballarat who support people right through to the Alliance for Gambling Reform, the indefatigable Anna Bardsley and all of those people who work so hard to support people who have experienced gambling harm. I will continue to fight for more to be done in this space, but I support this government's work to regulate this industry.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (17:03): The Greens will not oppose this bill, which gives the government the ability to award multiple licences for offcourse betting and other activities rather than only a single licence. Monopoly frameworks in any commercial industry are generally bad policy. We also support removing the requirement that new licence arrangements be no less favourable to the animal racing industry than current arrangements, as most policy settings for animal racing under this government are already extremely preferential.

However, the most important aspect of this bill is what is missing. There is no reference to, let alone any attempt to improve, gambling harm reduction in this bill. The Greens are concerned that multiple licensees risk increasing the amount of gambling advertising that we will see. We know more ads and more innovative ways to format and deliver ads increases gambling harm. The community is sick of the gambling ads that infest our screens and plague our commercial sporting environment, so I am heartened to see some discussion at a federal level about regulating gambling advertising, and I encourage Labor with its federal and state majorities to use this opportunity to put an end to gambling advertising across all media.

We all know – and if we do not know, we should take this time to remind ourselves – that Australians, including Victorians, are the world's biggest gamblers. We lose an average \$958 per year, more than any other citizens on the planet. We lose way more than Hong Kong residents, who lose \$768 per person per year; than Singaporeans, who lose \$725; than the Finns, who are next at \$515, and so on, compared to Australia – \$958.

These per capita averages, however, do not tell you about the spread of these losses across the community. The Australian Gambling Research Centre recently published findings that 38 per cent of Australians, almost two in five, gamble at least weekly and that almost half of all Australian gamblers are at risk of gambling harm. We should remember it is the policy settings that governments choose that allow so many of our citizens to be harmed, and a bill to regulate gambling is the opportunity to change those settings. Let us also remind ourselves that gambling harm causes people to lose their homes and relationships and sometimes even their lives. We know there are direct connections between gambling harm and family violence and mental illness, and we also know that for every person directly experiencing gambling harm it is estimated at least six more people connected to them experience some impact. We are talking about an issue that affects an extraordinary number of Victorians.

In a briefing last week the minister's office stated that increased ad saturation as a result of this bill was unlikely given there is a declining consumer base from retail betting and that gambling behaviour has shifted online. The Alliance for Gambling Reform disputes this analysis, pointing out that already 56 per cent of Tabcorp's revenue is generated from online products and that the only way for multiple licensees to make enough profit to justify the investment in the licence is to grow the market through advertising. If there are multiple licences awarded under the provisions in this bill, it is reasonable to expect that increased competition across licensees will see more predatory marketing dedicated to

growing the market and customer base, not merely competing within the existing market. The subsequent harm from gambling can therefore also be expected to increase. So while an effort to increase state revenue is to be supported, it is basically a move that could increase gambling harm unless a concurrent serious push for harm reduction is undertaken.

The landmark Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence was scathing of Crown's behaviour and its failure to keep patrons safe from gambling harm, and in response this government has actually embarked on a reform program within the casino. But it is disappointing to see that reform that reduces gambling harm is being limited to just the casino rather than employing a statewide approach across all gambling types. The state and federal gambling ministers are meeting in July and will discuss national consumer protection, although it is unclear if a comprehensive harm reduction framework is on the table. But what is clear is that Victoria is lagging behind other states in reducing harm from gambling.

South Australia has legislation in place for better regulation of gambling advertising. Both Tasmania and New South Wales have announced plans to introduce mandatory precommitment and cashless gaming on all poker machines, not just those in the casino. For example, the precommitment cards can set maximum daily limits on how much can be spent and lost on any one day, they can require users to preset their own limits on losses or time spent using a poker machine and they can limit how much money can be loaded onto a card at any one time. This kind of mandatory precommitment and these kinds of limits on losses statewide could be a game changer for reducing gambling harm in our state. It is the ambitious reform that the Victorian Labor government should be embracing.

In the last 30 years successive governments have completely failed to introduce any meaningful statewide reform of the industry, letting Victorians lose record amounts at the poker machines year on year and allowing the gambling industry to expand its power in this state, which is already too significant. We are being shown up by the rest of the country. If Victoria had a progressive government, it would do better, and it is not too late to start now.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (17:09): I too rise in support of the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. I would like to just start by thanking the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation for bringing this important regulatory change to the Parliament and for the number of other reforms that she has made in that space. I also want to acknowledge the contribution from the member for Eureka, who has often spoken very passionately on this topic. I recall a particular matter of public importance that was brought to the house in the last term by the former member for Morwell, on which the member for Eureka also spoke. It actually moved me to – I would not say the word confront, just to discuss with someone quite close to me the issues that they were having, and from what I can see I think that has made a real difference. So I really want to thank the member for Eureka and the former member for Morwell for really exposing me to some of the issues and challenges that people deal with every day and how, the member for Eureka might have said at the time, it is a life sentence not just for the individual but also for family members and loved ones involved.

So these changes, as has been mentioned previously, are fairly technical changes. They are mainly dealing with the wording of changing 'the' to 'a' in a lot of the definitions throughout the legislation, with the intention to make the necessary arrangements to permit the award of multiple licences with exclusivity periods determined by the minister as well as removing the 'no less favourable' industry funding requirement for a wagering and betting licence. It is timely that this bill and amendment be considered at the moment because the current licence held by Tabcorp is due to expire in August next year and the process for awarding the next licence is already underway. By making these changes the state will be able to consider a broader set of options from the market and will be able to extract the most value out of the licensing process and increase the viability of the licence or licences that are awarded.

It does have quite an interesting history in terms of these offcourse betting agencies. Go back 100 years ago and it was only oncourse betting that was allowed; there were certainly many reports of a lot of offcourse activity that was taking place, and that culminated eventually in the 1960s with the

establishment of the Totaliser Agency Board or the TAB that was designed to, really in the same way as we are introducing other regulation here, regulate that industry, which had for many years been operating underground. And of course we have heard about how since those times over the last 60 years there have been major changes to the industry. Thirty years since the privatisation of the TAB, and particularly in the last 10 years since the last licence was issued, there has been a huge rise in the ability and availability of online gaming. Now, I am not really a gambler in any shape or form. I do not think I have ever been into a TAB retail outlet. But I remember that the member for Gippsland East mentioned that even in the current retail outlet you are able to bet live on your app, on your phone, while you are in the retail outlet. I know we do have a retail outlet which is located very close to my office, and it advertises on the front of that: 'Download the app and play today'. So it is sort of encouraging that transfer to online betting even in the presence of the retail outlet. I know there has been a lot of discussion about gambling harm, and I want to talk a little bit more about online gambling, but I do not think that this regulation works counter to what the government has acted upon and the reforms that it has made to try and minimise gambling harm and also obviously the supports that it has put in place.

The real challenge has been in the rise of online gambling and, as mentioned before, the proliferation of the ads just telling you about how easy it is to bet on every form of sport and what the latest odds are on any particular game. And I see that even with my kids, who are just still primary school aged, watching the sport and just talking about the odds of a particular game and who is more likely to win the footy on the weekend. While I know they are very mathematically inclined and I like to think that they might be somewhat interested in the mathematical concept of it, I am concerned that they are actually talking about it in the context of odds rather than the context of just enjoying the sporting context for the sake of the sporting context.

In terms of the move to online gambling, I did some research and found a report from the Australian Gambling Research Centre, and it talked about the impact of COVID-19 and how that hastened the transition to online gambling platforms. Obviously during that time retail betting agencies were closed, and many people found that they had extra time on their hands and did transition to online gambling or started online gambling. One of the key findings was that almost one in three participants in the survey that the research centre had done signed up for a new online account during COVID-19 when one in 20 started gambling online.

Generally the findings were that the number of people who were gambling online increased and the number of times that people would gamble online increased, and this is where the challenge for us as policymakers and the challenge of gambling reform really comes. It is really in this online space, and it is particularly in a cohort of people. As the report went on to find, it was young men aged 18 to 34 that were the subpopulation most likely to sign up for a new account or to increase their frequency and monthly spend on gambling. You can see this through the way that the ads are targeted and the nature of the people in the ads and the messaging that they are trying to send out. So I think this bill represents a suite of programs that the government and the minister have introduced to reform gambling in Victoria. For that reason I do support the bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (17:19): I rise today to speak on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. This bill will enable flexibility when awarding the next wagering and betting licence and maximise the benefit to our state through the licensing process. This bill makes amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to permit the award of multiple wagering and betting licences. The exclusivity periods of these licences will be determined by the responsible minister. The bill also removes the 'no less favourable' racing industry funding requirement for awarding a wagering and betting licence.

Currently our state's wagering and betting licence is solely held by Tabcorp. It commenced back in July 2011 and will expire next year, on 15 August 2024. For more than 10 years only one retail wagering and betting licence has existed in operation. This bill will change this to permit the award of multiple licences with exclusivity periods determined by the minister, which will allow the state to



consider a broader set of options from the market. This will make sure we can extract the most value out of the licensing process as possible and will also allow a flexible market approach to attract interest in the wagering and betting licence and ensure government can respond to the latest market conditions. Having an exclusivity period will mean the state would not be able to issue another wagering and betting licence that has effect during the period of exclusivity. For example, the state could issue one wagering and betting licence for a term of 20 years with an exclusivity period of 10 years. After this point – after 10 years – the state could issue additional licences.

Removing the ‘no less favourable’ requirement will also remove barriers to awarding licences and increase competition. Historically this requirement was needed to show that before granting a licence application, the minister was satisfied that the applicant was entering into arrangements with the Victorian racing industry that were no less favourable to them than the arrangements under the current licence. This dates back to when the Victorian TAB was privatised and gaming machines were introduced. And we all know on this side of the chamber that it was Jeff Kennett who privatised the Victorian TAB, because those opposite me today have never seen a thing they did not want to privatise, cut or slash. Our community in Ripon still feels the impact of Jeff Kennett’s privatisations. As is so often the case, it falls on Labor governments to clean up the mess of privatisation. Jeff Kennett himself said that he regrets privatising the TAB, and I thank him for his honesty. However, I will note that we still have not had that admission from the former Premier about the privatisation of the SEC. We have not had that admission about shutting down the Maryborough and Ararat train lines, which will never, ever happen under a Labor government. We have not had a sorry for closing down our schools and TAFE campuses and slashing funding from our hospitals.

**Michael O’Brien:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, accepting that the member is a new member to the house, she still required to speak vaguely on the bill, and I would encourage you to draw her back to the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Jackson Taylor):** I will rule on the point of order. It has been a wideranging debate, in my understanding. The member has been on the topic of the bill. In that context, I will ask the member to come back to the bill, but I do not uphold the point of order.

**Martha HAYLETT:** I am glad that Jeff Kennett admits that privatisation is not the answer to every single problem for those opposite, just seemingly most of them. Before Kennett privatised the TAB, my father-in-law worked for the TAB in Ballarat in 1967 for four years as a ticket sorter. He was only 15 years old when he started. He used the funds to put himself through university once he turned 18 and moved to Melbourne. You would not see a 15-year-old working in a TAB anymore, and rightly so. It was a different time back then, but some things have not changed. Ensuring the government is getting the policy settings right to enable the best outcome for the community is still so important. Previously the ‘no less favourable’ requirement aimed to address concerns from the racing industry that they would be disadvantaged by the privatisation and potentially lose out on jobs and wagering revenue previously provided to them by the Victorian TAB. These conditions have now changed, with the current wagering and betting licensing arrangements reflecting market conditions that no longer exist.

Over the last decade alone the gambling environment in our state and nation has changed significantly. Technological advancements have seen online gambling grow, and there are no longer advertising restrictions on bookmakers licenced in other states and territories. As a result, the wagering and betting market has become a national market and the licensee is subject to much more significant competition from bookmakers licenced in other states and territories. Removing the ‘no less favourable’ requirement will free up future options in a changed market whilst also getting the balance right to support the racing industry that adds \$4.7 billion annually to our economy and 35,000 full-time equivalent jobs, including across my electorate of Ripon. These changes will ensure our proud racing industry continues to be funded from wagering generated on its product, helping the industry to back jobs and events that benefit our rural and regional communities.

Speaking of jobs, I was so proud to join the Minister for Racing and the member for Wendouree at the Ballarat Turf Club in Miners Rest last week to announce a \$3.1 million investment by the Andrews Labor government to deliver 200 jobs in the racing industry through Jobs Victoria. One hundred of the jobs will be at the stables in Ballarat, which the Ballarat Turf Club are over the moon about. The roles are open to people who face barriers to employment, such as people with disability, young people under 25 and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The racing industry is a major economic driver for Victoria, we all know that, and it is a significant economic driver in my electorate of Ripon. In Ballarat alone it supports over 700 full-time jobs. This government will always support each rural and regional Victorian working in the racing industry, whether they are working at the Avoca Shire Turf Club, the St Arnaud racing club, the Ararat Turf Club, the Wedderburn harness racing club, the Maryborough Harness Racing Club or any of the other clubs across our region.

We are a nation of punters. Whether you just put 20 bucks on the nose for the race that stops the nation or are a more frequent customer, punting is a legitimate activity that many people enjoy, but of course it is not without its complications. We know that problem gambling can be extremely harmful, and this is why it is also important to stress that the Victorian licensee or licensees in the future will be subject to the strongest regulator in the country. On 1 January 2022 our government established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission to provide stronger, more focused regulation of our state's gambling industry. It has oversight of all gambling and gaming activity within Victoria, from pubs and clubs through to the casino. The commission is required to undertake activities to minimise gambling harm. We also have the nation's largest commitment to addressing gambling harm, with \$153 million over four years to deliver communication and education strategies, research, counselling and treatment services to people experiencing harm from gambling. I want to thank the member for Eureka for all of her hard work and continued advocacy in the space.

As previously said, we are getting the balance right with this bill. We are getting on with what matters. We are ensuring our community benefits even more from future wagering and betting licences and that our state gets the best financial benefit. We are also supporting our proud racing industry that gives back to many of our rural and regional communities, including across Ripon. It is important that we continue to support the industry well into the future, as many livelihoods depend on it. We are also making sure that we address gambling harm and support those in our community who are struggling with its effects. I thank all the members who spoke before me for their important contributions today, and I commend this bill to the house.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:29): I am very pleased to rise to speak today, and I just want to pick up a point from the member for Eureka. I am very pleased that she raised the famous author Albert Camus; I was very excited about this. I read *Les Justes* at university, *The Just*. Principally the question was whether the ends justify the means. Without going into the depths of that particular play – I think it was a play, from memory; it was a long time ago, at least a century ago, that I was at university studying French literature – in any case, it does raise an issue: do the ends justify the means? When you are looking at this delicate balance with regulation, this is something that we always have to grapple with, if you like: that delicate balance, particularly in the space where we are talking about wagering and betting, you might say. I am not proffering that I can in any way answer that question in its fullness to the extent that probably we would like to when we are discussing someone such as Albert Camus. Nevertheless it does draw to one's attention that fine balance in regulation, particularly relevant in the context of the debate that we are having here today, and that is about 'How far do you go when you're making change and when you're trying to balance the various interests across the state?', in particular noting that thousands of people are employed in this industry. Therefore there are those elements that are very important when we are looking at the issue of employment.

Coming to that issue of regulation – and I think that much has been said about the nuts and bolts of the bill per se by other learned colleagues with regard to the technical changes that are being made – something that is particularly important, noting some of the criticisms that I have heard across the

chamber, is that the Victorian licensee or licensees will be subject to the strongest regulator in the country. Contrary to some comments that I have heard across the chamber, I hope that does provide some reassurance in terms of the seriousness with which this industry is being regulated.

On 1 January 2022 the government established the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission to provide stronger, more focused regulation of Victoria's gambling industry, and of course it has oversight of all gambling and gaming activities within Victoria, from pubs and clubs through to the casinos. Therefore it is very much within the ambit, and I should say stronger than the ambit, within the frame of our government, to have a very significant and serious focus when it comes to the regulation of this industry. Further to that point, the technical changes that are being undertaken here, as has been said, will not jeopardise measures to minimise harm from gambling. I think that is really important as well, because when we are talking about the delicate balance here that has been discussed by many in the chamber in terms of the fine balance between gambling in a measured way – and there may be various interpretations as to what that means – versus gambling in a way that is causing harm, there are probably a couple of limbs to that level. There will be those who may be concerned about what people are gambling on, and that is a separate issue altogether, and then there is the issue of actually making a bet.

I suppose what we are really talking about at its core is addiction and the ability to manage something that can be deeply emotional – I am not a psychologist, but suffice to say I think we are all familiar with what the term 'addiction' generally and broadly means – and have very considered and incremental measures in place to be able at worst to contain addiction. But ultimately we obviously want to curb addictive behaviour, and in this context that would be harm from gambling. I do not wish to be overly critical. Again, coming back to 'Do the ends justify the means, and what is the balance, the delicate balance, in this context?', addiction can span many things. People can be addicted to food, to alcohol and to so many aspects of life – to shopping, you name it. It is broad and significant in that way, and that is not in any way to diminish the significance for those who unfortunately can succumb to really harmful gambling activity that can render them in a position that is arguably very severe financially and emotionally and antagonise relationships and more. I am probably understating the ramifications of gambling when it is not undertaken in a way that is controlled or contained. But on that note, I think it is very important to emphasise that we are serious. We are absolutely serious about harm minimisation in our state and for those experiencing or at risk of experiencing gambling harm. For instance, in the 2019–20 budget the government provided the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation with \$153 million over four years.

You mentioned big figures; what does that actually mean? Sometimes the numbers can become white noise and blur, but the reason I am mentioning that is because it is a significant investment and therefore attests to the fact that we do take this issue very seriously. I should say, again to further offset and perhaps allay some of the concerns from the Greens that were mentioned earlier, this represents the nation's largest commitment to addressing gambling harm, and that is really, really important. The foundation delivers communication and education strategies, commissions research and works with Gambler's Help agencies to deliver counselling and treatment services to people experiencing harm from gambling. That is really, really important work, and it is work that has to be ongoing. I think probably with each and every day with the research that is going into this space, apart from the various ramifications that can flow from gambling, it is actually looking at how gambling that is not managed, so to speak, can impact on an individual's life. So very important work is being undertaken there.

With regard to regulation, we can see that there is very considered and concerted work, providing some technical changes that reflect the changing of the market, which is essentially what this bill is delivering, not in a way that will exacerbate current issues that have been addressed in the chamber with regard to gambling harm or otherwise. So it is not undermining the various very significant measures that have been implemented for some time and are ongoing in order to curb the worst impacts and ultimately to bring about much better outcomes in terms of the ability of Victorians who wish to

gamble to be able to manage their finances and manage their inclination when it comes to taking a bet on a particular event.

To round the discussion, I would like to say, coming back to Albert Camus: do the ends justify the means? Ultimately, it is a question of balance. How do we define balance? Well, that is a debate all of itself, but I would like to think that there is certainly a significant and serious commitment to finding the right balance, and we can see the various measures that I have spoken to today. On that note, I commend the bill to the house.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (17:38): I also rise to speak on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. At the outset I want to acknowledge, as others have in this chamber, the harm that gambling can cause and the devastating effects that can occur in families and society. That is one of the reasons why we do need to regulate all forms of gambling: in order to minimise that harm. I guess the debate about that is about to what extent there should be regulation and to what extent there should be curtailment of gambling. I suspect that many of those that, for example, think this bill does not go far enough are also maybe people that probably think that no gambling should be allowed.

Of course we also have to say that while we hear some of the most terrible stories about the effects of gambling on some people, on the other side, for a number of people it is an industry of jobs and employment, an income to feed families as well as a recreational activity that many individuals and families enjoy, whether it is at the social event of a country race meet or any of the other aspects of horseracing or greyhound racing or whatever it is. Whilst gambling is part of that, it is also the entertainment, the interest and the thrill rather than something that then can in some ways control a person's life.

The legislation we are talking about is quite narrow, and the reason that we are talking about it and that it is being introduced now is that the current wagering and betting licence is going to expire in 2024 – next year – so there needs to be further legislation. There has been a lot of change within the industry with, for example, the introduction of online betting. That does change things, and therefore legislation needs to respond. As we know with legislation that is introduced into the Parliament, while some of it is about making really huge differences to society – and on this side of the chamber we believe that the legislation that we introduce does often make really big and important contributions to making peoples lives better – other legislation is really about bringing things up to date. Society is always changing. There is technological change at a fast pace. Often the legislation that we are talking about is about making sure that legislation has adapted and responded to the changing nature of society, or whatever the issue is that we are talking about, and has some requirement for a legal framework.

This legislation, as I have said, is around wagering and betting licences, and that licence is going to expire in 2024. This change really is about making some amendments to that licensing framework in order for the government to get a better deal out of it – the government and therefore the people, because this is also all about trying to maximise the benefit to the state. This legislation is about making sure that with the licence that is coming up in the future it will provide the state government with further flexibility in negotiating that licence and introducing some more competitiveness into it so that the gains to the state are improved.

As I have mentioned, we are often required to talk about legislation that makes changes. This bill is not about making massive changes to the industry; that is not what is about. It is about making certain changes for particular reasons. Other work, as we know, has been done in terms of providing better funding for programs to minimise gambling harm as well as work with the federal government to introduce frameworks to look at the way we manage gambling harm and to set up a system that better regulates the industry and also tries to provide some consumer protections. But again, in many cases it is a matter of at what point the regulations and the protections meet. As I think the previous speaker, the member of the Albert Park, was saying, it is about a balance. We have to accept that there are many people that engage in this activity as a form of recreation and entertainment. That should be able to

continue, but we also have to be mindful that in other circumstances it really is a terrible situation that people find themselves in.

I also think the member for Kororoit mentioned, you know, pokie machines and how terrible they are, and I know that the Thomastown electorate is similar. It might not be first on the list of losses, but it is certainly quite high, and the devastation as a result of that is just terrible – but in this case we are talking more about racing as a legitimate form of entertainment that people can enjoy and get involved in. Of course we also need to be mindful, and the government will continue to sort of monitor and look at how the gambling system works in Victoria and look at ensuring that it is managed and regulated in a way that does, one, give the most benefit to the state as well as ensuring that the strongest protections can be introduced while other people still continue to be able to partake in the recreation.

We also have to be mindful of the employment and the jobs that are generated. If we look at the racing industry, for example, we know that it generates a lot of income for the state. It also generates a lot of jobs, a lot of attractions and tourism. We just have to look at the Melbourne Cup races, for example, and how popular they are. We have people coming from all over not just the country but other parts of the world. These sorts of activities are part of, I guess in some ways, the fabric of Victoria as the sporting capital, as we like to think, of Australia and maybe beyond.

This legislation is quite narrow. It is looking at the licences that the government issues, and this is I think what we need to talk about as opposed to other aspects – which we will of course acknowledge, but they are really things to be subject to other debates and discussions and future legislation. This legislation is quite narrow. It is about the licensing system as part of the regulatory framework, and I finish in support of the bill.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (17:48): It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening to contribute on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. Just before I go into the crux of the debate I will outline for everybody what these amendments seek to do. The bill, obviously, as others have said, makes amendments to the licence structure for the wagering and betting licence to permit multiple licences rather than the current situation where there is only a single licence-holder. It will also provide the minister with the discretion to determine any periods of exclusivity for future wagering and betting licences and will remove the ‘no less favourable’ requirement for issuing future wagering and betting licences.

Essentially what this bill seeks to achieve is to introduce a level of competition into this sector of the industry that has not existed previously. Now, as we know, that is an incredibly good thing for punters and for people that like to have a bet on racing, and I know the member for Nepean during his contribution earlier reeled off the stat that 70 per cent of Victorians at some time or another like to have a bet during the course of their lives. So it does that, and it is a bill that is fundamentally good for our racing industry in Victoria.

As you would imagine with an amendment of this nature – and every time we introduce a bill of this nature into this house – extensive consultation has been undertaken prior to us introducing the bill in this place. I will note that the racing industry in this state is overwhelmingly supportive of the change that we seek to make with this bill, and that is incredibly important. The racing industry in this state provides or creates a significant amount of economic benefit to Victorians – \$4.7 billion of economic activity per annum, to be exact – and about half of that is household income. So this is an industry that literally sustains Victorian families and an industry that those on this side of the house are more than happy to support. It also creates 120,000 full-time equivalent jobs, from race day staff to trainers to stable and kennel hands. I know firsthand that it sustains hundreds of jobs down in my patch in Wyndham, through the Werribee Racing Club and race day events but also the facilities adjacent to that racing club – think about the breeding facilities that exist down there in Werribee, the equine facilities and the scanning and veterinary and medical facilities, as well as the Werribee quarantine facility, where most of the international raiders that come over to our Victorian Spring Racing Carnival start their journey. So it is also an industry that is incredibly important to the City of Wyndham.

Under the current framework, as I spoke about earlier, having a single licence-holder is incredibly restrictive. The act was passed in 2012, when the way that people liked to have a bet was very different, and I will go into that in a little bit more substance shortly. The act, which was created back then, only permits one wagering and betting licence in operation at the same time. This limitation obviously restricts the state's ability to attract market interest and to potentially maximise the value from the licensing process. We believe in this particular instance – not always but in this particular instance – that further competition will provide for better products, better odds and a better licensing system. The current system also limits, as I said, competition within the wagering and betting industry. In short – and I think perhaps the member for Brunswick touched on this – we currently, under this licensing system, have a monopoly, and we think in this particular instance that to open that up to competition is something that would benefit the industry, benefit the state and also benefit the consumer. So that is really the main aspect of this bill and a really important reason as to why we are introducing it.

Another important fact is that the current act does not provide the minister with the authority to set exclusivity periods for future wagering and betting licences. This lack of flexibility can obviously limit the effectiveness of the licences to potential applicants. As I spoke about earlier, the current licence held by Tabcorp, which came into effect in 2012, expires on 15 August 2024, and the bill before the house at the moment will give the government the flexibility to issue licence arrangements to reflect the current betting trend.

That is something else that is incredibly important and something that I touched on briefly before. When the current arrangement came into effect in 2012, whether they be betting on sport or racing or anything else, the way that people engaged with that and the way that they had a bet was incredibly different to the way that the majority of people do it now. Once again, the member for Nepean – because I heard his contribution – spoke about the fact that his father owned a TAB, and if we wanted to have a bet in 2012 the vast majority of us would have walked into our local TAB or our local pub TAB and would have had a bet on an electronic betting terminal or up at the bar. That has changed seismically in the last 10 years, and these changes will further reflect that changing market.

So just quickly, towards the end of this, I will discuss the 'no less favourable' requirement and its effects on the betting market. The act includes a 'no less favourable' requirement at the moment, mandating that any licensee must enter into funding arrangements with the Victorian racing industry that are no less favourable than the existing arrangements. This requirement that is currently in effect can most certainly act as a barrier to entry for other potential licensees, for the potential entry of competition and for the potential entry of licensees that may better reflect the market as it is, given that the value of the licence may change due to shifts in consumer preferences and market dynamics, particularly, as I said, with the growth of online gambling. This requirement arose from the concurrent privatisation by those opposite, in 1994, of the Victorian TAB and the introduction of gaming machines – electronic betting terminals – in Victoria. It was designed to address concerns by the racing industry that it would be disadvantaged by the privatisation and potentially lose out on wagering revenue previously provided to the racing industry in Victoria.

Just to conclude, I would love to thank the minister for their incredibly hard work on this bill, and the department as well, and I commend it to the house.

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (17:58): Before I move to the bill, I just want to make a comment about an incident that occurred this afternoon out Exford, down at Melton South. Around about a quarter to 4 there was a bus and truck accident, with about 30 schoolchildren involved. The bus rolled. There have been eight children transported to hospital in a serious condition. A number of other kids have injuries but have been stabilised and are still on the scene. I know all of us from this chamber extend our sympathies to the kids and wish them well but also to the teaching staff that are all on scene, both from Exford Primary School but also from Eynesbury Primary School, and of course to all the parents. We are thinking of them right now, and we hope that their kids are safe and will mend quickly. Our thoughts and prayers are with that school and with those families.

I will move on to speak about the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. The bill will amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to allow the award of multiple wagering and betting licences and to remove the ‘no less favourable’ industry funding requirement for wagering and betting licences. I want to make reference to and pick up on what the member for Albert Park made comments about, and that was about addiction to gambling, alcohol and food. I tick all those boxes. I thought she was talking about me when she made that reference, but anyway – I certainly make sure that I enjoy myself, I will tell you that now.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Minister for Racing and of course the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and all the stakeholders involved in our fantastic racing industry. Melton is the home of Tabcorp Park, which is a world-class harness racing and entertainment facility. I have been to many excellent community events at this facility and also many harness racing events. Tabcorp Park consists of a 1040-metre harness racing track. It has a hotel, a conference facility, function rooms, a 300-seat bistro, a sports bar and a TAB and gaming room. It hosts around about 80 race meetings per year as well as concerts, corporate functions and other events. Harness Racing Victoria recognised Melton as the most attractive region for this facility because of our population growth, being well placed for the land and because we are home to the highest proportion of standard breeds in Victoria.

Tabcorp Park is an incredible facility. It is an asset in our community, and that is why in May 2022 the Andrews Labor government’s Victorian Racing Industry Fund provided more than \$1.63 million to upgrade Tabcorp Park. The harness racing industry in Victoria generates \$600 million for the economy and helps sustain around 4300 jobs. Victoria needs the racing industry for the economy, for the jobs and to allow us to have a great day out at the races. About two weeks ago I was at Tabcorp Park with the Minister for Racing opening up the new owners lounge, which is a great facility that we have contributed funding to. This lounge is for the owners of harness horses when they have a win at Tabcorp Park. It is a beautiful lounge for them to relax in and enjoy their winnings. It is a great facility to have opened only a couple of weeks ago.

Over the years I have been to many, many races at many, many racetracks all over the state and also interstate. I love the races of all kinds – thoroughbreds, harness and the greyhounds – and they are all very entertaining. I am sure all of us here, or most of us, have placed a bet at a race meeting, in particular probably the Melbourne Cup. We will all have engaged in either betting on the Melbourne Cup or being in Melbourne Cup sweeps. Some of us have been more successful than others, and I can say I have never been successful in betting on the races. That is probably why I ended up in Parliament. Anyway, we have had our moments over the years.

Again I say I have been to many, many race meetings at both country Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne racetracks, and I find the facilities terrific. That does not mean to say we cannot upgrade some facilities in some local regional areas. I find the hospitality amazing and of course the families that are involved in racing. It is a fantastic industry to get involved with. We know that racing is a family matter in rural and regional areas, and it is fantastic for local regional communities and economies. Victoria leads the way with our racing industry even though a number of states are trying to take our mantle. Good luck to them, but I think they are a long way off from doing so.

In Victoria land-based wagering and betting can only be conducted under a licence issued by the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. This licence allows a business to conduct wagering and approved betting competitions, unlike businesses located elsewhere in Australia who can only accept Victorian bets online and by phone. The Victorian licensee can also accept bets on racecourses and through an off-course retail network like pubs or standalone agencies. I am sure not all but a lot of us have been into the old TABs. Now they are all modernised in these big gaming places and the eateries that go along with them. I know that there are some in Melton – at the Melton Country Club; the two hotels, Mac’s and the Golden Fleece; and at Tabcorp Park. They are set up for these quite different agencies than what they were previously, like the old TABs where you would walk in

and there would be a thousand tickets on the ground from all the losses. Now they are all modernised and electronic, so it is quite different.

For almost 11 years Tabcorp has held the single permitted wagering and betting licence in Victoria. In light of this licence expiring in August 2024, we need to amend the act to support the issuing of a new licence. We have been given the opportunity to have a think about what is best for our state, our economy and anyone engaging in wagering and betting. Instead of the single wagering and betting licence permitted at one time, the bill will allow the minister to exercise discretion and determine how many licences can be issued in Victoria, similarly to how the public lottery licence and keno licences operate. This will ensure the licence will maximise value to the state by attracting greater interest in the licence.

In addition to this, the issuing of a licence will include an exclusive period, and this means that the government will not be able to issue another licence during that period. For example, the government could issue one licence for a term of 20 years with an exclusivity period of 10 years. After this 10-year period the government could issue additional licences. As it stands, the act states that the minister must ensure that the licence applicant has made arrangements with the Victorian racing industry before granting a licence application to ensure that the licence-holder has an agreement with the Victorian racing industry that is no less favourable than the previous licensee's agreement. The 'no less favourable' requirement arose from the concerns of the Victorian racing industry, given the introduction of gaming machines in Victoria and the concurrent privatisation of the Victorian TAB. This was around about 30 years ago.

Of course with the introduction of gaming machines we have seen the introduction and increase of addiction, and I do have some concerns about access to gaming machines. I have always said that in Melton anyone that is in a gaming den after midnight is either an addict or so desperate to get a drink into themselves that it is the only place they can go. I can never understand why some of our clubs and pubs extend their licences to allow gaming to go until 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning. That cannot be any good for anyone, and I would have thought that the majority of people that are in those places after midnight are addicted to gambling and we should be doing something more to stop that. I am supportive of having limits that can be pushed onto those machines, and I think we need to deal with that in a far stronger way.

This bill is an important bill for our state. I do thank the minister and her staff in regard to this bill. I do commend this bill to the house and wish everyone well in their future gambling.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:07): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

*Business of the house*

**Victorian Auditor-General's Office**

*Financial audit*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison)** (18:08): We have two messages from the Legislative Council. The first one is:

The Legislative Council has agreed with the Assembly in the appointment of Mr Kenneth Weldin of PKF Melbourne Audit and Assurance to conduct the final audit of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office for the financial year ending 30 June 2024.



*Bills***Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023***Council's agreement*

The **ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison)** (18:08): The second message is from the Legislative Council agreeing to a bill. The Legislative Council has agreed to the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 without amendment.

*Motions***Energy policy****Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this house notes the overwhelming support at the 2022 election for the Victorian Labor government's plan to:

- (1) bring back the State Electricity Commission;
- (2) reach 95 per cent renewables by 2035 and net zero by 2045;
- (3) install 100 neighbourhood batteries across Victoria; and
- (4) create 59,000 renewable energy jobs.

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon)** (18:09): I began my contribution last sitting week. The first thing I did was outline the hypocrisy of the government members and ministers and particularly the minister at the table, the Minister for Climate Action, in her contribution when she was saying how addicted to privatisation the Liberals are. I pointed out how the Labor government since I have been here have flogged off some \$22 billion worth of state assets because they have run out of money, and you have to look at why they have run out of money. It is gross negligence, mismanagement, overspending and blowouts on every single project – from the Port of Melbourne to selling off land titles, other land packages and Snowy Hydro. At the same time, they have increased taxes. We are the highest taxed state in Victoria.

**Roma Britnell:** In the nation.

**Cindy McLEISH:** In the nation. We had a much bigger share out of the GST revenue – there was an extra \$11 billion there – but still the Andrews Labor government felt it necessary to flog off asset after asset and then have the temerity to say that this is something that the Liberals and Nationals are addicted to, when nothing could be further from the truth.

I draw you back to the State Electricity Commission, because Labor members have been told something. I think they have been told also that if you say it often enough it is true, but that is not the way it works, because the facts are the facts. In 1991 Joan Kirner as the Premier began to sell off the SEC. Why did she do this privatisation process? Why did she go down this track? Because at the time the SEC was \$8 billion in debt. In today's figures that would be \$14 billion to \$15 billion. Imagine that: a government-owned entity or agency being that far in debt – \$15 billion. The government cannot bail them out; it is just not feasible to be able to do that. So what they did, the only option they had available to them, was to begin the privatisation process.

**Roma Britnell:** Who did that?

**Cindy McLEISH:** Joan Kirner certainly did that, and this is all verifiable in *Hansard*. There are the appropriate transcripts, so do not just believe me – trust the record, the fact as it stands. At that time – and I fear for the government at the moment that we were heading down that same path – the Cain–Kirner governments had mismanaged money so badly that they actually had to borrow money to pay the nurses and the teachers and the police. Imagine that: you have to borrow money to pay for something that should just be guaranteed. It should be in the budget, it should be absolutely rock solid,

but it was not there. They had gone so far down the gurgler that they had to borrow money to pay nurses and teachers, and I fear that we are on the same trajectory.

In this privatisation process, as it began at the time, 59 per cent of the Loy Yang B power station was sold off. It was privatised. Could they keep it in Australia? No, they could not do that. It had to go overseas so a US company, Mission Energy, in 1992 for \$1.3 billion purchased Loy Yang, that 51 per cent share. So for the government to say that it is we that are addicted to privatisation, to try and rewrite the records to say that we sold off the SEC when it was something that they did, and to know that you have sold \$22 billion of state assets in my time here – privatised it – it is just such a fallacy. This government have got their heads in the clouds and they are living in la-la land.

I want to talk about when we heard about the how the SEC was going to be brought back and how we were lucky in Victoria for the government to control this entity now. When it was spruiked – great, they are going to lower the cost of power bills. Well, that is something that we are all fairly keen on having, lower power bill costs. I would say that we would all like that. It is not happening. There were no dates, there were no costs, there was no business case. But we knew that there would be no business case because there is no business case on the Suburban Rail Loop either. We began to think ‘Gee, what’s really going on here?’ because we do not know. We have been kept in the dark. There have not been any details released, and we sort of imagined how it came up: ‘What can we do?’ Whilst on the one hand they are privatising things left, right and centre, on the other hand they are like ‘Oh, we’re going to own this’.

But who is going to own it? We are really quite unsure about whether it is going to be 51 per cent government owned and 49 per cent private equity share. The minister, way back at election time and then in December, said on 20 December the SEC was going to work with 51 per cent government ownership and 49 per cent private equity share. After this was done, on 20 December, not even a month after the election, when the minister was asked if energy prices were going to be lowered or were going to continue to rise, she said that it would be 100 per cent publicly owned and would operate for profit. Then, goodness, it seemed like that was not right either. Now the government has stated it will be 49 per cent owned by superannuation funds and not operated for profit, so we really do not know – flip-flop, flip-flop. The minister is at the table. She really needs to get the facts straight here and to tell people, because it is all over the place. These are your quotes; these are not made up. These are your quotes from question time and from your media releases. The minister is just disputing this.

I want to touch on energy prices being lowered under this. We had a federal budget recently, and they talked about energy prices being lowered with the initiatives that they have for small businesses. I think everybody was quite shocked to find that Victoria was the only state in the country that as part of the package that was announced by the federal Labor government had a co-contribution required by the state. So every other state decided that they were in on this and they were going to help their small businesses, but no, we have got the Labor government in Victoria snubbing small business yet again. They did not sign up to this. We had reports in a few of the print media last week, the *Australian Financial Review* and the *Herald Sun*, and we had some quotes from Paul Guerra. He will be well known to many people here, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief. He said this move would leave Victorian businesses ‘worse off than those in most other states’. They thought like everybody else that the federal government’s small business energy program might help Victorian businesses, but no, for some reason they have decided not to match it here. And this is in the face of a survey that VCCI did recently that said that 92 per cent of small business respondents are concerned about potential increased costs of energy in the next year. So the government here had a chance to help businesses lower the costs, but no, they have neglected to take up that opportunity.

We know of course the funds are pretty dry and the cupboard is fairly bare, but we need to look at why the cupboard is bare and what it is that they have done. Despite having gains from the sale of state assets and having increased taxes going through the roof – the number of taxes is in the forties now – and increased GST revenue, they have still managed to squander it. There has been an enormous amount of money wasted with budget blowouts. Level crossing removals are \$3.3 billion over budget.

For the east–west link they had to pay out contracts that were not worth the paper they were written on – \$1.3 billion. We have just got this repeating itself and repeating itself and repeating itself. The government is wasting money like there is no tomorrow, and I do not support the minister’s motion.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (18:18): I am really excited to rise in the house today to speak to this motion, which notes the overwhelming support for the Victorian Labor government’s plan to bring back the SEC and also to transition this state to 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035, installing 100 neighbourhood batteries across Victoria. In the process of doing all that it is creating thousands of jobs – 59,000 jobs – in renewable energy. I am really proud to be a member of this house and to support these initiatives and the importance of taking action on the challenges that are posed by climate change. The Andrews Labor government has set very ambitious targets, but they are necessary in response to these challenges. I believe it is a significant step going forward for our state and our country, and again Victoria is leading the nation in this space.

First and foremost, I would like to commend the government for their plan to bring back the SEC, not only helping to secure our energy future but ensuring that Victorians have affordable and reliable electricity. The SEC has played a really significant and crucial role in our state’s history, and I am excited to see it not only returned but returned as a leader in renewable energy. I remember how proud people were to work for the SEC. I had relatives in my own extended family who worked for the SEC. I remember them wearing their T-shirts with the logo on the weekend because they were super proud to work for the SEC and they were proud of the work that they were doing for the state. I know from throughout the campaign and since, after promoting the \$250 power saving bonus throughout the community, how excited people are to see the SEC coming back.

People would talk about this positive plan with me, but the key issue here though was that people knew that it was for them. This was a policy for Victorians. It was putting energy back in the hands of Victorians, because the government will own it and the State Electricity Commission will not be run for profit or for shareholders but will be run for Victorians. Also, we are going to enshrine the SEC in the constitution this year, protecting this, really, from the opposition. And I remember something very similar that we had to do was to enshrine the fracking ban in the constitution to protect it from the opposition.

As I have indicated, I am really proud that this state is leading the country in climate action. This government’s plan to transition the state to 95 per cent renewables is bold but absolutely necessary. By embracing this clean energy, like solar and wind, we can reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, we also know the government’s plan is to reduce those emissions by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 with that accelerated target of net zero emissions by 2045. This is a really important global effort that we are leading on. By setting these ambitious targets and taking meaningful action we show the world that we are committed to being a leader in sustainability and climate action.

Having come to this place after fighting for a fracking ban, I actually know personally the level of interest and eagerness in the community to get on with this transition to renewables. It is immense. Communities who declared themselves frack-free were doing so to protect their agricultural land, their environment and their clean and green agricultural sector and to protect our food bowl. Again, with Victoria leading the way in this space in banning fracking, communities knew then at that point that the government was on a path to transition to renewables – and Victoria again is leading. These communities are ready. They are ready for this transition. They are eager and they clearly are ready, with that resounding support at the election, to have Victoria lead in this space.

Coming from a farming background I know that many in the agricultural sector are also working towards goals and assisting the state in our goals. Clearly they are very much at the forefront of climate change. They definitely feel the effects of drought, fires, floods, frost and disease, and this government has proudly supported our Victorian farmers with, for example, the \$20 million fund to create climate

action plans, innovation and technologies for the agricultural sector. So I think everyone is playing a part, and I am really proud and pleased to see farmers stepping up to that challenge as well.

Excitingly, too, there will be 100 neighbourhood batteries for this state – and that is super, super exciting. This is really an innovative approach to energy storage. It is our future, and we are grabbing it with both hands and taking it on. It is going to make it easier for our households to store that excess energy generated by their rooftop solar. It is going to reduce waste and improve inefficiencies. It is also going to help reduce the costs of households and businesses and contribute to that transition. This also is going to mean, though, that households will have access to that cheaper renewable energy even if they do not have solar on their roof.

At this past election Labor did make a commitment to have one of these neighbourhood batteries in my electorate in the local government area of the Borough of Queenscliffe, and speaking with local residents and community organisations such as the Queenscliffe Climate Action Now group, I know how excited they are to see this come into reality. I know that they already had a plan to do this, but they just know how important this is not only for today but for the future of their town. This neighbourhood battery that will be in the Borough of Queenscliffe is just one piece of the jigsaw that they are trying to put together and to realise at the Borough of Queenscliffe, led by community action, in a response to their *Climate Emergency Response Plan*, which has been adopted by their council. They are a very active community, they are dedicated and they are doing their own climate action locally. This climate action and this community advocacy do take me back to those grassroot days of – excuse the pun – people power, where the community takes action, and there is so much power in that community action and community-driven projects, and I do thank all those that put their hand up to get involved and be part of the solution. So congratulations to the Borough of Queenscliffe and the Queenscliffe Climate Action Now group.

Finally, I will just sort of touch on this. The positive plan that we have is going to absolutely create opportunities for this state in terms of jobs – 59,000 jobs in the making for the renewable energy transition. This does represent a significant opportunity for our state to develop and deploy all of those new technologies and innovation and industries and to be that hub for clean energy. This transition, the investment in business, the training of new workers and the building of new infrastructure, is going to create these thousands of jobs, and it is so exciting for jobseekers, those who may be looking for a different career, students, tradies, TAFEs, businesses and future workers. This SEC is going to train the next generation of tradespeople – maintenance workers, electricians, welders, painters and mechanics – and what is probably more exciting for me is to see that these jobs will create apprenticeships and traineeships, delivering secure jobs for those young people as well. We will also establish the SEC centre of training excellence to coordinate and accredit courses in clean energy and connect our TAFEs, registered training organisations, unions and the industry and, very excitingly, add clean energy to the VCE vocational major. We want secondary school students to get that experience through the SEC. So this is a little bit of a call-out to all those who want to be involved: we are going to need you, we want you and we want those workers to be getting involved.

In conclusion, I really urge members of this house to support this motion before us and continue to work together to support this plan to bring back the SEC, this transition to renewables, our reduction of our emissions and installing these hundred neighbourhood batteries across Victoria, creating thousands of jobs on the way. This is a critical part of our future. It is going to secure our state's energy future. It is the future of our planet and our climate action, and I am really pleased to support this motion, and I commend the motion to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (18:28): Thank you, Acting Speaker Addison, and it is great to see you in the chair this evening. SEC, bringing it back – well, it is in my wheelhouse as the member for Morwell. The Latrobe Valley has been powering the state of Victoria for generations, so it is great to be able to stand up and have a little bit of a chat in here tonight. The locals down in the Latrobe Valley are a little bit nervous. These are the mums and dads on the street. They are wondering how all this is going to work. So as you can well imagine, with the power industry down there, a lot of their

husbands, wives and things like that actually work in the power industry, so when I talk to them, they are just a little bit unsure how it is all going to fit in. Another thing they are really nervous about is once the coal-fired power stations shut down, what are we going to be left with, with three huge coal pits that need to be filled in or filled with water? But I will come back to that.

Workers in the current power industry also cannot work out how it is going to work. All of them to a person talk about being able to have a base power load to be able to secure the power generation for the future. We all realise that the renewables are coming in, and we are all embracing that, but to keep this constant power supply, if one of the generators goes off, they need X amount of power to be able to fire it back up again. These workers that I talk to are my experts. They are the ones that have worked in the power industry. Their parents have worked in the power industry. They are the real experts about what is going to happen, and I love being able to sit down and talk with them and, you know, listen to where the government wants to go and where the government wants to get to within its time frame. It really is enlightening to talk to these workers, and their time frames for it all to marry up and work are miles apart.

Hazelwood power station is shut, and they are starting to do some rectifications on the actual mine there – some rehabilitation. Yallourn power station is shutting in five years time. Loy Yang power station follows in the early 2030s. So with our current power source looking like it is going to be gone, we currently have zero of the proposed wind farms or solar farms in place and we have no transmission towers or transmission lines agreed on, let alone built, for how they are going to bring the renewable energy from the wind farms out in Bass Strait onto land and then into either Loy Yang or the ex-Hazelwood power station, into where they house all the power stuff that comes to Melbourne.

Let me talk about the transmission lines. The member for Gippsland South has spoken about this for many years. Being a new member, it is something new that I am actually now engaging with the community and the residents of the Latrobe Valley on. They are a very divisive thing, these transmission lines. They are going through farmlands. For generations these families have lived there, and it is actually pitting family member against family member. Do the transmission lines go above ground? Do we put them below ground? It is a really hard one to fathom. It is making a big impact on the communities where it is going to impact, and they still have not bedded down exactly where these transmission lines – the source of bringing this renewable energy in so we can use it – are going to go.

A nice thing to be able to do, because these towers are pretty big, would be to have a replica tower and a wind turbine in Melbourne so the people here and Melburnians can actually see how big they are. They are absolutely huge. Once again the country, especially the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland South, will wear the ugly brunt so Melbourne can bang on about having clean energy. We are the ones that are going to have to have these transmission lines and transmission towers and look out to sea and see these wind farms.

The transmission towers are 80 metres tall. The ones that you see, the big towers you see in Melbourne, are about 35 to 40 metres tall, so we are doubling in size. They are huge. The wind turbine blades – this is not the tower that they are going to sit the turbine and the blades on – are 100 metres long. Each blade is 100 metres long. If one blade comes up to be at 12 o'clock and you measure to the bottom of the lowest blade, it is actually taller than the Rialto building that sits in Melbourne. So on your way home tonight in your Uber or when you are walking home have a look at the Rialto tower, and that is as big as what the blades are, let alone what the actual towers are to hold the turbines up in the water. For the look of what we are going to be left with we really need to do some work on that. It would be lovely for people to be able to see the actual impact of it all.

Workers in the industry say they will not have enough, as I said before, baseload power to keep this generation going. Of course we are going to have the renewables coming in, but with such a short time frame we need to make sure that we have a smooth transition. Once again, the experts that I am talking to are not sitting behind a desk. They are not running models on computers. They are the people that

have been in the industry for generations and know what it takes to keep the lights on throughout the whole of Victoria. They are the ones that I deal with on a daily basis.

I have touched before on the rehabilitation of the mining pits. They are massive. We talk about filling them with rubbish and filling them with water. I invite the Minister for the State Electricity Commission to fire up the big red Andrews bus and burst through the Pakenham border. Bring everyone down – we will do a little bit of a school excursion. Come down and actually see how big they are. They are enormous. We drive past them on the highway, and you do not actually take into account how big they are. At the Hazelwood mine they actually run a tour. You can go down and see it from the other side. It is mind blowing for someone that has lived in the community all their life to actually go into the pit and see what we need to do, because we do not want to be left with just some open holes that are no longer going to be used. We need to make sure that whatever happens at the end of their life they are rehabilitated so they are something the people of the Latrobe Valley can use and be proud of. What that is we do not know as yet, but we would really like to make sure that that is on the agenda also.

Where I come from we are the home of power generation, and do you know what – we actually saw through the smoke and mirrors of the SEC. The one true indicator for the much-hyped SEC when we were going through the election was all of a sudden it popped up out of nowhere. We had the Labor candidates and the people handing out how-to-vote cards with the old SEC caps on and the old SEC shirts. I would say even rusted-on Labor supporters in the valley saw through that – that it was not right. You can stand there and you can say, ‘We want to bring back the SEC.’ You can say that you are going to create 59,000 new jobs. The people of Victoria overwhelmingly voted this in. It was called out by the people where power generation matters, down in the Latrobe Valley, the people who live in the home of the founding of the SEC and the ones who do keep the lights on for us and the entirety of Victoria.

How do I know this? Well, I am exhibit A. The valley did not vote for the Andrews government and the SEC – bringing it back. Country Victoria did not vote for the Andrews government and bringing back the SEC. It was those that want the soft touch of ‘We are using clean energy to power our lives’ but do not want anything to do with the visual pollution of wind turbines and transmission line towers. What we need to do is make sure that we do transition responsibly and do not actually have such a short time frame because, as I say, my experts who have been in the power industry a very long time with generations and generations of workers are calling it out, saying that it will not work in that short time frame.

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (18:38): It is a delight for me to rise this evening to support this motion. It is particularly pleasing to see the Minister for the State Electricity Commission in the chamber at the moment – I must say, a minister who I believe has done more for climate action than any other minister in any other jurisdiction in the nation to push the case along for climate action. I do want to start by looking at those opening words of the motion, which is about overwhelming support at the 2022 election for bringing back the SEC. That was certainly apparent in my own community in Box Hill; we had probably the highest primary vote but certainly the highest two-party preferred vote that was ever recorded for Labor in a Box Hill election since the electorate was established in 1945, and that was reflected I think in many other seats in the east and of course in many other seats across Victoria, including your good seat, Acting Speaker Addison. I know there are many seats neighbouring yours which also have many renewable energy assets, and the community by and large are very supportive of those renewable energy assets because they want to be able to have the benefit of the renewable energy that those assets generate.

I just want to look back. I have been looking at the history of the SEC, and not just in terms of the privatisation, which in itself seems to be a case of some people having some different views. But I will go back to the early days, when the SEC was initially set up, just over a century ago, and the reasons why it was set up at that stage. Prior to that stage the energy supply was largely provided at a municipal level or to run the tramways. Some people may be familiar with the old power station that was in

Spencer Street, which was owned by the City of Melbourne to provide energy to local residents in the City of Melbourne. As the energy demand grew, the reliability of supply became a bigger question for the community. The resource of the Latrobe Valley had been recognised and known for quite a number of years, but the technology at that time was not there to generate reliable power. That was towards the end of the First World War, when there had been enough technological developments overseas that they had identified that this was a resource that could be used. The purpose of setting it up, as I was saying, was really to ensure a reliability of supply, because most of the other energy that was generated at the time was reliant on coal imports – black coal imports, specifically from New South Wales.

I see a lot of parallels with where we are now in terms of the renewable energy sector. The energy sector has grown and developed significantly over the last 20, 30 years to a point where there is efficiency of those renewable energy assets, particularly the investment in batteries. We see in the motion the recognition of the 100 neighbourhood batteries. I also note the government's significant investment in the battery outside of Geelong, I believe the largest battery in the Southern Hemisphere. This is a combination of assets and a combination of renewable energy resources, and we now can fully utilise and fully realise the capacity of those assets. When we look at, I guess, the bands of the state, in the north of the state we have fantastic solar resources to maximise the use of solar energy. Both in the highlands around the range and in the southern part of the state near the coast – and now off the coast, offshore – we have wind energy and the reliability of that wind energy. Particularly on the south coast we have one of the most reliable wind resources probably anywhere in the world. There is literally no land between South America and those southern tips of Victoria which the wind has to cross or where it dies down at all. Anyone who travels down that coastline is very familiar with that wind.

I know that one of our local branch members is very passionate about wave technology. We have also got some very reliable wave patterns, particularly off the south-west coast of Victoria. I do not think the technology is quite there to harness all of the wave technology, but there is a lot of research that is being put into that. But overall, as a bloc there are a lot of renewable resources that are available in the state of Victoria, and that industry has matured over time so that we can harness those different resources and pull them altogether utilising battery technology to provide a continuous reliable source of renewable energy power. This is part of a much broader mix of what we are doing as a government to reach our 95 per cent renewable energy target by 2035, our emission reductions target from 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and net zero carbon emissions by 2045. Stationary energy and energy usage is obviously just one component. It is a very significant component of those net zero emissions, but emission reductions cut across almost every single industry. Obviously, we have put a lot of investment into the zero-emission vehicle fleet and enhancing that fleet, particularly in terms of our bus fleet. From 2025 we will be making a significant investment in our future, with all buses having zero tailpipe emissions. Across the broader transport fleet and other government operations 100 per cent of government operations will be moving to renewable energy. Think about all of the different government operations that that entails – hospitals, trains, trams, police stations, schools et cetera.

We are also looking at investing \$77 million to help land managers restore and protect natural landscapes and vegetation through natural restoration and \$20 million to help Victorian farmers make climate action plans and support cutting-edge research, innovation and technologies for the agricultural sector, along with the \$15.3 million Victorian carbon farming program to help farmers plant trees. The agricultural sector is a huge contributor to the Victorian economy, but it has a reliance on making sure that it understands what the climate is going to be doing in the future and making sure that it is playing its part. Many of them do want to play their part, and we have to assist them in that process by making that transition easier for them.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (18:48): I rise tonight to try not to laugh at this motion that the government has put forward. I note that the Minister for the State Electricity Commission is here, and I am glad she is here because I know in my part of the world people regularly want to contact the minister to discuss some of her delusional visions on the rollout of the SEC and the state's capacity to meet the targets that this government continually trumpets.

We do not have to look very far to see how ridiculous this motion is. First of all, the government is asserting that people voted hand over fist to have the SEC reinstated. I can assure the minister that no-one in Polwarth was voting on having the SEC come back, because there is not really a fondness for it. The SEC conjures up for many people the disasters of the death knells of the Cain–Kirner regime when they were here and broke the state.

The minister asserts in one of her points that 59,000 jobs will be created. I mean, that is just a crazy figure. It is unsubstantiated; the minister is yet to provide not only to this Parliament but to the people of Victoria where on earth that figure comes from. In my electorate and in my counterpart the member for South-West Coast's electorate we share some of the largest quantities of wind farm and renewable energy projects in the whole state. I can tell the minister, because she is sitting very close, that about eight blokes in a ute drive to Mortlake, eat a few pies at the pie shop and drive back home. That is the extent of the long-term employment opportunities that her rollout is funding, so where the 59,000 ongoing good, long-term jobs for Victorians are in this motion I have no idea.

It is important to realise that tonight just before taking the floor I had a little look at where the rollout is going for the moment, and the government is right: there has been a great effort by all Victorians to do more in the renewable space. But it is a big job, and this government has a responsibility to sell to the community how vast and enormous that task is. Just some basic facts tonight, at 6:45 in fact: here in Victoria at the moment the renewable rollout has seen an installed megawatt capacity in renewable energy now greater than the traditional energy sources we had of carbon-based coal and gas. At the moment renewable energy is about 3 per cent ahead of traditional energy sources. But tonight at 6:45, despite the fact that there is now more renewable energy capacity in the state, it is still only able to produce 27 per cent of our supply of energy here in Victoria.

What the minister fails to understand is that while people have a desire for renewables, they actually have a greater desire to make sure the power stays on when and where they need it. Why is this important? This is important for electorates like mine and the member for South-West Coast's because when we leave Melbourne at the end of a Parliament week and we head up over the West Gate Bridge and look west, 75 per cent of the energy consumed west of the West Gate Bridge is consumed by about 15 businesses. It does not matter how many households the minister says she is providing energy for, she never refers to the amount of productive capacity that that energy is producing. Why is that important for the people of western Victoria and Geelong and elsewhere? It is because the energy being used creates jobs, it creates opportunities, it creates wealth and it creates exports. It is the reason our communities exist – turning energy into production. The minister categorically forgets this when the government goes on its rant about how wonderful the SEC will be.

The government say to us and in their budget papers they are allocating \$20 million a year for the next four years to create this SEC engine that is going to power Victoria into the future. Well, let us have a look at what renewable energy costs. I can tell the minister that in my electorate the Mount Gellibrand wind farm, which I believe the minister came to open, creates 132 megawatts of energy at full capacity; tonight it is 21 megawatts, so it is very much underperforming on its overall capacity. That cost \$258 million. The Berrybank wind farm – again, 180 megawatts; it is producing 31 tonight – cost \$284 million. And the very controversial Mortlake South wind farm, at 157 megawatts, producing only 10 tonight – \$280 million. Minister, for the princely sum of \$822 million we just have three quite small wind farms. They are incredibly expensive installations that have to be created, and there is no way any rational Victorian, anyone who has a figment of understanding about how these things work, could possibly believe this government is going to recreate the SEC to power Victoria into the future for a paltry \$20 million a year. And this is from a government who spent \$3 billion over the last four years on its Big Housing Build and has created a net gain of houses in Victoria of only 74.

This government's capacity to imagine the magic pudding, to create amazing, desirable outcomes with its resources – clearly it is unable to. We only have to look, for example, at the West Gate Tunnel. All of us who travel down the West Gate Freeway remember fondly, in the lead-up to 2022, that that tunnel was going to be open and operating by 2022 – and here we are in 2023, and it is still just a



tunnel with lots of concrete and nowhere close to being open. We also know, for example, that we have had promises of a Geelong women's and children's hospital. That was promised at least one election ago, and it is still a 'to be announced' funding program in the government's budget line items. This government talks big and acts very, very tiny when it comes to getting things done as it says.

Do Victorians really believe this government's ability to roll out the SEC? I do not think they do. I do not think they trust a government who struggles to get ambulances to people in a timely fashion. Certainly in country Victoria we have record low attendance rates at our schools, and this government has done nothing to encourage kids back to school and have them attending school. These are important basic requirements of a government, let alone one that wants to reimagine itself as an energy provider.

The minister has made out that one of the reasons the government are taking on this quest to do the SEC for \$20 million a year – I am sure they are probably going to plan to pay their government-appointed CEO about that much every year, but anyway – is, they say, 'We're doing this because we're reversing all the terrible things the Kennett government did.' Can I remind this Parliament and can I remind the minister that it is this government that has just in the last eight years flogged off the Melbourne port, which has been hugely detrimental to much of the agricultural export from certainly my part of the world, this government has just recently flogged off VicRoads and of course it has flogged off the land titles office. They are just three very large-scale state government basic services that Victorians expect to be well run and well managed, but this government has flogged them off. So to come out and tell the Victorian population that it is getting back into the nationalising of energy is just a ludicrous concept. We know it is ludicrous because they have not put the resources and they are not putting the commitment into the funding required to do it. They are certainly not putting the infrastructure in place, because it is just physically not possible.

We have seen this minister now bungle around and mess around with the lives and livelihoods of communities from Truganina out to the back of Ballarat, and that is just one piece of infrastructure, just one part of the very complex web that has to be put in place to provide a sustainable long-term renewable energy system. We have been going now I think for nearly eight years trying to get a consensus, trying to find a route, trying to find a funding mechanism and trying to get community licence to put powerlines up, yet this government want us to believe that for \$20 million a year they can create an energy system that is going to return profits to Victorian taxpayers.

**Lily D'Ambrosio** interjected.

**Richard RIORDAN:** It is beyond a fanciful notion, Minister. It is fanciful because you also mentioned in the motion that you want to have the hundred neighbourhood batteries, and I think the biggest one that you have created, at Moorabool, says it runs houses in the area for half an hour. Can I remind the minister: batteries do not generate electricity. They can store electricity, but they do not generate it. Minister, it does not matter how many batteries you put around the community, they are not going to generate the electricity when and where you need it, and certainly not for a prolonged period of time.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarnet) (18:58): It is an absolute –

**Sam Groth:** I draw your attention to the state of the house.

**Quorum formed.**

**Dylan WIGHT:** It gives me absolute pleasure to rise and follow one of the more extraordinary contributions that I have seen in this place in my short time here. The member for Polwarth spoke about our motion about the SEC but did not just speak about that. We had the situation where he strayed into the West Gate Tunnel. He strayed into school funding.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member will have the call when we return to this debate. I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.***Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Mooroolbark Heights Reserve clubrooms**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (19:00): (161) My adjournment is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the crucial funding to allow for the construction of new and accessible clubrooms at the Mooroolbark Heights Reserve. The Mooroolbark Heights Reserve clubrooms were constructed in 1970 and are used by both the Mooroolbark football and cricket clubs. The current facilities are outdated and too small for the demands of the clubs. When men's and women's teams play on the same day, the women's teams are left to use a temporary offsite building to get changed as no change rooms are available within the current building. This inequity towards the women's teams is unjust. With women's teams' participation levels increasing, we need to be providing the infrastructure and resources to support and encourage the growth to continue.

This long-overdue upgrade would provide fully accessible facilities for everyone, including men's, women's and umpire change rooms, game day toilets, a kitchen extension and a multipurpose community space allowing a space for function hire. This investment in grassroots sports would provide facilities for the local community that they can be proud of, offering them an inclusive space where they can socialise and feel connected. Again, I ask the Minister for Community Sport to provide the crucial funding to allow for the construction of new and accessible clubrooms at the Mooroolbark Heights Reserve to ensure equality and inclusiveness for all.

**Fawkner RSL**

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (19:01): (162) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Veterans, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to the Fawkner RSL. I am very fortunate to have active RSLs in my electorate, and I thank them for the important role they play in our community and the critical work they do in supporting our returned service men and women.

It being Volunteer Week, I also commend the tireless dedication and hours given by the volunteer committees that run them. Thank you to the executive committee of Fawkner RSL: Michael Brennan, Harry Middlemo, George Zaro-giannis and Stephen Barry. After attending the dawn service at Maygar Barracks on Anzac Day I dropped into Fawkner RSL, who also run a moving service to commemorate our veterans and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Chatting to president Michael and secretary George, I heard of their plans to grow and expand the Fawkner RSL as a place to meet and connect with others.

I recently spoke to Minister Suleyman about the great work RSLs do in my electorate and was absolutely delighted to be able to pass on the good news that the Fawkner RSL's application for funding of \$37,000 to install solar panels on their roof had been successful. This will help lower their energy costs and emissions and is part of the Andrews Labor government's ongoing work to honour and support Victoria's veteran community with more than \$1.4 million being distributed to 55 projects across the state through three grant programs. The RSL have been steadfast advocates for veterans' rights and welfare for over a century, and I commend their tireless efforts to support those who have served our country. Both the RSL and Legacy were supportive of my father-in-law and my husband's family growing up. My father-in-law Max served on four ships during the Second World War, including the *HMAS Shropshire*, and he narrowly survived the sinking of the *HMAS Canberra* in the Pacific. He lost a brother at El Alamein and another was taken prisoner of war. He carried the effects of this for the remainder of his life, as so many service people do. The RSLs were such an important place for him to meet, to connect with others and to access support, advice and services, and I thank

them for their work. I commend Fawkner RSL for their important work and would welcome the opportunity for the minister to join me at the Fawkner RSL and meet with their leadership team.

### **Regional health services**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (19:04): (163) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide a guarantee that regional Victoria, including my community, will not be impacted by the federal Labor government's \$810 million cut to the state's health funding. As part of this cut, palliative care funding across aged-care facilities is set to be reduced in regional Victoria.

During a recent tour throughout the Euroa electorate with our Shadow Minister for Health, several healthcare providers made it abundantly clear there are genuine concerns about their funding under this government. We are seeing out-of-control surgery waitlists. For category 1 surgeries, which are the most urgent, the statewide waitlist has increased by over 45 per cent in just three months. It is up as far as 140 per cent at Bendigo. At Albury Wodonga Health, elective surgery waitlists are up to three times longer than major metro hospitals. We have a failing 000 system. Over the last quarter just 65 per cent of ambulances arrived on time in code 1 emergencies, despite target ranges of 85 to 90 per cent and a decrease in the demand for these services. Not a single Ambulance Victoria target is being met in the LGAs of Mitchell, Benalla, Strathbogie or Greater Bendigo for code 1 emergencies. These are not just numbers, these are people's lives.

Regional Victoria falls well short of national averages for critical health professionals, including dentists, mental health professionals, Indigenous health practitioners and medical radiation practitioners. We have staff shortages and a government that neglects our country hospitals and healthcare providers. It is devastating that we are now expecting up to 15 per cent to be cut from community and grassroots health prevention programs when next week's budget is announced. These community health services involve critical programs that address chronic disease and contributing factors, including smoking, vaping, disability exclusion, unhealthy eating, family violence prevention and physical inactivity. These services prevent Victorians from requiring hospital visits, helping to ease the burden on our already struggling hospitals.

Our health services in Benalla, Seymour, Kilmore, Euroa, Heathcote, Nagambie and so many more do not deserve to have their programs ripped from them. This counter-productive and short-sighted budget cut is only going to increase the strain for the many regional Victorians who both provide and rely on these services. By the government's own admission, people living in our regional areas already have much poorer health outcomes than other Victorians. Access to quality health care should not be determined by where you live. It is a fundamental right that should be guaranteed to all individuals. Our health system is under strain and continues to fail patients in regional Victoria when they are at their most vulnerable, and that is simply not acceptable. I ask the minister to urgently and effectively address the disparity in healthcare services between – *(Time expired)*

### **CALD outreach initiative**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (19:07): (164) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep and concerns the CALD outreach initiative. The action that I seek is that the minister provide more information on how the Andrews Labor government's CALD outreach initiative is supporting children and families in my electorate of Narre Warren South. Many people in my electorate are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and require assistance to access early childhood services. The CALD outreach initiative will support the City of Casey to run engagement activities and employ outreach workers that will help children and families to attend kinder, connect with early childhood supports and transition to primary school. The initiative is a recommendation of the parliamentary inquiry into early childhood engagement of CALD communities to reduce barriers to early childhood services, including playgrounds and libraries, and to assist families with enrolments and information sessions.

This is the sort of thing that Labor governments do and indeed the Andrews Labor government does. While those on the other side of politics will continue to demonise and intimidate when it comes to immigration, the Andrews Labor government will continue to deliver support, care and help to our multicultural communities in our welcoming state. It is important that every child, no matter their background, gets the very best start in life. I would appreciate it if the minister could provide further information on how the CALD outreach initiative will benefit children and families in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing that response with my community.

#### **Polwarth electorate sports clubs**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (19:08): (165) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Community Sport, like my colleague from Croydon.

**David Hodgett:** Is it Mooroolbark footy club?

**Richard RIORDAN:** No, it is not. The action I seek is the presence of the minister – for her to come down to my electorate to visit a couple of passionate local sports clubs that have been doing it hard for a very long time and would very much appreciate some of the government’s largesse that they have been very good at throwing out on their various love projects in the big smoke.

I first of all bring the minister’s attention to the Irrewillipe footy club and rec reserve. It is the home of the Western Eagles. The Irrewillipe sports club is one of those fantastic local footy netball clubs that support a vibrant and prosperous farming community. They have done it hard for a very long time. They have possibly got some of the worst community facilities anywhere in the Colac & District Football Netball League. It is desperately in need of an update.

Then there are of course the good people in Birregurra. The Birregurra community rec reserve is also in desperate need. I note the minister at the table, the Minister for Police, knows where Birregurra is because he is used to going to the very expensive restaurant at Birregurra, and he spends a lot of time at Lorne and not really worrying about the people of Ivanhoe. However, I digress. It is vital that the minister also comes down and talks to the people of Birregurra, because the government has been quick at handing out a dollar here and a dollar there at Birregurra – they have got some new lights, and they are very grateful for that; Minister Tierney was down to open the lights – but what that community needs are safe change rooms. They need a gathering space where the kids can meet on Thursday night like all other leagues do to share a meal together without falling through the floorboards, which I inspected only Saturday a week ago. This community has been working tirelessly. They are pushing hard. They have got a large fundraiser coming up and they need the support of the government to at least give them hope that the hard work and fundraising that they are doing can be in some part matched by the government.

There are other communities around the Colac district – the South Colac footy club and the Eastern Reserve, home to the netball, baseball and cricket clubs – that are all worthy recipients of getting their very, very out-of-date facilities upgraded so that they can adequately deal with the needs of modern community sport, where boys, girls, men, women and others come together and need suitable facilities so that they can encourage and grow participation in these country communities. I urge you, Minister: to find some time in your diary. I would love to show you around and introduce you to some great, well-supported community sports clubs in the Polwarth electorate that could really do with help this budget.

#### **Monbulk police station**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (19:11): (166) I rise tonight to request that the Minister for Police and Minister for Crime Prevention, who, wonderfully, is here with us this evening, join me in visiting the Monbulk police station. As the member for Monbulk, I am proud of the hard work and dedication of our local police force in keeping our community safe. Thanks to the investment made by our government in supporting the police, over 3000 new officers have been trained and deployed

since we took office, resulting in a reduction in crime in Melbourne's east, including in my own electorate. In fact, according to recent crime statistics, we saw a decrease of over 7 per cent in the number of criminal incidents in the Yarra Ranges, which is a testament to the efforts of this government, the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the boots on the ground of our officers. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that our community feel safe and supported. This is why I would like the minister to accompany me on a visit to the Monbulk police station to express our gratitude for the hard work of the officers and to hear from and listen directly to them about the support they require to do their job. I look forward to the minister joining with me to meet with the police stationed there at Monbulk to listen to and discuss what further support they need to keep Monbulk, the Dandenong Ranges broadly and the outer east a safe place to live.

#### **Noise pollution**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (19:13): (167) My adjournment is to the Minister for Environment in the other place, and the action that I seek is that she direct the EPA, particularly in Wangaratta, to do their job and stand up for communities affected by noise pollution. They need to visit, listen and take some action. As a strong supporter of agriculture and farming families, I support the right of farmers to make a living and remain financially viable. However, on occasions there are frost fans that are installed in places that are far too close to dwellings.

Darryl Hitchcock lives in Cobram East, right next to the Cobram East Caravan Park. The noise from the fans is excessive to him and to those staying at the Cobram East Caravan Park. Sometimes these fans could still serve the same purpose and be located on farms to protect the fruit from the frost but at the same time be located away from dwellings. In many cases, the farm owner does not live on the farm and is not subject to their own noise pollution. The EPA has become a toothless tiger in this area, and I implore the Minister for Environment to stand up to the EPA and demand they take their role seriously. It is not good enough for the EPA to listen to the inquiry and then ignore any action from thereon in.

#### **Narre Warren North Road upgrade**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (19:14): (168) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure in regard to the Narre Warren North Road upgrade in my electorate, and the action that I seek is for the minister to provide a progress update on the works. Narre Warren North Road is being upgraded between Fox Road and Belgrave-Hallam Road to improve safety and travel times for the more than 14,000 vehicles that use the road every single day. I know that people in my electorate are excited to see the improvement of traffic flow as well as the upgrade of walking and cycling paths once the works are complete. I have been lucky to visit the upgrade site on multiple occasions and to chat to the team about progress milestones, and the upgrade looks absolutely amazing. However, I am looking forward to hearing an update on how the works are progressing from the minister.

#### **Gippsland community connections program**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:15): (169) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the issue I wish to raise is the Gippsland community connections program, operated locally by Latrobe Community Health Service. The community connections program, established 18 months ago, links migrants with local business. It aims to generate employment opportunities to help migrants connect with opportunities in our local region. Meeting last week with representatives of the program in Warragul, it was great to hear how it has directly assisted more than 225 people across Narracan electorate in the last 12 months alone. I understand this financial year the program received \$260,000, meaning in outcome it only cost \$1155 per client. They have indicated that of the 225 that have been engaged in the program, 114 have been successfully placed into employment.

We do not give the government credit often, but this is a really good program for the minimal amount of money and the connection the migrants get to local communities. I have 38 different nationalities

in my community, and what it does is it brings these people in and connects them to other migrants in the community but then finds them employment. This is actually a net-positive program, for 114 people to find employment, to pay taxes and to then contribute to the local economy – shopping, buying food et cetera. I am baffled as to why this program would be cancelled.

I urge the minister: do not cancel this program. With the migration set by the federal Labor government this year to be about 700,000 migrants coming into this country, it is so important now that this program keeps going. It will benefit so many people coming into my local area. It is so difficult for migrants that come into a country, know nobody and do not know how to get work, and this is what this program does – it connects them to their communities; it finds them work. I urge the minister to reconsider the funding on this – to re-engage the funding on this – because it helps a lot of people and it is a positive program.

### **Geelong Ring Road employment precinct**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (19:17): (170) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty and Minister for Employment, and the action that I seek is that the minister visit the Geelong Ring Road employment precinct to meet with some of the key manufacturing businesses in the region. The Geelong Ring Road employment precinct is Geelong's largest designated growth area for industrial development. It consists of 500 hectares of high-value industrial-zone land to the north of Geelong. It is one of only a few places in Victoria with industrial-2-zoned land available. The precinct is easily accessed by road and rail, and these transport connections are complemented by the nearby Geelong port and Avalon Airport, supporting sea and air transport routes. The Geelong Ring Road employment precinct is geared towards attracting larger developments of regional and national significance. It is currently home to a variety of businesses that can take advantage of large parcels of land and develop custom facilities to suit their manufacturing needs. Once fully developed the Geelong Ring Road employment precinct has the capacity to deliver 10,000 local jobs. I look forward to welcoming the minister to the precinct to visit some of these businesses and to hear firsthand how they are providing manufacturing solutions for the state and the nation right in the heart of the Lara electorate.

### **Responses**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:19): I am pleased to just rattle through a few requests for action from colleagues in the chamber tonight. The member for Croydon raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport, in particular seeking action on funding for new accessible facilities at Mooroolbark Heights Reserve, and he went into details about those matters. The member for Broadmeadows, my former work colleague in various roles across the community services sector, has raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans – to join her in a visit to the mighty Fawkner RSL and the amazing members and veterans, who do such great work advocating for the services that veterans need at Fawkner RSL. The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Health. The action that she sought was to ensure that regional Victorian health services are not affected by federal Commonwealth government funding arrangements, and she went into some detail about those matters. I will be sure that too is passed on –

*Members interjecting.*

**Anthony CARBINES:** Well, she went to those details, and they are in *Hansard*.

The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, particularly about more information that is needed about the Andrews Labor government's support for children services in the mighty Narre Warren South electorate.

A matter was raised also by the member for Polwarth for the Minister for Community Sport – to visit the Polwarth electorate and some of those amazing volunteer and sporting clubs. The Irrewillipe sports club was one that he would like to see the minister visit and also one out in Birregurra. I am sure those

sporting clubs out there would not mind if the minister dropped in to Brae while she is in that neck of the woods. I will come to the member for Monbulk at the end, as I am responding in more detail there.

The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Environment. In particular the action that he sought was to direct the EPA to do their role more effectively in Wangaratta with regard to noise pollution. He went into some detail about those matters, so we will see that they are followed up by the Minister for Environment.

The member for Narre Warren North raised a matter for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and those matters relate to the Narre Warren North road upgrades, particularly at Fox Road and Belgrave-Hallam Road, so we will make sure that they are also acted on by the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure.

The member for Narracan – I almost said he is not with us, but he is here in the chamber – raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the member for Bundoora, asking about the Gippsland community connections program. What fantastic work they do. He touched on that and how the future of the program is super important, and he is keen to see action from the minister in relation to supporting the Gippsland community connections program.

The member for Lara of course raised a matter for the Minister for Industry and Innovation and several other portfolios that he holds in relation to visiting the Geelong Ring Road employment precinct to see not only the very significant work that they do now but to help with the advocacy that she wants to see happen in relation to that precinct growing to provide a further engine for jobs in the Lara electorate.

I am really pleased to respond to a matter raised by the member for Monbulk, in particular requesting that we visit the Monbulk police station to discuss community safety and express our gratitude for the service of the local police. I know everyone tonight will be thinking about our first responders and the work that they are doing in Melton in relation to a very significant and tragic bus and truck crash that has happened there. I think in more broad terms the member for Melton and all members of this house wish our first responders well and the families who are dealing with the very significant and tragic event that has happened today in outer Melbourne.

But in relation to the member for Monbulk, and I suppose touching on the fact of our first responders' work, we had the opportunity before she was elected to this place, when she was a candidate, to visit the Monbulk electorate. We went out to the Emerald police station. It was just fantastic really and an opportunity to thank again in broad terms our first responders and our police for their work. It is a tough and hard job. But at Emerald we certainly met some old-timers who have seen it all and done it all and who are great leaders for new and emerging police who are learning the ropes out there at Emerald. There is a real community feel. Each station is different. Each station has its own set of circumstances to deal with, and I would be really pleased to get out there with the member for Monbulk and meet some of the 3637 additional police that our government has funded through the \$4.5 billion investment, since we have been in office, in Victoria Police. It is also part of delivering on the 502 additional police in the last budget that we funded and the 50 additional protective services officers, who should never be underestimated on the commitment they provide and the work that they do in so many public buildings and services, not just on our transport network but here in the Parliament itself.

I will take the opportunity as well to say to the member for Monbulk and the people in her electorate: we are recruiting. Made for More is the campaign Victoria Police are running right now in Victoria. If you know people in our community who want to serve others and who have something to give of themselves to the community, Victoria Police needs them and needs them now. It is a great career and a great opportunity to keep people safe and to make a contribution in so many ways through the work that Victoria Police do. I would certainly encourage people to give consideration to that and encourage members to continue to impress upon those in their communities the opportunity to make a lifelong difference, through Victoria Police, to their local communities.

We have seen 97 additional police in the Knox division out there in Monbulk, including 18 family violence specialists. Right across our state there is very significant involvement and engagement with family violence. We have seen that through not only the Royal Commission into Family Violence, led by our government, but the resources and the services that we have needed to provide to keep families safe. We have seen that in particular through Victoria Police and the work that they do with our community service organisations.

Lastly, can I just say, as mentioned by the member, according to most recent crime statistics, there has been a decrease of almost 7.5 per cent in criminal incidents in the Yarra Ranges shire. That is pretty significant, but it is also an indication that when things do not go well criminal incidents do happen. Regardless of what our statistics might say, for anyone who has been a victim of crime, that is a serious matter. The opportunity to understand and support people in our community who have been victims of crime never goes away. That sticks with people for a long time, and we will continue our work there. But ultimately through the investment in Victoria Police, the investment in our services, we have seen in broad terms our criminal incident rates – our crime rates – down to 2005 levels. That is when we last saw these levels. That is an indication of the improvements that we have made and an indication of what is required. If you invest in our police force, in our police service and in our services, the results are there to support our community.

In September 2022, when we visited Emerald police station, I think we came away with the fact that there is the job and there is the work but there is also the personal commitment that people make. When you live in a community, you have a stake in it. You just go to that extra level and you have that extra accountability. I am sure we will see that too when we visit the Monbulk community, and I look forward to visiting the police members at Monbulk with the member for Monbulk very soon. We will be sure to do that. Perhaps we will take the opportunity to not just encourage others in her community to step up and make a contribution to the community as members of Victoria Police but also to thank those members for the sacrifice and the contribution they make in showing great leadership in local communities, putting their lives on the line every day, 24/7, to keep people safe. With those comments, I will sit down.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Correct weight. Thank you, Minister. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

**House adjourned 7:28 pm.**