

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 29 October 2024**



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**Tuesday 29 October 2024**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Bills*

**Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (12:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Duties Act 2000 to introduce a temporary concession from duty for newly constructed dwellings in strata subdivisions and for other purposes.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:06): The government has sought to move a bill that the Premier announced this morning in a press conference around 9 o'clock that the government intended to move – at 8:45, I understand. For the background of the house, the government has offered the opposition and I presume the crossbench a briefing at 4:30 this afternoon. The coalition in good faith has gone to the government on a number of occasions and sought to understand when this bill would be debated. It is not unreasonable that the government provide a briefing to the non-government members of the chamber. Unfortunately as yet the government has not provided any confirmation on when the debate on the bill will occur. It is not unreasonable for the government to outline to the house when this bill will be debated, and in good faith we have sought to know that.

I do note that the surprise of this bill is such and the rush of this bill is such that the Parliament's own program for the day does not list this bill; that just shows the rush of it. And I note that the government did not provide public advice to the Parliament until half an hour after the Premier's press conference that this was occurring. As I say, this is not about the substance of the bill. Of course the coalition on principal will always have lower taxes than Labor, but it is not unreasonable to understand from the government when they intend to put this bill that is so rushed it is not on the Parliament's own program for the day.

**Paul EDBROOKE** (Frankston) (12:08): I am amazed. I am sure he is doing his best work, but he just does not seem to be up to it. This is the coalition standing in the way of a plan to expand the off-the-plan stamp duty concession that this government has announced. I know everyone on this side wants to see more homes built in Victoria, and I note that the coalition leader –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, and the substance of the matter in no way has been debated. This is simply about the procedure of the issue.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Frankston, this is a procedural debate, and I ask you to come back to the matter in front of the house.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: I note that the coalition leader has said, 'We're not going to stand in the way of a tax reduction.' Well, that is what they are doing right now with this procedural debate.

**James Newbury**: On a further point of order, Speaker, on relevance, there has been no vote on this matter, so any assertion otherwise is factually misleading.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Frankston, speak to the procedural motion.

**Paul EDBROOKE**: Member for Brighton, you do go on. It was great to see you on the news the other night. You did a fantastic job.

**The SPEAKER**: Member for Frankston, through the Chair.

**James Newbury**: On a further point of order, Speaker, the member has now defied you twice.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Frankston.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Thank you, Speaker. I have not defied your rulings at all. I do defy the opinions of the member for Brighton, though. It is us on this side of the house that have made a raft of amazing announcements in the last week, and this is part of them. This is what we need to do to get more homes in Victoria for Victorians.

**James Newbury:** On a further point of order, Speaker, in relation to your previous two rulings, you have ruled that this is a procedural motion. At no time did I speak to anything other than the procedure before the house, and I would say that the member again is defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** Manager of Opposition Business, you need to just state your point of order.

**James Newbury:** Relevance.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I would not like to be the Manager of Opposition Business.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Frankston! This is a warning. You will speak to the procedural motion before the house.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I know that everyone on this side of the house looks forward to speaking on this particular bill. I think –

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** Well, how is the court case going, Mr Pesutto?

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition! It is inappropriate to sledge members on their feet across the chamber. Manger of Opposition –

**Brad Battin** interjected.

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

**James Newbury:** On a further point of order, Speaker, a fourth time on relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Frankston, if you cannot speak to the motion, I would ask you to resume your seat.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** I will speak to the motion. It is those on that side of the house that block motions like this, that do not want to speak on housing, that do not want to actually debate legislation like this that actually houses Victorians. They are blockers. They know that. As people on that side of the house, they should be ashamed of themselves.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Frankston will resume his seat and will no longer be heard.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (12:12): On the procedural motion before the house, this is about respect to the house and respect to Victorians. The government should work through the Parliament. We are not running a Parliament by media conference. There are processes of the house and forms of the house as to how those in the house, particularly the opposition, can be informed of forthcoming legislation, and that has not happened. This procedural debate is about the fact that the government has not showed respect to all Victorians, through us, in this house here. Every Victorian would want a tax cut to some of the 55 increased and new taxes that this government has introduced. We are not arguing against tax cuts. We are arguing against the process as to how this legislation has been brought before the house. I support the Manager of Opposition Business the member for Brighton in raising this particular issue. The government treats this house like its own pet toy. They do not follow the forms of the house. They do not follow the procedures that have gone down over the decades and over the centuries as to how the executive government is actually responsible to the house. It is not the house being responsible to the executive government, and I would urge people to support the member for Brighton's procedural motion.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:13): We have heard quite a bit of sooking from those on the other side this morning. This bill, let us be clear, is around two pages, and apparently this is going to be a real challenge for those on the other side to wrap their heads around.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, if it is only two pages, perhaps the government might want to provide it.

**The SPEAKER**: There is no point of order.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: As I said, what we have seen consistently over the last week or so, or indeed I might say over the last 10 years or so, is that those on the other side will do everything in their power to stop building houses here in –

**James Newbury**: On a further point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the coalition has not opposed the motion before the house.

**The SPEAKER**: On relevance?

**James Newbury**: On relevance.

**The SPEAKER**: Leader of the House, this is a procedural motion. I would ask you to speak to the procedural motion about why this bill should be introduced.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: Because on this side of the house we are committed to delivering more homes and more opportunities for Victorians. Those on the other side will do everything they can to block –

**James Newbury**: On a further point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural motion. The government will have every opportunity in the debate to debate the substance of the bill. I would ask you to bring them back to the motion.

**The SPEAKER**: The Leader of the House will come back to the procedural motion.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: I will make the point – and I have it on good authority that the opposition have received a copy of the bill – it is urgent. It is very urgent that we get on and build more homes for Victorians. That is our focus, but we understand that those on the other side need some time to understand how you reduce stamp duty in order to build more houses. They need some time to wrap their heads around that concept. We will ensure that the bill is not debated until such time as those on the other side have received the briefing that they suggest that they require.

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, I just want to clarify: did the Leader of the House say that the briefing would occur before the bill is debated? It has not been provided to the opposition.

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:17): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (12:17): The bill will put in place a temporary expanded off-the-plan land transfer duty concession for new apartments, units and townhouses to encourage more off-the-plan purchases and support the delivery of more homes for buyers and renters across the state.

**Read first time.**

**Tim PALLAS**: I move, by leave:

That this bill be read a second time immediately under standing order 61(3)(c).

**Motion agreed to.**

*Statement of compatibility*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (12:20): In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility for the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Charter)*, I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024:

In my opinion, the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. The provisions of the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024 do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons.

**TIM PALLAS MP**  
**Treasurer**

*Second reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (12:20): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024 amends the Duties Act 2000 to introduce a new temporary off-the-plan land transfer duty concession for purchases of eligible apartments and townhouses, for contracts entered into from 21 October 2024 for 12 months. The new concession will be available to off-the-plan purchasers of dwellings within a strata subdivision, and will allow purchasers to deduct 100 per cent of the construction costs incurred on or after the contract date, for the purposes of determining the dutiable value of the purchaser's property.

The new concession will encourage more off-the-plan purchases of apartments and townhouses by providing a land transfer duty benefit to purchasers, including investors, who are not eligible for existing off-the-plan concessions that are currently available for first home buyers and owner-occupiers. The existing off-the-plan concessions for first home buyers and owner-occupiers will continue to apply. The new off-the-plan concession will be available for a 12-month period commencing from 21 October 2024.

I commend the bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:22): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (12:22): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:22): I just briefly note that the government has –

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY**: This is a procedural motion, and I do note on the procedural motion that the Treasurer has moved that the debate be adjourned until later this day. The Leader of the House said across the table earlier that the debate would not occur until after the government's bill briefing had occurred, and we accept that offer that that would not occur until after the bill briefing. It would be unreasonable for a government to offer a bill briefing but move to have debate before that has happened. That is not an unreasonable request. So we accept the fact that the government has provided that offer, and we accept of course that offer and we take that offer in good faith, because any breach of that would be a very sad and sorry reflection on the government. So briefly, we do expect that the



government will rush this bill through later today, but we accept their offer and assurance that the 4:30 bill briefing will happen before that occurs.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (12:24): Well, I am glad that the member for Brighton has welcomed the government's reasonable approach to this bill and then has had a change from one procedural debate to another. It is good to see that they are coming to some sort of frame around the importance of bringing this discussion on.

**John Pesutto** interjected.

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

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Look, the Leader of the Opposition is a bit vocal. For those that missed it on *Hansard* and the millions tuning in, that is why you sit here. I would rather be a contender than a pretender, my friend. I would rather be a contender than a pretender.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Mordialloc, I caution you about contributions not being addressed through the Chair.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** It is really great to hear those reflections from the member for Brighton, because we have got a busy legislative program; we do not want to tie it up in procedural debate.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Those can interject that we cannot manage it, but we are: we are managing this legislative program to bring on these important legislative changes, and why wouldn't we when we see the importance of housing bring on this discussion? This is an opportune time in our state, at a critical moment –

**Danny O'Brien** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The member for Gippsland South can interject, but it is really important that we are talking about housing. It is really important that we are talking about housing on behalf of Victorians, in the procedural nature that this is taking, to make sure that we are not wasting a moment. The catalogue of discussion that we have had in the last two weeks around that, coming to this point and this procedural outcome here, will strengthen our approach to housing and has brought on this bill and discussion.

The bill briefing, to get people's head around it, even though there has been cross-discussion and people have seen things – that is fine to get that understanding and further commentary around that. But this is a really important moment for Victorians as we undertake a significant amount of reforms, including this bill right here. So to not waste a moment is really important – to bring this forward as quickly as possible. We have seen previously the member for Brighton say, 'Don't talk about procedural motions.' The member for Brighton is the record holder in this place for bringing on procedural motions, criticising the legislative framework and then holding up the time of those opposite. So it is a really important thing around having the opportunity –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is a procedural motion, and the quickest way to get to the bill is to not debate the motion.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Mordialloc to continue.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** This is important. I am glad that there has been a bit of a change and a bit of a scurry from one procedural debate to another. I am really proud of the member for Brighton for fronting up and saying that on this procedural motion he has seen the light of day with his colleagues to make sure that briefing is held to understand why this government is prioritising legislation on housing and bringing it on so quickly – not staring through windows and opposing every time they

can and opposing the timeframes for bills. This is really important. And maybe at that bill briefing there will be an epiphany to support the legislative program and agenda to get more houses and to bring this on as well. I welcome this procedural discussion, the member for Brighton's enlightenment in this space and that he is not going to be a nightmare for housing anymore – he is going to be a builder not a blocker. Get to that briefing at 4:30, my friend, and see how you go.

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

### **Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024**

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:28): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to repeal certain redundant or spent provisions in acts.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:28): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:28): The purpose of this bill is to repeal the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012, the Docklands Act 1991, the Filming Approval Act 2014, the Greenhouse Gas Geological Sequestration Act 2008, the Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988, the Road Safety Act 1986 and the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017.

**Read first time.**

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

### **Tobacco Amendment (Stamping Out Fire Bombings) Bill 2024**

#### *Introduction*

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (12:29): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Tobacco Act 1987 to provide for a licensing scheme and other measures to combat firebombing, to provide in relation to enforcement and for other purposes.

There is no doubt that this is one of the most important bills that can be introduced to this Parliament this year. Victoria is in the midst of an illicit tobacco war that has seen over 100 tobacco shops and associated shops burn while this government sits on its hands. Premier Allan gave a commitment in March to see this bill introduced and stamp out this illegal behaviour, but three weeks out of our last sitting there is still no sign. In fact unconfirmed reports say that even if the government introduced a bill, it would be 2026 before authorised agents became active. Victoria simply cannot wait that long.

Last week we saw another two shops burn to the ground, like every week for the last hundred shops that have been burnt in the last 18 months. This bill needs to be introduced now. We must stop this senseless burning of tobacco shops. Every week shops burn. That affects obviously the business owners; it affects the landlords, the adjacent hairdressers and cafes and of course those who live above tobacco shops.

A New South Wales licensing scheme exists, and there are no firebombings. Queensland have no firebombings, and they have a regulation in place as well. Search and seizure laws are critical, and a fit and proper person test must be passed to have eligible trade in tobacco. Victoria is the only state in Australia that does not have licences to sell tobacco, and Victoria is the only state where we have seen over 100 firebombings, and this tired government is out of ideas.

Victoria Police (VicPol) have recently been begging the government to introduce a licence. This licensing scheme is currently being run by local government authorities, and they do not want the regulation and they believe the police should be doing it. As recently as last week the Premier admitted that there is a problem and said legislation must be introduced. Premier, every week that you dither, another two tobacco shops burn. Every week that we delay, families are put at risk. Here is your chance; today is your day; we can fix the firebombings. If unconfirmed reports are correct, it will be 2026 before authorised officers will be active in Victoria. That means another 85 shops could burn before this government gets organised.

I know some government benchers think that this government chamber is only for the government to introduce bills. Well, let us be clear: when the Victorian government will not govern, it is time to support those who still have the ideas.

We also know real regulation requires VicPol's support, and this will give police the powers they need. We all know the Australian government is doing a power of work behind the scenes to prevent importation, but it is the states that regulate the sale, and every other state has. If we had a show of hands in here of who would like to live above a tobacco shop, I suspect it would not go very well. And those who would pay the insurance premium on a tobacco shop? Again, there would not be great support for that.

The introduction of a stamping-out-firebombings bill is the first serious step. If the government is prepared to be bipartisan, we can solve this problem. And the health minister – it sits in your hands, to see if you are serious, to eat some humble pie and accept that there is urgency to support this bill. We also need to start handing out fines – decent fines of up to \$1 million will be in this bill – and start showing some leadership.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (12:33): I support the member for Ovens Valley on his motion to put forward this bill, because it is a very important aspect that is happening in the community at the moment. What we have seen here in the chamber today is there is already a motion to put forward legislation in relation to housing, but there are other crises happening across the state that this government and this Parliament can assist with to ensure that we get the best outcomes for people.

One of the reasons it is probably a super-important moment in time to get this through this chamber is we are starting to hear, through local media and media, people who are genuinely concerned about living near or above these facilities that have been burnt, these tobacco houses. What we have seen so far is people and residents who can not get insurance if they live above any of those tobacco places. We have heard it on 3AW alone, where people have actually rung up and stated they cannot get insurance above a tobacco house; they have to actually go and get international insurance to cover that.

The member for Ovens Valley brings a very good point to the table: that Victoria does not have a licensing scheme, whereas other states like New South Wales and Queensland do. New South Wales and Queensland also have stricter laws when it comes to bikies, when it comes to dealing with outlaw crime, and I think it is really important that this government starts to review how we can deal with this moving forward.

We have said continuously that we are willing to work in a bipartisan manner if it is in the best interests of the community. We have seen that with legislation that has gone through this house, which this side of the house has supported, whether it is with crime, whether it is with housing, whether it is dealing with local roads. Whatever it takes, we are willing to work with the government if it is a good outcome and a positive outcome for Victoria. What we are not willing to do is sit idly by as elected members of Parliament while people in our community are genuinely concerned about the safety impacts that they are seeing because of the tobacco wars across Victoria. It is not just metropolitan Melbourne. It is not just the outer growth areas. It is up in Bendigo; it is in Ballarat; it is up in Mildura; it is through Gippsland. It does not matter where you go in this state, this tobacco war is impacting too many people for the Parliament to sit idly by and do nothing.

So when the member for Ovens Valley raises a concern and brings legislation to this place, like we would work with the government – and I note the leader of opposition business would always be willing to work in the best interests of what is for the community. I know he would support legislation to outlaw this. I know the crime down in Brighton has been out of control and is something we need to do more and more about. This is one of those things that we as a Parliament can work together on to ensure that we can see outcomes that are positive.

So why is it important today? It is important today because, as the member for Ovens Valley said, every day that we are doing nothing, every week we are doing nothing, there is potential for one or two more firebombings. And let us be sure: it is going to get to a stage where we end up with someone dying because of this war on tobacco. It is going to be someone who is innocent who lives above one of these premises. And I think the government need to take this into serious consideration – that failing to act is failing to protect those people who deserve that protection.

And we want to talk about the housing crisis, which the government is trying to put onto the agenda today – this is another one that will impact what is going to happen in relation to the housing crisis here in Victoria, if people can no longer live safely around those areas of tobacco stores. We have even said, and I note that the member for Eildon mentioned, even electorate officers with an electorate office that is next door to one – people who live at or near these tobacco places are genuinely fearful of the outcomes that can happen with these firebombings. They have seen the violence that has come from them, the danger and damage that happen from them all across our state.

So I stand here very proud to support the member for Ovens Valley. I know that Victoria Police would want the powers to ensure that they can deal with the crisis that is going on. They need a government that can stand up and put in place the legislation that they need. We get sick of the government coming out talking about the fact that they give all the powers and resources to Victoria Police that they require to combat crime in our state, yet they are not coming out and supporting legislation like this to give Victoria Police the powers they need to ensure that they can act on the incidents that have been happening – happening over 100 times here in Victoria. You do not have to be blind Freddy to understand it. It has been on every news channel across our state – the firebombings and the impact that has been happening.

It is really important that the government get on board and let this go onto the agenda, so we can debate that here and today to ensure that this legislation is passed as soon as possible to give Victoria Police the powers they need to protect Victorians. We would 100 per cent support that, and I thank and congratulate the member for Ovens Valley for what he has done in this work to get it here. Now it is up to the government to support that so we can get this legislation through as soon as possible.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:38): It has been repeatedly stated: the Allan Labor government will introduce legislation to establish a tobacco licensing scheme by the end of the year, and we have been very clear on this point. The opposition knows this legislation is coming very soon. And I do take up the issue –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Members will show some respect to the member on her feet.

**Nina TAYLOR:** I get that you want to interrupt housing and other matters that you are not really so concerned about to run a stunt here, when you know very well –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Through the Chair, member for Albert Park.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Sorry, Speaker. The opposition know very well what the Premier has already said publicly with regard to this issue. Ergo, we will introduce legislation to establish a tobacco licensing scheme by the end of the year. And we know that we are nearly at the end of October, so we are being very clear about the timing, which is very soon. And I will make a further point that the opposition, rather than engaging genuinely on a matter of great importance to the Victorian community – it is very

clear it is of great importance to the Victorian community and we are acutely aware of that, and hence the discussions that the Premier has already put forward publicly on this matter. This kind of petty stunt is not getting us to where we need to go.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Lowan, you are not in your place, and I would ask you to show respect to the member on their feet.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is a procedural debate about the introduction of the bill, and the member can support the bill which is currently before the house.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. Member for Albert Park, I remind you that it is a procedural motion.

**Nina TAYLOR:** Further to the issue at hand, of course we have really critical matters to debate in the chamber – we know that. That is not to resile from the importance of this issue, and I want to make a further point on that front. Unlike those opposite, when we introduce our legislation the public will have confidence that it has been drafted by experts with due regard for the findings of the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Eildon is warned.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I do think the member needs to avoid attacking the parliamentary drafters. It is entirely inappropriate for the member to attack the public –

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order, Manager of Opposition Business.

**Nina TAYLOR:** In no way, shape or form have I in any way discredited the parliamentary drafters.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Berwick, you had your turn.

**Nina TAYLOR:** What I am saying is to give due regard to the findings of the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into vaping and tobacco controls. Surely the outcomes of that parliamentary inquiry should be taken into account and are indeed relevant – acutely relevant – to the matter which is being debated as part of this procedural motion, and I would like to thank PAEC for their report. The health and safety of all Victorians of course is the Allan Labor government's top priority, so on that front I know that legislation does need to be appropriately drafted, and taking heed of such a critical inquiry surely makes good sense. When we are thinking about the broader Victorian community and accountability, I would think we would not want to be just doing an inquiry for the sake of it. There are actually outcomes there that should be addressed and considered with regard to the legislation that is being brought forward to the house, so that is I think a genuine and reasonable concern and a matter to be transacted in the process of bringing forward comprehensive legislation that will duly acquit the seriousness of the matter at hand. I think some due respect for that inquiry and those outcomes are needed.

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:43):** I rise to support the private members bill that has been put forward by the member for Ovens Valley, the Tobacco Amendment (Stamping Out Fire Bombings) Bill 2024. It is important that we bring this forward now, being on the front foot. The coalition is certainly on the front foot and taking the lead. When I listened to the comments made by the member for Albert Park, she referred to this as a petty stunt but then referred to it also as a critical matter. If it is a critical matter, it is even all the more important that we are able to bring on and debate this private members bill.

We have heard today already with the duties amendments that the Treasurer is bringing on, because it is also critical, that they have done that at the last minute – no thought. The member for Ovens Valley has put a lot of thought into this bill. He has had a lot of information and done a lot of research. It is very important because, as we know, there have been over 100 shops that have been firebombed in the last 18 months. That is two a week. The longer the government dither with this, they can tell us it is a critical matter but not do anything about it. We have waited for too long – far too long – and if they are not going to do it in a timely manner, I think it is only reasonable that a private members bill is brought forward as the opportunity does arise. It is part of the program that we are able to bring private members bills forward, which is what has been done. We are taking the lead here because the government have been negligent. The government have been absolutely negligent for all of those businesses that they could have saved by having a licensing scheme.

They have dillydallied on this, which again is one of the reasons why we have brought this forward. Better Regulation Victoria in 2021 did a report on this, and in that report it stated that the Victorian government wants to call for national efforts to regulate illicit trade but it also needs to be doing work locally.

The government can do work here, but they have chosen at this point to take the back road and let it go for too long. Victoria Police want this sort of work done. They have got Taskforce Lunar specifically looking into this and the crime that sits behind it. We heard the member for Berwick talk about what this means for the owners of the premises who lease them out and for the adjoining premises, because if one shop in a strip is firebombed there is damage to the innocent businesses either side or above. I know there are very many businesses and even electorate offices in and around or above some of these businesses, and I think it would be very neglectful if the government did not look at this, because we need to make sure that insurance is available and that it is not harder to get insurance and that it is in fact part of regular business insurance rather than people having to go overseas.

We did hear about the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The member for Albert Park talked about PAEC, and recommendation 9 is that the government:

... implement the suggested elements for an effective tobacco licensing system recommended by Better Regulation Victoria.

I talked about that Better Regulation Victoria report that has been there since 2021. The government has dithered on this. They are not taking the lead. We heard the member for Albert Park say that this is a critical matter, but if it is a critical matter I would have thought they could do something about it. The Treasurer is bringing something in quick smart because he has realised that they are in a bit of strife with their housing policy, so he is trying to do something to sell his ideas. He can try and do that quickly, but they cannot bring forward a critical matter such as the firebombing. The coalition, through the shadow minister, is prepared to do this, and I think it is only reasonable. I know that there will be members on the government benches who think that this should be debated, and probably debated this week as well, because they will understand the issues. They will have seen the news and they will have heard from people in their electorates, because this firebombing is very widespread across Victoria. It is not in just one spot; it is a big issue that also relates to organised crime. I am sure that government members want to tackle organised crime and want to look after the small businesses on either side of these shops and those that own the premises that are firebombed – to look after them and protect those businesses. *(Time expired)*

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (12:48): There is no doubt this is an important issue. I have had an incident in my electorate as well. That is why this government have been working assiduously to ensure that we actually come up with the best possible licensing scheme. It is not for an opposition representing just 28 out of 88 seats in this house to step in and to come up with their own solution, which is not well thought out, especially when you consider the fact that they barely participated in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry. I hear the deputy chair did not even turn up to PAEC for the inquiry.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Laverton!

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance.

**The SPEAKER:** I would ask the member for Bentleigh to come back to the procedural motion before the house.

**Nick STAIKOS:** I was certainly on the procedural motion. It is a comment on their real motivation for bringing this private members bill into the Parliament. But they also behave as though nothing is actually being done in this space, and there could be nothing further from the truth. Taskforce Lunar has made 80 arrests, issued 200 search warrants and seized \$37 million in illegal tobacco and cash. Victoria Police are working with the Australian Federal Police and with the Australian Border Force, and the Albanese government has backed Australian Border Force with \$140 million in additional funding.

We may not be accepting the member for Ovens Valley's private members bill, but the rest of this is actually being done. We are not sitting on our hands. Both government and Victoria Police are working assiduously to deal with this issue, and they are getting the results. When it comes to a licensing scheme, the government is consulting with Victoria Police and the government is consulting with local government. This is actually more complex than the opposition are letting on. The right way to do this is the way that the elected government of Victoria is dealing with it, not by this stunt.

**Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (12:51):** I wholeheartedly support the introduction of the Tobacco Amendment (Stamping Out Fire Bombings) Bill 2024. If there is another firebombing of a tobacco store and the government chooses not to support the introduction of this bill straightaway, it will be on the hands of Labor, because they have known for too long that there are significant challenges and issues when it comes to the firebombing of tobacco stores. It has been happening right across Victoria, even in my community in the Yarra Valley. We saw a firebombing occur in Seville, which impacted not only that tobacco store but all of the stores surrounding it. People's businesses, small businesses and livelihoods have been lost. People have been put out of work because of the damage and destruction caused by that firebombing in my community in Seville. The dental facility, the medical clinic, Branded Burgers – these are businesses and medical and health services that have been completely shut down for over nine months now because of firebombing, and this government still sits on its hands. If this government felt that this was a serious issue, they would support the member for Ovens Valley, they would support the Liberals and Nationals and introduce this very important bill, because we know that this firebombing situation is out of hand. Who is Labor protecting? Are they protecting the CFMEU and the bikie gangs? Who are they protecting?

**The SPEAKER:** Order! On the motion before the house, member for Evelyn.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** On the procedural motion, the reason why it is so critical to introduce this bill and not delay any further is because it is crucial that we introduce this right now and stamp this out. The police are crying out for the enforcement powers. I speak here not only as a local MP who has been impacted by firebombings and who is representing the small businesses and the workers in these businesses who have been directly impacted – and also those residents who can no longer access health services in the Yarra Valley as a result – but also as a parliamentary appointee to the board of VicHealth. This government is failing to even listen to VicHealth; it is responsible when it comes to tobacco. The recommendation of the Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is to get this kind of legislation in and in now. So if the Labor government chooses not to introduce it now and there is a delay and there is another firebombing, it will be on the hands of Labor. Let the community know that. Let the community remember that it is the delaying tactics of Labor, because they know that this is crucial.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural motion, and the member is straying from the narrow confines of what should and should not be counted in a procedural motion. I ask that you ask her to come back to it.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Evelyn will come back to the procedural motion before the house.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** To the procedural motion, it is crucial that we support this. This Parliament has for decades been alive to the fact about tobacco – and with VicHealth. This is a trade. But we also need to support the people who work in this industry, those businesses and shops that are surrounding tobacco shops. They are being subject to the crime and the tobacco wars that are happening under the watch of the Labor government, and it is precisely why we need to introduce this bill – to the procedural motion – to stamp out firebombing.

It goes to the name of the bill. It is in the title of the bill – to stamp out firebombing. If this Labor government choose to not support this, then are they happy, are they fine, that another firebombing might occur between now and when they might get around to introducing their own bill? Why is it that they are not appreciative of the fact that this is such a critical issue, that it has damaged so many lives? Do they not want to stamp out the firebombings in these illegal tobacco wars? If they actually did care about the Victorian community, the Victorians, if they actually wanted to, they would introduce this bill –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, a procedural motion is not an opportunity to stand on your feet and relentlessly attack the government, when we have made it very clear that we will be introducing a bill before the end of this parliamentary term.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the House will wait to be called before she speaks. Member for Evelyn, come back to the procedural motion.

**Bridget VALLENCE:** The Labor government are attacking communities further if they do not support a bill that stamps out firebombing and does it right away.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (29):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, 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'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

*Noes (50):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, 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, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

**Motion defeated.**



**State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2024***Introduction and first reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (13:01): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007, the Sale of Land Act 1962, the State Taxation Acts and Other Acts Amendment Act 2023, the State Taxation Amendment Act 2024, the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Unclaimed Money Act 2008 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:02): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (13:02): This bill implements a range of taxation-related changes, including instituting an exemption from payroll tax for payments to contractor GPs and to employee GPs for providing bulk-billed consultations from 1 July 2025 to support more bulk-billed consultations for Victorians.

**Read first time.**

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

**Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024***Introduction and first reading*

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (13:03): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Criminal Procedure Act 2009 and other acts to reform the process for committal proceedings and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Michael O'BRIEN** (Malvern) (13:04): I ask the minister to provide me with a brief explanation of the bill.

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (13:04): I thank the honourable member for Malvern. The Justice Legislation Amendment (Committals) Bill 2024 will streamline Victoria's committal proceedings to minimise trauma for victims and witnesses and improve criminal justice efficiencies by reducing duplicative core procedures. The bill will amend the Criminal Procedure Act 2009 to abolish the test for committal for indictable cases and allow for early committal in cases before the Supreme Court. The bill will also amend the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958 to allow for the default use of audiovisual links, AVLs, to conduct committal hearings.

**Read first time.**

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

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

**The SPEAKER** (13:05): General business, notices of motion 25 and 28, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

***Petitions*****Bail laws**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) presented a petition bearing 298 signatures:

Issue:

We the undersigned residents of Victoria draw to the attention of the House community support not to weaken bail laws. Revelations that 80 hardcore repeat youth offenders have been arrested more than 10 times each over the past year again demonstrates that now is not the time to be weakening bail laws. Victoria Police have confirmed that a group of around 290 young offenders are committing the majority of serious crimes, including aggravated burglary and theft, with 80 offenders having been arrested repeatedly.

Action:

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Victorian Government not to weaken bail laws. The Victorian Government must listen to the concerns of the community and look at ways to prevent repeat youth offending rather than making a bad situation worse. Now is the worst possible time to be weakening bail laws and putting the Victorian community at even greater risk.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

***Committees*****Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Alert Digest No. 14*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (13:06): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 14* of 2024, on the following bills:

Aged Care Restrictive Practices Substitute Decision-maker Bill 2024  
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024  
Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024  
Youth Justice Act 2024 house amendments

together with their appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

***Documents*****Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

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

Alpine Resorts Victoria – Report 2 October 2022 to 31 December 2023  
*Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* – Order under s 17B granting a licence over Waverly Park and Gardens Reserve  
Game Management Authority – Report 2023–24 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*  
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Report 2023–24 – Ordered to be published  
*Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984*:  
Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 42 (*Gazette G43, 24 October 2024*)  
Notices under s 32(4)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 82/2021 (*Gazette G42, 17 October 2024*)  
*Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* – Report of requests under s 11  
*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:  
Alpine Resorts – C31

Ballarat – C245  
Bayside – C199 Part 1  
Boroondara – C414  
Campaspe – C125  
Darebin – C223  
Frankston – C158  
Hindmarsh – C22  
Kingston – C212  
Maribyrnong – C185, C187  
Moirā – C93  
South Gippsland – C129  
Stonnington – C345

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Estate Agent Act 1980* – SR 114

*Local Government Act 2020* – SR 116

*Plant Biosecurity Act 2010* – SR 113

*Tobacco Act 1987* – SR 115

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 103, 114, 115

Victoria Police – Report 2023–24 under s 37F of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*

Victorian Inspectorate – Report on irregular inspection of IBAC surveillance device records by the Victorian Inspectorate in May–June 2023 under the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

**PROCLAMATION** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing an operative date:

*Youth Justice Act 2024* – Chapter 20 and s 1 – 16 October 2024 (*Gazette S557, 15 October 2024*).

### ***Bills***

#### **Short Stay Levy Bill 2024**

*Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (13:08): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Short Stay Levy Bill 2024 without amendment.

#### **Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023**

#### **Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024**

#### **Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2024**

#### **Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024**

#### **Short Stay Levy Bill 2024**

*Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (13:08): I inform the house that the Lieutenant-Governor has given royal assent to the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023, Criminal Organisations Control Amendment Bill 2024, Health Legislation Amendment (Regulatory Reform) Bill 2024, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Bill 2024 and Short Stay Levy Bill 2024.

*Motions***Middle East conflict**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (13:09): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that in the last 24 hours Israel has bombed Baalbek in eastern Lebanon, killing over 60 people, Israel has maintained its deadly siege on northern Gaza, and the Israeli parliament has voted to ban UNRWA from delivering humanitarian aid in occupied Palestine; and
- (2) calls on the Victorian Labor government to end all military ties with Israel and to demand their federal colleagues sanction Israel now.

**Leave refused.**

**Housing**

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (13:09): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberals for being more focused on locking people out of Brighton than helping more Victorians into better homes faster.

**Leave refused.**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (13:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Bulleen for not standing up against the NIMBYs in the Victorian Liberal Party after saying we want to get more Victorians into home ownership.

**Leave refused.**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (13:10): I move, by leave:

That this house commends the member for Brighton for all his hard work spruiking the government's housing announcements over the past week.

**Leave refused.**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (13:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Kew for capitulating to the NIMBYs in the Victorian Liberal Party, led by the member for Brighton, after previously saying they needed to provide better opportunities for first home buyers to get the keys to their own home.

**Leave refused.**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:10): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the member for Brighton on becoming the NIMBY leader of the Victorian Liberal Party and notes that while the member for Brighton is busy tweeting from the comfort of his home – that he owns – the Allan Labor government is helping more Victorians into better homes faster.

**Leave refused.**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (13:11): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the anti-housing comments made by the Leader of the Opposition and several Liberal frontbenchers, including the member for Brighton, in the wake of the government's housing announcements and calls on the Leader of the Victorian Nationals to explain how regional Victorians can trust their coalition partner to deliver housing reform.

**Leave refused.**

**Land tax**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:11): I move, by leave:

Notice of motion 38 standing in my name relating to the establishment of a parliamentary inquiry into Labor's land tax.

**Leave refused.**

***Business of the house*****Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (13:12): 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 31 October 2024:

Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024

Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024.

What a busy, jam-packed week we have here in the Victorian Parliament addressing the matters that are of concern to all Victorians, and I might start by outlining the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024 and how much every member on this side of the house is looking forward to having their opportunity to get on their feet and outline how our government is working every day to deliver more homes and more opportunities for Victorians wherever they live. Be they in the inner city, in the suburbs, in regional cities or indeed in rural and regional Victoria, we have got something for everyone when it comes to delivering the homes that people need, because without a roof over your head your options are exceedingly limited. I note the member for South-West Coast is chuckling on the other side –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order on relevance, Deputy Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** laughing as I outline the concerns of Victorians right across our state that only the Allan Labor government are addressing, and we are doing that through this very urgent bill that we have brought into this place. We will be debating it this week. The opposition are getting their briefing. I would have thought that the second-reading speech tells you all you need to know to get right behind it, but no, they need to be briefed. We will do that of course, as a courtesy, but as I said, we are builders on this side, not blockers, and we will see where we end up when this bill is voted on towards the end of the week.

We also will be debating the Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Our government's transport infrastructure agenda is central to our housing agenda, because we are about delivering homes close to transport, close to jobs, close to schools and close to TAFE institutes and universities – close to opportunity – because that is the mantra of our government. We have got a track record of delivering on transport infrastructure. Everyone knows that only a Labor government invests in the infrastructure that our community needs. In fact we are the only party that has delivered infrastructure in the last 25 years, because I can tell you in the four short years that they were in government not a single major project was delivered.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a procedural motion, and on relevance, I would ask you to bring the Leader of the House to the motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** This is a procedural motion on the government business program, and I ask the Leader of the House to continue on that.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** The bill will also make important amendments to precinct planning, which again is all about delivering projects and housing.

We will also be debating the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024 and the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Both of these bills are very important. The agriculture bill is helping us strengthen food safety, and there is education regulation, and we are making sure that Victoria has up-to-date and effective regulatory powers to ensure that all Victorians have access to safe food and indeed good schools.

This is a government business program of which I am very, very proud. I know that on this side of the house there is a great deal of energy and enthusiasm and readiness to get up and debate, and I look forward to hearing our members on this side on their feet, delivering for Victorians with a focus on housing – the number one issue of our time. Only the Allan Labor government has a comprehensive response to this crisis. While those on the other side – excuse my French – bitch and moan and block, we –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the House! We would encourage parliamentary language to be used.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, in relation to the government business program, when we got version 1 of the government business program – because we are now on the second motion; that has not yet been reflected in the Parliament’s printing because of the changes today – it listed three bills, one of which the Leader of the House just spoke about: the Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I think it is actually called the railroading communities bill. The coalition sought from the government an opportunity to consider that bill in detail, because effectively what that does do is railroad communities and take away all community rights.

The coalition went to the government seeking an opportunity to consider that bill. The government, as they are prone to do, felt that their minister was not able to deal with a consideration-in-detail process and declined the opportunity. On that basis we will be opposing the government business program, because there must be opportunities in this place for ministers to have the character and capacity to debate what they are putting to this place. When it comes to that bill and bills in other weeks when we have sought to take those bills into consideration in detail, the government has said no, and that is just fundamentally wrong. Only one time in this term has a minister taken a bill into consideration in detail.

This bill specifically will railroad many, many communities, and we know that Victorians and Melburnians will see this; they will see it over time, and they are starting to see it. They are starting to stand up and say what the government is doing is wrong, and that is what Melburnians and Victorians will do.

They will understand that the government is railroading them, and that is what Victorians will do over time. Again, we sought an opportunity to take this bill into consideration in detail and that was declined. We also earlier sought to move to introduce a bill in relation to the tobacco firebombings and a fix for that, and we would have hoped that the government would have not only allowed it to be introduced but afforded it an opportunity on the government business program. Unfortunately, it was not provided an opportunity. We do know 108 bombings have occurred over the last 18 months – that is two a week. It is shameful to know that the government has not allowed the bill to be introduced or included in the government business program.

We heard a debate earlier about the government pushing forward with a bill immediately, and I did note at the time that the government had indicated that debate on that bill would occur after there had been a briefing on the bill and there had been some discussion. The Leader of the House spoke about our understanding of the bill. I was handed a copy of the bill and the second-reading speech when the Treasurer stood up. Having an opportunity to open it is not unreasonable, as it is not unreasonable for the opposition to be briefed on it so that they understand it. As I said in an earlier debate, the coalition

will always stand for lower taxes and always deliver lower taxes than the Labor Party will in their wildest dreams. On principle we are very strongly for lower taxes. It is just in relation to that bill that it was not unreasonable that some process be followed rather than just the straight, raw, opportunistic politics of the Premier, but I think that was for all to see over the last week.

I know that each week I try and lobby the Leader of the House to allow a third of the Parliament – just under a third – to speak on the budget bill, because the Leader of the House does not want her own members to speak on the budget motion. There are a number of members who have not had that opportunity. I know it was a dud budget. We know it was a dud budget because the Leader of the House will not even let their own members speak on it, but every member should have the opportunity on principle to speak on it – every member.

*Members interjecting.*

**James NEWBURY:** There are members who are saying they spoke on it. Stand up for your colleagues, my friends. Stand up for your colleagues who have not spoken on it.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the Chair, member for Brighton.

**James NEWBURY:** It is not unreasonable. The coalition will be opposing the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (13:23):** It gives me great pleasure in this early afternoon to rise and speak in favour of the government business program, and what an incredibly busy government business program it is. I mean, if you want a government with a legislative agenda, well, gee whillikers, you have got one. This week we have four incredibly important pieces of legislation on the government business program. The Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024 is an incredibly important piece of legislation, because whilst those on that side spend their weekends organising little protests with their Liberal Party branch members –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is not being relevant in any way to the procedural motion, and I would ask you to bring him back to the motion.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Tarneit to continue on the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT:** To continue, whilst those on that side are concerned with spending their weekends organising protests, those on this side of the house –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is defying your ruling.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I was listening closely, and there were seconds, and I am sure the member for Tarneit was coming straight back to the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Indeed I was, Deputy Speaker. Those on this side of the house are concerned with building more homes for more Victorians. The Leader of the House rightly said in her contribution that housing is going to be one of the most defining political and policy issues of our time.

It is not enough that Victoria is building more homes than any other state in Australia. We know that more has to be done. We know that that great Australian dream of owning your own home –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, again, this is a procedural motion. I am not sure what the talking points say, but the member is not dealing with the motion before the house.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will rule on the point of order. There is some context and latitude, member for Tarneit, but you need to bring it back to the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT:** As I said, there are four incredibly important bills on the government business program this week. I will note that the coalition are not supporting the government business program,

but quite frankly it is completely irrelevant because the government and those on this side of the house will get on with delivering what we have to do for all Victorians. As I was saying, housing is going to be one of the defining issues of our generation, and we want to be able to tell our kids and our grandkids that we did absolutely everything we could in our power to make sure that they have a roof over their head.

On the government business program we also have the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024. When we got elected in 2014, we said that we were going to make Victoria the education state. On this side of the house and in this government we do not close schools, we build them. On this side of the house we do not sack teachers and principals, we give them the tools to give our kids the very best start in life possible. Look no further than my electorate of Tarneit for an absolutely massive example of that incredibly important legislation, and we have an incredibly important legislative agenda in that education space.

We have got the Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and as the Leader of the House said, our transport infrastructure agenda is as much about housing as it is about transport, because what we know is that to give people the best quality of life, they need to have the best possible transport infrastructure around their home to get them from A to B to C.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (13:28): I rise to speak on the government business program. As the member for Brighton has said, I will be opposing the business program once again this week. There are some good things on the business program, and anything that makes housing affordability better for Victorians, especially regional Victorians, we are all for. We will speak on the motion that needs to proceed through to make that happen for Victoria. But we do have the right to be able to get up and discuss it as a coalition and to be able to see what it is that we are actually dealing with, because at the moment the housing crisis in regional Victoria, especially in the Latrobe Valley, is probably the worst it has ever been. So we need to see detail to make sure that these changes that are going to come through are going to make housing more affordable and create opportunities for the people who live in the Latrobe Valley and also right around regional Victoria, to make sure it is going to work and not just be city centric, as a lot of it has been. I am happy that we are getting a bill briefing later in the afternoon, and then to be able to come back and discuss it I think is fine. But anything that can make housing more affordable for my constituents – they are always ringing me and knocking on my door, and that is one of the bigger problems.

The Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 is another one that we will be discussing today, and I think people on both sides of the house will be wanting to get up and work their way through these amendments.

There are parts of it that are going to be quite interesting to debate. There is a section there in the seafood one questioning people that are in the seafood industry. I am wondering why it is only the seafood industry that is being drawn upon, so it would be good to be able to glean why it is not a wider area across a lot of workforces where that needs to happen.

The Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, as we have heard from the members on the other side, also is to do with the Big Build here in Melbourne – to make sure that is right. We need to be able to get up and discuss this, because as I said, we should have a state of cities around regional Victoria, not a firm focus on a city-state being here in Melbourne, because the housing crisis is right across the board. It is not just here in inner-city Melbourne, it is out in the regions. I know all members on both sides that are in regional areas know that this is the number one issue, to be able to house people, and to also have access to transport, to move them around, is a huge issue. We need to be able to discuss these procedures, which is really good.

The Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024, which I spoke on before, did come in late. We are really interested to support that as a coalition, and I look forward to being able to do that later on.



The other thing is the opportunity, as I think the member for Brighton said before, to be able to talk on the budget reply. The member for Shepparton and I, on this side of the house, still have not had the opportunity, and we are very keen to stand up and talk on how the budget has affected us in regional Victoria. We have had the Premier, the Minister for Housing and also the Minister for Energy and Resources move through my area of the Latrobe Valley, cutting and slashing – I suppose I could throw the Treasurer in there as well – services, shutting down industries like the timber industry and the white paper industry and forcing the rapid closure of the coal-fired power stations without really providing any guidance or any future development and also lifestyle that we can have in the Latrobe Valley.

We have really had a bit of a gutful of what the government is telling us. I need the opportunity to reply, to let the government know what we do need and what we do want in the Latrobe Valley, rather than being gagged because the Labor government does not want to talk about the budget reply.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (13:33): I am so happy to rise and speak to what is essentially a classic Labor agenda. This week we are going to be talking about housing, talking about transport, talking about education and, most importantly, talking about giving people a go, giving people a hand, giving people a leg-up into housing. I am absolutely proud to stand and speak on that.

It did not escape my notice that we will also be speaking about agriculture and food safety, and some of that is around creating offences relating to the sale, delivery or provision of raw milk. Reading that, I could not help but feel that this is a fantastic opportunity to warn people against crying over spilt milk, because we know that crying over spilt milk is pointless. Throwing up your hands and saying, ‘Oh, there’s a housing crisis’, and having a cry does not help anyone. Get in and clean it up. Get a mop and get to work. That is what people on this side are doing. We are not crying over spilt milk, we are fixing it, and that is why we are rushing to get more support for people who want to get into housing. That is why we have an absolutely big agenda that is focused not on bemoaning things as they are but on changing things to be as they should be, and that is the way a government should be.

I do not want to come the raw prawn on that either, but there are some seafood amendments. We heard from the member for Morwell about that.

**Mathew Hilakari** interjected.

**Lauren KATHAGE**: There is something fishy opposite, and I thank the member for Point Cook for that, because it is much better than my joke about walking the plank. I really appreciate that.

I mentioned education before, and this is the Education State. We have seen the release of the *Education State: Excellence in Every Classroom* resource, which has come out from the fantastic Minister for Education. So of course there should be no surprise that this week we will be talking about making sure that we have high-quality standards for education providers in this state. We do not want to have unregistered schools. We want to make sure that there is quality education available for everybody in Victoria, whether they are going through the standard schooling system, through private education providers or the like. Pleasingly, this bill, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024, will also be looking at ways to support principals by allowing work experience arrangements to be through other nominated persons. It just reminded me of what a fantastic opportunity work experience is. I recall fondly Liam from Mernda Central College, who was a fantastic work experience student in my office. I think I learned more from him than he learned for me, that is for sure.

Even our transport bills cannot help but focus on getting people into housing. We heard from the Leader of the House about the changes that we are making to ensure that precincts which are close to transport and close to existing services are made available for people to live and establish a life for themselves if they choose to in that location. If that is close to where their family is or where the jobs are, the more the better. It is all about increasing choice and maximising the benefit that we get from the massive transport infrastructure investment this government has made. We are not seeking just to

have people move from point A to B. We want to give them a home at point A and a home at point B, because we know that that is how you get quality communities and quality living in Victoria.

We are looking at changes to stamp duty. We heard from those opposite that they want to cut taxes. Now is the opportunity, and they want to drag their feet. They suddenly want to know more: ‘We need more information about cutting taxes. How does that work? Can we please have a briefing on that?’ For people that talk about it so much, you would think that they would be right behind us and ready to support. We are in a rush to get things done. We are cleaning up spilt milk. Grab a mop and help us.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (13:38): I rise to oppose the government business program and support my colleague the Manager of Opposition Business in doing so. The reason is that this government refuses to allow debate and consultation to take place in an informed way and to have debate occur, which is how this chamber should operate. I have heard from the member for Tarneit and other members that providing information prior to debating a bill is irrelevant. Here we have a government business program put forward by the Allan Labor government of three pieces of legislation, and one of the pieces of legislation that they actually want to debate is not even on the program yet. They have just introduced it, and they want to debate it today and do not even want to give the people debating with them – the opposition here – the opportunity to be informed. They certainly do not want to give anyone the opportunity to go out to the community and talk about it. We have seen that so many times. That is why we oppose this program, because we have asked for respect and to go into consideration in detail on one of the bills – the Transport Infrastructure and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 – a bill which I think takes away, without a doubt, the voice of local community, the voice of local government and the voice of the people who will be affected by the changes this government wants to introduce.

This is a government that says it has been building more houses. This is what I have heard in this government business program motion debate, but they have not been building more houses. There is less social housing and dwellings – that is, a net loss in the figure of houses under this government for the last 10 years. So they can pull the wool over your eyes as much as they like with words, but the facts speak loudly – that is, a net loss in the amount of dwellings in the social housing figures that the government have got.

So here we are with three bills on the agenda, and one of them they refuse to actually consider in detail. The other two are very much tinkering around the edges. The Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 puts forward some changes to the sale of raw milk, something I absolutely endorse. I do not want to see raw milk sold, compromising our standing as a green and clean producer of milk. However, this raw milk bill was debated in 2022, so the reason we need another change now is because the government actually did not do the job properly in 2022, so here we are in 2024.

The Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024 – they are saying they are proud of their Education State. Well, have a look with your eyes wide open. We are in a situation where we have got an education crisis. We have got teachers leaving the system in droves. Here we have a government that does not have legislation on the table that will actually bring about the legislative changes that are needed to address the areas of failure of the Labor government.

In fact one of the bills that we have put forward today which would have been debated is the Tobacco Amendment (Stamping Out Fire Bombings) Bill 2024. This is to introduce licences to try to bring our state in line with other states that are not having the firebombing of tobacco shops like we are seeing – two a day, 108 over the last 18 months, terrifying communities. We can see change that is really being called for if the government will put on the agenda the program that will actually bring about change and address some of the crisis. You cannot tell me that two firebombings of stores is not a crisis for this state. It is. It is extraordinary that we are in a state where we wake up every morning and hear these stories about people being terrorised.

Not to mention the housing crisis that the government are trying to wash over; not to mention the health crisis, where people in pain are waiting for extraordinary amounts of time on waiting lists. There is the education crisis, as I have already mentioned, with teachers feeling unsupported and not backed in and leaving in their droves. We have got a road crisis in south-west Victoria and in fact right across the region, where our roads are crumbling.

This is a government that has forgotten to listen to the Victorian people, that wants to shut down debate and calls information given to the community ‘irrelevant’, as heard here today, when we have a state in crisis under this government. Enormous debt – they do not know how to fix it. We have got children dying in the child protection system. We have got roads crumbling, a health crisis, an education crisis, an energy crisis – the list goes on. Victorians are in a world of pain because of this Allan Labor government.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (50):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, 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, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner

**Motion agreed to.**

*Members statements*

**Nyah West planning**

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (13:48): The horticulture industry north of Swan Hill is in desperate need of accommodation options for the thousands of people it employs, and with that in mind I am very concerned about the way the Swan Hill Rural City Council has made it difficult for a developer to build eight houses in Nyah West. Builder and developer Justin Quattrocchi of Four North Investments purchased land to subdivide into eight lots. The Swan Hill Rural City Council approved that planning permit, but they put a condition on it that he should seal Donald Street, which runs east–west adjacent to that particular land. Mr Quattrocchi took the council to VCAT, and VCAT ruled that the contested conditions were not appropriate or reasonable and that the council had fallen well short of the information and evidence required to justify the sealing of Donald Street as a condition of the permit issued for the site under review. That was stated by the VCAT member that heard this particular case.

Mr Quattrocchi said that it was actually mind-blowing that this had happened. This council was advertising on their website to entice builders and developers to the area to actually build houses. He was going to build these eight houses as rental properties. Nyah West is a great little community, but it does not have accommodation options. It has a fantastic school, but the shire did everything they could for him not to go there. He is now saying he is going to move to the Buloke shire for his next development.

### Wyndham Community & Education Centre

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (13:50): It was my privilege to join the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Wyndham Community & Education Centre recently in my electorate. The centre is one of Victoria's largest adult and community education providers. Led by CEO Dr Jennie Barrera and team, the centre aims to deliver leading educational, social, cultural and community services, and it hosts a range of community programs in the Wyndham city area. Present on the day was former federal member Julia Gillard, who officially named the centre's original building the Julia Gillard Community College. Since 2014 the state Labor government has provided \$4.2 million to the Wyndham Community & Education Centre, and almost \$2.5 million of that was provided for their new building, which I had the honour to officially open on the day. Funded through the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund, this type of investment in infrastructure is important for our local multicultural communities. It fosters social cohesion and inclusion, ensuring that all Victorians feel a sense of belonging and are free to share and celebrate their cultural heritage. Victorians come from more than 300 different ancestries, speak 290 languages and follow more than 200 different faiths. One in two Victorians were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas. Our diversity is our strength. It is something Wyndham is proud of. Congratulations to Jenny and the team for a wonderful celebration.

### The Social Blueprint

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:51): Help us beat the squeeze of cost of living. The cost-of-living crisis is affecting everybody across the state, and we know we feel it in my electorate of Caulfield. I want to give a special shout-out to the Social Blueprint, who have teamed up with us to deliver a whole set of resources, a website and an event, which we are going to be launching very shortly, to help many charities, schools and sporting organisations deal with the cost-of-living crisis that they are experiencing each and every day. A big shout-out to Sharon Lowe and Tammy Feldman, who have been instrumental in delivering great work within the Social Blueprint, and I know this will be a much-needed event within my electorate of Caulfield.

### Posh Opp Shoppe

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:52): I also want to give a special shout-out to the Posh Opp Shoppe, which is celebrating 25 years of its existence. If you want a bargain of second-hand goods, head down to the Posh Opp Shoppe. I need to disclose that my aunty Rosalie Silverstein has been running this for 25 years. They deliver \$500,000 each and every year to help kids with disabilities. They go into schools to provide support workers to those kids with disability. It is a great cause. It is a great organisation, and thank you to all the volunteers at the Posh Opp Shoppe that do a fantastic job.

### Ruby Feren

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (13:52): We all get constituents that write to us from time to time. I had the youngest constituent write to me only yesterday, and I want to give a special shout-out to Ruby Feren, who is five years old, and she is concerned about the environment.

### Thomas Daly

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (13:53): I rise to pay tribute to a much-loved member of the Upwey community Thomas John Daly, who dedicated his life to education and the betterment of our local community. Tom was a true champion for students, families and the broader community, and it is with great sadness we mourn his passing on 18 October at the age of 65 after a hard-fought battle with illness. A graduate of Melbourne University with a bachelor of education, Tom's passion for teaching and leadership saw him devote his entire career to education in the outer east. He started his career in 1982 at Lilydale High before working at Vermont Secondary College and Wantirna College. In 2007 he took on the role of principal of Upwey High School, where his tireless advocacy and vision for a brighter future for the students and families under his care resulted in securing a complete rebuild

of the school. Tom's commitment to improving educational outcomes was unwavering, and his legacy will live on through the students who benefited from his leadership and the staff he led with such grace.

Outside the school grounds Tom's love for the community extended to local sport. In 2018 he was awarded the number one ticketholder at Upwey Tecoma Football & Netball Club. He was a proud supporter who championed the club and its players as passionately as he did the students at his school. The flag at the Upwey roundabout was flown at half-mast for Tom for a week, a testament to the high regard and deep affection in which he was held. My thoughts are with Tom's wife Alison; his daughter Kate; his father Brian; his siblings Bronwyn, Dennis and Bernadette and families; and all who knew and loved him. We have lost a remarkable man, but his legacy will live on. Vale, Tom Daly.

### **Housing**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (13:54): Firstly, when in government the Liberal and National parties approved 220,000 lots in four years – 200,000 in growth areas – and this government are saying they are going to bring 180,000 over 10 years. That growth of Labor is slower than Adelaide, which is a quarter of the size of Melbourne and planning for growth of one-sixth the rate of Melbourne. What a pack of frauds.

### **Animal welfare**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (13:55): For my second issue I would like to raise a matter that year 7 student from Blackburn High School Olivia has raised with me around animal cruelty. She said to me that recently on a family holiday to Montenegro she noticed that that country was moving to cat villages, and these villages were saving cats, which had been abandoned, from being euthanised. She put the idea to me, and I said to her that it is a wonderful idea, particularly when matched with increasing penalties for animal cruelty and for abandoning pets, because pets are for life, they are not just for Christmas. I said to Olivia from year 7 at Blackburn High, who is involved with the Manningham United footy club, that it is a wonderful idea and I will raise it in Parliament. She is one of the leaders of the future of our community.

### **Whitehorse Art Show**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (13:56): It was wonderful to attend the 58th Whitehorse Art Show gala dinner, hosted by the Rotary Club of Box Hill Burwood. For many years the art show has provided an outlet for artists to display and sell their work, with funds being raised to support the Box Hill Hospital stroke unit. A big thankyou and congratulations to Barbara Power, Rae Harding and all the organising committee on another successful event this year.

### **Our Lady's Primary School, Surrey Hills**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (13:56): Springtime means fete time, and it was terrific to attend Our Lady's Primary School fete on 19 October. The fete provided a wonderful showcase for the school, with many terrific stalls, rides and delicious food. Congratulations to principal Annie Engellener and all the fete organising committee for putting together such a great event.

### **St Luke the Evangelist Primary School, Blackburn South**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (13:56): On 20 October I had the pleasure of attending the very popular St Luke's primary school fete in Blackburn South. School fetes are only made possible by the fantastic commitment of staff, parents and the generous donations of local businesses. I would like to thank and congratulate principal Clare Ryan and everyone in our community who helped make this celebration a success by giving their time or donations.

### **Dilnaz Billimoria**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (13:57): Congratulations to Dilnaz Billimoria on receiving the Power of Peace award from the Centre of Melbourne Multi-faith and Others Network. This award recognises her unwavering commitment to fostering peace and community cohesion through her works with the

interfaith networks and Communities' Council on Ethnic Issues. At a time when global, national and local communities face increasing challenges, Dilnaz has shown patience and perseverance while engaging with diverse groups to promote understanding and unity.

#### **Australian Meat Industry Council**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (13:57): I wish to congratulate Brad and his team from Brad's Magic Meats in Shepparton, who were recently awarded the best traditional beef sausage in Victoria with their gourmet sweet chilli beef sausage at the 2024 Australian Meat Industry Council state sausage and best butchers awards in Melbourne. As you can imagine, people are coming from wide and far to get their hands on Brad's award-winning chilli beef sausage. Good luck to Brad, who will represent Victoria in the national competition in Tasmania next February.

#### **Tatura Primary School**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (13:58): Tatura Primary School recently celebrated 150 years of education. Congratulations to the principal Susanne Gill, teachers, staff, students and their families past and present as they all celebrate this wonderful milestone. The school has welcomed thousands of students over the years and played an important role in shaping the future of their students. I am sure that there will be many wonderful memories shared.

#### **Goulburn Valley Health**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (13:58): The community has come together once again to support two incredible local fundraising events. The Biggest Ever Blokes Lunch had over 1000 in attendance, raising awareness of prostate cancer. Close to \$200,000 was raised. The proceeds from this event go to providing a local prostate cancer specialist care nurse at Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton. On Sunday we had the Ladies Who Lunch fundraiser, supporting Goulburn Valley Health's oncology unit. 750 ladies attended, and whilst the final figure has not been determined, it is expected to have raised around \$100,000 – a wonderful effort from our local community.

#### **Footscray electorate**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (13:59): Footscray is and always has been home to some of Melbourne's best musicians, but equally important as having great musicians and artists are equally great venues for them to perform in. I would like to offer a big congratulations to Kindred Studios for being nominated for the best small venue at the Music Victoria Awards last Thursday. An integral part of the music landscape in Melbourne's west, Cherie and the team do a great job supporting local artists while also bringing in big names through the door. Kindred, along with Misfits and Mamma Chen's in Footscray, are recipients of 10,000 Gigs funding. This means that there will be even more opportunities in the coming months to see some of Melbourne's best bands in some of Melbourne's best venues. I hope some of my parliamentary colleagues will join me in Footscray for a beer and a gig to see the talented artists and the venues that help make Melbourne the live –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am required to interrupt for question time.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

#### *Members*

#### **Minister for Employment**

#### *Absence*

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): I wish to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Jobs and Industry will answer questions for the portfolios of employment and prevention of family violence.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Child protection**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. In the last four years 66 children in the government’s family services system have died, most of them younger than two years old – 66 children. After 10 years of Labor, why are more vulnerable children in Victoria suffering and dying than ever before?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): In answering the Leader of the Opposition’s question, can I at the outset say that the death of any child is an absolute tragedy. Also, particularly for vulnerable little Victorians, it is a particular tragedy for those family members and loved ones, but it is also something that is deeply and keenly felt by every child protection worker who works with those children and their families. At the outset of answering the Leader of the Opposition’s question I would like to acknowledge those frontline child protection workers who work incredibly hard, with great care and compassion, with some of the most vulnerable members of our community. They deserve our support and they deserve our appreciation, and one way that our government has showed that support in terms of backing the work of those child protection workers has been to work incredibly hard to strengthen the child protection and family services system. Yes, we have made additional investments. We have made additional investments over the last five years of around \$4 billion. That has meant that we have more child protection workers than ever before.

But we also know that these are not just incredibly tragic circumstances; they are also reflective of very complex family arrangements and very complex situations that some of these most vulnerable little Victorians find themselves in. That is why I want to particularly highlight the work that the Minister for Children has been leading over the past two years around not only securing the additional investment that sees additional child protection workers working with those vulnerable Victorians and their families but also looking at how we can reform the way we provide care for those little Victorians, support their family settings and strengthen the family environment for those children, because can I say the wellbeing and safety of those children are absolutely at the centre of everything we do. That is why, for example, not only in last year’s budget was there additional investment in the child protection system; there was also work and reform to see that all children in residential care will have access to therapeutic supports by the 2025–26 year, because again it recognises that alongside additional investment we need to change and support and strengthen the way we work with some of our most vulnerable Victorians.

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): Noting the Premier’s answer about the reforms and the work of the minister that the Premier mentioned, why is it then that in 2022–23 nine children died, in 2023–24 17 children died and in the September quarter just past six little kids in state care died? If that pattern continues throughout this year, we will see a year-on-year increase over that period. Why are more Victorian young kids dying if the Premier is to be believed about the actions her government is taking?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): I identified in the Leader of the Opposition’s question a hypothetical and some assumptions that he has made, and those assumptions do not reflect the work that is going on right now by the child protection workforce, who work incredibly hard with these vulnerable Victorians. This is not a set of statistics; these are kids. These are vulnerable little kids that should not have their lives played politics with. They should be supported.

**John Pesutto:** On a point of order, Speaker, as members of the opposition we take great offence to the imputation –

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**John Pesutto:** May I finish, please, Speaker?

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**John Pesutto:** There was nothing hypothetical in our question. Our job as an opposition is to question the government on its performance.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, you need to state –

**John Pesutto:** Children are dying, and we asked a very respectful question of the Premier.

**The SPEAKER:** You need to state your point of order.

**John Pesutto:** Relevance, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I reiterate: the safety and wellbeing of children are absolutely at the centre of the work we do. It is the centre and focus of the Minister for Children, and we will continue to look at ways that we can strengthen and support our child protection system that are in the best interests of vulnerable little Victorians.

#### **Ministers statements: housing**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:07): Victorians know that our government is absolutely determined to support the building of more homes for more young people for their families. Whether you want to rent, whether you want to buy, whether you are looking for a new place to live, we know that the only way to work through the housing crisis is to build our way through, to build our way out, and that is exactly why the announcements that we have been making are focusing on building – not blocking, building. We are giving young people, families and downsizers the opportunity to live near train stations – we know how much those opposite love people living near train stations – exactly where they should live, close to jobs and services. That is why we are delivering 50 new activity centres to support 300,000 more homes. We are helping families to unlock value in backyards and build in more backyards, creating the grand designs of tomorrow.

Speaker, can I point you to an example of where what we have announced is having such an impact; they are doing their job before it is even law. There is a development in Docklands, a thousand homes. The Minister for Planning had approved this project. Before last Monday this project had not got off the ground; construction could only start once pre-sales had reached a required level. This changed overnight, according to my friend Ahmed Fahour. Immediately following our announcements last Monday to reduce off-the-plan stamp duty, there was a rush of interest, and I am pleased to inform the house today that this project is now ready to start construction. There is an air of confidence in Victoria, and I look forward to visiting this site very soon to support that confidence in Victoria, to support Victorians to get into more homes.

#### **Child protection**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:09): My question is to the Premier. In the last four years the Victorian government has received 5400 incident reports of physical, sexual, psychological and financial abuse within the family services system. Abuse incident reports have increased over the last two years. What conclusions can Victorians come to other than that Labor has utterly and comprehensively failed to properly run Victoria's family services system?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:10): I absolutely reject the proposition that was put at the end of that question from the member for South-West Coast, and I reject it because I am going to support those child protection workers who are supporting and working with vulnerable Victorians. I would hope that is something that we could display a sense of unity on in this place, because this is something that is –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** These are vulnerable little Victorians we are talking about, and as I said in my earlier answer, the safety and wellbeing of children are absolutely at the centre of everything we do as



a government. Those child protection workers deserve our support, which is why, as I mentioned earlier, we have provided additional funding. But it also goes beyond additional funding. Yes, additional funding has resulted in more child protection workers than we have ever had before in our system, but it also goes to looking at the broader family services system, looking at what more we can do to not just strengthen the supports around the child in care but also support the family environment and, if at times it needs be, the broader environment in which that child is placed.

That is why I also mentioned the therapeutic services that we will be providing to every child in residential care. It is also why we have done the work we have done through legislative change that has passed through the Parliament to change the system when it comes to supporting Aboriginal children in care, because we know that particularly this group of kids are removed from their parents at a higher rate than the rest of the population. Too many little Aboriginal babies are taken away from their mum at birth. That is why, alongside the broader reform work that the Minister for Children is undertaking, we are also changing and working with Aboriginal-controlled organisations to support the mother, the family and the community to take care of those little kids. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that it is working, because Victoria has the highest rate of Aboriginal children placed in kinship care in this country because of these changes.

These communities and these vulnerable Victorians deserve our support and our respect. They deserve to be listened to, and that is what we will continue to do to support these vulnerable Victorians, their families and particularly children.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:13): In May the commissioner for children and young people revealed that in just one year there were reports of 85 children living in residential care being victims of child prostitution. Some children were as young as 11. Does the Premier guarantee that today there are no children in the family services system being prostituted?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): In answering the question from the member for South-West Coast, I want to draw the member’s attention to the additional investments that we provided last year that specifically included additional new investment to tackle child sex exploitation, recognising that the important point about this investment is not, again, just the investment itself. It recognises that this is a challenge and how we need to better support and strengthen supports for vulnerable young Victorians.

**Roma Britnell**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I asked: today what is being done to make sure no child is being prostituted?

**The SPEAKER**: Order! A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question.

**Mary-Anne Thomas**: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question. I ask that you ask members on the other side to allow the Premier to address this very serious issue in silence.

**The SPEAKER**: It is a very emotive subject the house is talking about in question time today, and I ask all members to be respectful of members on their feet. The Premier was being relevant to the question. I cannot tell the Premier how to answer the question, but she was being relevant.

**Jacinta ALLAN**: As I was saying, not only is the additional investment important in terms of providing additional support, particularly supporting the work between the department and Victoria Police, who do a huge amount of work in this area; it is also about recognising that this is a most serious challenge within our system that needs the attention that it is getting.

#### Ministers statements: housing

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (14:16): The Allan Labor government has had a really busy week approving and building more homes for Victorians and more opportunities for Victorians – homes of the right size and homes at the right scale for our suburbs.

More homes means more opportunity, and last week I was delighted to join the Premier at Middle Brighton to announce more homes at 50 train and transport centres right across Melbourne, an expansion of our 10 activity centres program to build more homes and to give more opportunity for Victorians to live where they want to live. These are plans to support these wonderful places to change gradually over time, places where you can wake up in a well-designed and well-built home and get ready for work or school knowing that the train or tram is just a short distance away and knowing that the local shops and services are at your fingertips and that there are plenty of people around, those wonderful people who help keep local businesses in business, teach your kids at the local school, pour your coffee or even look after you when you need care.

We are setting the foundations now so that these great local places can grow gently and comfortably over time and making sure that as communities grow so too will the services and the infrastructure to support them. We will plan for and see more trees, more open space and parks and more vibrant streets. We are planning for gentle densities around our train and tram activity centres because these are exactly the kinds of people-scaled places we need.

*Members interjecting.*

**Sonya KILKENNY:** There is nothing gentle about those opposite – nothing gentle at all. They are loud and they are blockers. Of course it is Halloween this week. That would suit the member for Brighton – spooky, lurking in the shadows, blocking more homes – and the member for Hawthorn, blocking more homes – *(Time expired)*

### Health system

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:18):** My question is to the Minister for Health. The government is hiring a new executive director, health service financial performance and capability, who will be responsible for ensuring that cost-saving –

*Members interjecting.*

**Emma KEALY:** This new role will be responsible for ‘ensuring that cost-saving targets are met and addressing any shortfalls with decisive action’. Does decisive action include recommending job and service cuts?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:19):** I welcome the question on budgeting in our hospitals, because it does give me an opportunity to remind the member on the other side that only at the last budget our government invested an additional \$8.8 billion in multiyear funding to our health services, ensuring that they have certainty year on year to deliver the care that Victorians need and deserve. Of course we have seen extraordinary growth and demand in our system. We met with and talked to our health services, and we were happy to then provide some additional funding to meet the 6 per cent growth that we have seen in the demand in our system. I need to remind members in this place that in the last quarter our health services saw record demand – 503,000 presentations to our emergency departments. But at the same time –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this new role is responsible for cost-saving targets, and I ask the minister to come back to the question put.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant. I cannot tell the minister how to respond to the question, but the minister was being relevant.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I was making the point about what our hospitals do with the record funding that they receive from our government. I talked about the demand on the system, but it is also an opportunity for me to point out that in the last financial year more planned surgeries were delivered in our health service system than have ever been delivered before, and you can only do that when you get record funding.

**Emma Kealy:** On a further point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the minister is meandering from the question, which was about this massive new role which is all about implementing cost-saving targets. I ask you to bring her back to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant. I cannot tell the minister how to answer the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Of course this year alone we are investing \$20 billion into our hospitals. When you add the rest of our health funding, that is approaching around 30 per cent of the state's budget being invested into health care. When you invest that money into health care, you expect that it is being used wisely. We make no apologies for ensuring that this substantial investment, record investment of \$25 billion, is used with a focus on delivering the frontline services and care that Victorians expect. Of course I am really proud, as I said before, of the achievements that have been delivered in our health service system despite the unprecedented demand.

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now debating the question. It was a very narrow question, which was around an executive director role whose job is to ensure that cost-saving targets are achieved.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will come back to the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** If the member was listening to my answer, she would have heard me say that we do not shy away from the fact that we want to ensure that the \$20 billion invested into our hospitals alone – 25 per cent of the entire state budget – is focused on the delivery of frontline care.

**Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:23):** The Premier has admitted that there will be back-office job losses in the health system. Why then is the government hiring –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask members to be respectful of other members on their feet, from both sides of the chamber.

**Emma KEALY:** The Premier has admitted that there will be back-office job losses in the health system. Why then is the government hiring this new back-office executive director with a salary of up to \$419,000 a year?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:24):** Again I take the opportunity to reinforce that, when we invest \$20 billion every year into our hospitals, we expect that that funding be focused on the delivery of frontline care. Unlike those on the other side of the house, we have been very, very proud to deliver a 28 per cent pay increase to our nurses through the latest EBA. We look after our health sector workers –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for South-West Coast, I will not warn you again.

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is about a back-office job being paid \$419,000 a year when frontline health services are being cut.

**The SPEAKER:** What is your point of order?

**Emma Kealy:** Relevance, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask members to state their point of order before they make a statement to the house. The minister was being relevant to the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** If only we could have seen the same passion from those on the other side when the Liberal government was busy closing Eildon –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister has not yet dealt with the substance of the question or the substance of the supplementary at any time in their answer.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will come back to the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** I make the point that we will not be closing hospitals; that is what those on the other side do. That is their record in government, and it will never change.

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Speaker, this is a very narrow question. I ask you to bring the minister back to the question. On relevance, it is about a very highly paid job and around cuts; it is not about service delivery in any way at all.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will come back to the question. The minister has concluded her answer.

### Ministers statements: housing

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:27): We on this side of the house believe that more homes means more opportunity, and that is why the Allan Labor government is slashing stamp duty on off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses to cut up-front costs, speed up building and make it more affordable to everybody –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker: the anticipation rule.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the Treasurer to be very cautious about anticipation.

**Tim PALLAS:** With regard to the announcement that I made last Monday – last Monday, for those who are a bit slow picking up media releases – I announced that first home buyers and owner-occupiers can access stamp duty concessions when they buy off the plan.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, I can see the Treasurer reading his statement, but the Treasurer is clearly in breach of the anticipation rule.

**The SPEAKER:** Treasurer, be very cautious about anticipation.

**Tim PALLAS:** I am trepidatious, but I am going to soldier on. One of the most important things you can do for Victorians is to recognise the material circumstances that they confront. Nothing gives greater certainty to Victorians than the security of a roof over their head and the acknowledgement that there is a government that is motivated to ensure that they will get there.

We know that the building industry has been doing it tough in recent times, in no small circumstance due to peaking prices around commodities and also of course a consistently high level of interest rate charges. What this has meant is that there has been an inability to deliver the level of housing stock that we need to assure people of the certainty and security of a roof over their head. That is why this government, more than any other government in the nation, is producing more housing stock, more housing approvals. But we need to do so much more, and that is why this government will continue its efforts to not only loosen up the burden of tax where it is appropriate to get people into homes but also help developers get on and deliver that housing stock that is so vital to their future.

### Housing

**Sam HIBBINS** (Prahran) (14:30): My question is to the Premier. Experts have said that the government's housing plan, which relies on private property developers to solve the housing crisis, would require the price of apartments to rise by at least 15 per cent. Premier, why does the government's plan to tackle housing affordability require the cost of apartments to go up?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:30): I can tell the member for Prahran that it does not – it absolutely does not. Indeed there is no better place in the nation to be a first home buyer than right here in Victoria, and it is getting better. I know I am not allowed to anticipate debate, but there is a little something we announced last week – it was not a little something, it was a big something – and

it is going to support first home buyers. It is going to support homebuyers and home builders to be able to purchase an apartment, a unit or a townhouse with the support we announced last Monday. That is in the Parliament today, and I hope the Greens political party are going to use this as an opportunity to get on board and not be the blockers that the Liberal party are – to not be the blockers, to not follow the lead of the member for Brighton and be another blocker. That has got us to this point, where too many young Victorians cannot afford to buy a home, their first home, to be able to start a family and build their long-term wealth like older generations have had the opportunity to.

That is why the work that we are doing is not just focused on how we can get more apartments and units and townhouses built, particularly around activity centres in great locations close to public transport services and great local infrastructure. For example, in Brighton we have upgraded the local primary schools and kinders. There is that place in Camberwell where we have also upgraded the local schools. The Lilydale line is level crossing free. This is exactly the sort of location –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the Opposition, I ask you to cease interjecting while there is a member on their feet.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Oh, well, the blockers never rest. I have got a message for the blockers: we will work harder every single day for those younger Victorians who need their government fighting for them so they can build their long-term wealth by getting into their home. That is what we are focused on. We are focused on doing it in the inner suburbs, the middle suburbs, the outer suburbs and those great parts of regional Victoria, because part of our plan is to give Victorians choice about finding a home where they want to live. It might be close to where they grew up. It might be close to the job that they want. It might be close to transport services and schools. We are builders, not blockers. I hope the Greens political party can show the colours of their wares and show that they will support the bill that is in the Parliament today to get on and support the building of more apartments, units and townhouses here in Victoria.

**Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (14:33):** We all know it has been years of government inaction that has got us to this point in the housing crisis. The only way the government can actually guarantee that the new homes will be built –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I cannot hear the question.

**Sam HIBBINS:** The only way the government can guarantee that the new homes will actually be built and that they will be affordable is if the government steps in and builds more homes itself, like governments have done in the past. Given the clear problems with relying on property developer profits to solve the housing crisis, will the government now adopt the Greens' plans for a public builder to massively increase the number of genuinely affordable public homes for renters and first home buyers?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I did not hear the question. I ask the member for Prahran to repeat the last part of his question.

**Sam HIBBINS:** Will the government now adopt the Greens' plan for a public builder, as they have many times in the past, to massively increase the number of genuinely affordable public homes for renters and first home buyers?

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Laverton can leave the chamber for half an hour. The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for half an hour.

**Members for Laverton and Frankston withdrew from the chamber.**

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): We have a public builder. It is called Homes Victoria, and it is out there building and completing 10,000 homes right now. It is doing that right now, supporting the homes that vulnerable Victorians need when they need the government to build a roof over their heads. We know the member for Hawthorn has stood on the back of a ute in Bills Street opposing those homes in Hawthorn. We know that the Greens political party, particularly the member for Richmond when she was parading around the City of Yarra, are also fond of blocking social and affordable homes in their community. I say to the Greens political party and I say to the Liberal political party: you go on and try and block; we are going to try and get on and build. We are going to try and get on and build, particularly through our Big Housing Build – \$6.3 billion of investment. Last Friday we announced for regional Victoria another 1000 homes that are going to be built in regional Victoria by this government.

**Ministers statements: housing**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:36): On this side of the house we believe more homes means more opportunity. In the last week we have announced a series of policies to build more homes around 50 train and tram zones and to provide stamp duty relief, subdivision reform, rental reforms and land supply, both greenfield and surplus government land. And when it comes to surplus land, there is no better site than Arden. Thousands of new homes will be built around the brand new metro station at Arden, close to jobs and services and just one stop to the fantastic Parkville precinct. We are out to market on Arden right now and have announced a really strong shortlist from the EOI process. At the old water tank site on Upper Heidelberg Road at Ivanhoe we are going to build more than 270 homes with 2000 square metres of open space, a fantastic community park.

**A member** interjected.

**Colin BROOKS**: A great local member. At the former VicRoads office at Kew, around 500 homes will be built in an area brimming with services and schools and close to open space. We have launched our innovative small sites program expression-of-interest process to deliver 260 homes offering deferred payment on land to help kickstart construction in Coburg, Alphington, Preston and Malvern, where young people want to live and where they should have a chance to own their own home. These are just a few examples of the pipeline of surplus land that we are unlocking for more homes. The Allan Labor government is determined to build more homes, while some are determined to block them. While we are unlocking opportunities for young people, they are trying to take those opportunities away. We are delivering more homes and more opportunity, more opportunity for young people to rent or to buy, more opportunity to live where people want and near the people they love.

**Health services**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:38): My question is to the Minister for Health. Under Labor, regional public hospitals receive less funding than public hospitals in Melbourne to carry out the same procedures. How did the government calculate the amount of funding provided under the new pricing structure, which disadvantages regional hospitals?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:38): I welcome the question from the member for Lowan. Again it gives me an opportunity to inform the house of our \$20 billion investment into our hospitals this year alone. We are providing our health services with the funding that they need to deliver the care and services that their communities expect. We have delivered an uplift in price to every health service in the state. That is what our health services asked us to do. They asked that we increase the price that we pay for the activity that is delivered in our health services, and in line with the national model, the Victorian efficient price is based on cost data which is submitted by health

services. That is what drives the price that we then pay – a price, I might say, that has been uplifted this year.

Costs differ for a range of complex reasons across our health service system. I would not expect those on the other side to want to engage with the complexities of running a \$20 billion hospital system, but I can point out that the reasons include patient acuity, labour costs statewide and specialist services. And I might say that a majority of hospitals right across rural and regional Victoria are receiving higher payments, reflecting the higher costs of paying for care in rural Victoria.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (14:40): Under the government’s new pricing structure, a public hospital in Melbourne will receive \$25,608 from the state government for hip replacement surgery. Public hospitals in the regions, such as Ballarat base, will only receive \$23,864 for the exact same procedure. Why are regional public hospitals not getting their fair share of funding when they carry out exactly the same procedures as public hospitals in Melbourne?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:41): I have actually already answered the question, but it gives me an opportunity for the benefit of the member on the other side to reiterate that we pay hospitals the price that it costs them to deliver the service. But the member did talk about Ballarat hospital, and I had a great opportunity to be there last week with the member for Wendouree, who has advocated so strongly, along with the member for Eureka and our dear friend the member for Ripon –

**Emma Kealy**: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is precisely the same procedure conducted in a regional hospital as in Melbourne. I ask the minister to come back and explain why regional Victoria always misses out under Labor.

**The SPEAKER**: I appreciate the member for Lowan’s passion about this issue; it is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was being relevant. The minister strayed somewhat from the question, but I believe the minister had already answered the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: The member did ask me about Ballarat Base Hospital. As I said, I was there last week. Stage 2 is now complete. That has delivered all of the equipment – heating, cooling and so on – as well as pharmacy, education and training, and pathology, and now the new tower will be delivered and opened by 2027.

#### **Ministers statements: growth areas infrastructure**

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:43): On this side of the house we believe more homes means more opportunities, and that is why we are supporting Victorian families with the infrastructure and services that make our fastest growing suburbs better places to live, like new schools, health services, public transport and of course road upgrades as well. Our \$400 million investment from the growth areas infrastructure contribution fund included over \$150 million for bus services across Melbourne’s north, Melbourne’s west and Melbourne’s south-east. I know the members for Bass, Cranbourne and Pakenham are very excited about the new and extended bus routes that we are delivering, as should the member for Berwick be. And of course who could ever forget the member for Werribee? He knows the importance of buses and connections to the rail corridor, and that is what we are delivering for his communities in the Harpley and Cornerstone estates. Only a Labor government can invest in better buses, with over 20,000 new services per week delivered to date by this Andrews and Allan Labor government. And, believe me, we are not done yet. We all know what happens when those opposite have their hands on the wheel. We saw that with what they did with Fishermans Bend –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, if I can refer you to Speaker Brooks’s ruling in relation to attacks on the opposition on page 160 of *Rulings from the Chair*, that is exactly what the minister was doing, which is out of order.

**Jacinta Allan:** On the point of order, Speaker, I was sitting right next to the minister while she was making her contribution, and I could barely hear her given the wall of noise that was coming and the disrespect that was being shown by those opposite, so I fail to see how the member for Brighton could make such a point of order given he could have barely heard the answer.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind members and ministers that a ministers statement is not an opportunity to attack the opposition. I was also struggling to hear the minister on her feet. The minister to continue, without assistance.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** By way of comparison, we saw what they did with Fishermans Bend: a botched rezoning and a complete failure to plan for public transport services.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is defying your ruling.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will come back to her ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** When it comes to buses under Liberal governments, the wheels do not go round and round, but we know their leadership sure does. On this side of the house we are focused on building more homes and more –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has defied you twice.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister will come back to her ministers statement without attacking the opposition.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** On this side of the house we are focused on building more homes and more opportunities.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Berwick electorate**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (14:48): (860) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. It is in relation to what information the minister has on an environmental study into the project at Beaconsfield railway station with the new overpass. The reason I ask is that constituents have approached us. With the new project going through an area there that was protected in the past for wildlife and the wildlife community throughout Beaconsfield, since this project has started there is the emergence of echidnas, which are walking around the main street of Beaconsfield and going up the highway to Peel Street, and the movement of kangaroos and wallabies from that area. This is an area that was protected for them in the past, but I just want to know what information the minister has on that environmental research prior to this project starting for the overpass at Beaconsfield railway station.

#### **Glen Waverley electorate**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (14:49): (861) My question is for the Minister for Children in the other place. How does the Allan Labor government provide support and fun activities for the children in the Glen Waverley district? Glen Waverley district is the best place to raise the next generation of Victorians, and the community grants provided in the recent free family fun program for Children’s Week proves just that. I would like to thank Kerrie Road neighbourhood house and Happy Feet Fitness for hosting a dance workout and healthy eating program last week, proudly supported by the Allan Labor government. When it comes to supporting our youngest constituents with dynamic education and social opportunities, I would like to give a shout-out to Birralee Preschool, who celebrated their 50th anniversary on Saturday. They are a wonderful community kindergarten in



Vermont South, and I thank their passionate educators Cassie Rolfe, Emily Brown, Yan Sun and Sarah Montell for giving our youngest Victorians the best start for the best life. It was a wonderful celebration held at the kinder, with past educators, committee members and community members coming together to acknowledge this wonderful milestone. I thank my community for supporting our youngest Victorians, and I look forward to the minister's response.

#### Ovens Valley electorate

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:50): (862) My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. Moara Shira Lodge in Cobram was closed last year, and the men who occupied it were dispersed and found accommodation in other towns and centres. This accommodation centre has now been taken over by vandals, who have smashed all the windows, graffitied the walls and ripped up the electrical supply. Over the weekend I met with Neville Trease and other neighbours, who tell me that the Victorian government has let this accommodation be trashed and ruined, and they are fearful as to what happens next. I have seen photos of this building that show the disgraceful vandalism that has occurred. How does the government propose to deal with this mess?

#### Lara electorate

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (14:50): (863) My question is for the Minister for Environment. How many containers have been recycled in the Lara electorate since the beginning of the container deposit scheme? This week marks one year since the CDS was introduced in Victoria, and across the Lara electorate I have heard from many, many residents over the last year who are making the most of the container deposit scheme. Whether it is local sporting clubs fundraising through the collection of drink containers or young children learning about the importance of saving, at the same time learning about the importance of recycling, the Lara electorate loves the CDS. It was great to hear the minister announce a competition where Scouts can collect containers to fundraise for their Scouting groups through the container deposit scheme. This competition not only rewards their efforts but also empowers young people to take responsibility for the environment and raise funds for their Scout groups. Again, my question to the minister is: how many containers have been recycled in the Lara electorate since the beginning of the container deposit scheme?

#### Polwarth electorate

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:51): (864) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport: Minister, what will your solution be for the loss of 875 seats a day on the Warrnambool train, or the 6125 lost seats for the week, and the loss of the catering car for those taking the 3- to 4-hour journey from Warrnambool? What will the solution be for that complete cut in services when the new VLocity trains allegedly start later this year on the Warrnambool line? The Warrnambool line has been promised an upgrade for a long time, but the residents and constituents throughout Polwarth have great concern that already there are limited seats and limited availability on the Warrnambool train now, and with an estimated 6125 fewer seats per week to and from Melbourne that is a massive cut to services. Minister, what will your solution be for this massive cut in public transport services?

#### Northcote electorate

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (14:52): (865) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture, and I ask: what is the Victorian government doing to progress the national guiding principles for assistance animal standards and policies? My constituent Claire Moore has shared with me her daily struggle in simply trying to access public spaces with her assistance dog Zed. Despite Zed being clearly identifiable as an assistance dog, Claire still faces constant barriers in places many of us take for granted, like cafes and stores. These refusals are not just frustrating, they are discriminatory and unlawful. Yet too many venues are unaware of our laws, and the constant need to explain and justify an assistance dog is deeply distressing and exclusionary. Claire wants our laws to be stronger to ensure people with assistance animals are always treated with dignity and respect. She is calling for stronger

penalties, such as those in other jurisdictions, along with greater education and support to ensure our laws are complied with. Victoria is now part of a national working group considering a consistent approach to assistance animals. I look forward to hearing about its progress.

#### **Richmond electorate**

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (14:53): (866) My question is for the Minister for Housing. A month ago Richmond residents heard that their homes would be demolished so that the Labor government could give the land over to private developers. Elderly members of the Vietnamese community like Lee, who arrived in Australia as a refugee, are among those who have made their lives here. Over the last few weeks residents have told me of deceptive and coercive behaviour from Homes Victoria officers under instruction to get residents out as quickly as possible: residents who want to stay being threatened and pressured to sign relocation agreements and residents only being shown a single page and instructed to sign without ever having seen the remaining pages of the agreement. Minister, why is Homes Victoria pressuring residents to sign a contract that they do not want to sign and that they have not even been given the chance to read?

#### **Bellarine electorate**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (14:54): (867) My question is to the Minister for Creative Industries. Minister, how will the recently announced Victorian Gig Fund and the Live Music Festivals Fund support the local economy in my electorate of the Bellarine? This investment in our live music industry is supporting Bellarine venues and festivals to host more great events across the year, championing up-and-coming and established artists. This month I met with Daniel from Queenscliff's Blues Train, one of the local venues who secured funding in the Victorian Gig Fund. It was great to hear how this grant will go towards artists' fees so the Blues Train can offer emerging local talent opportunities to perform live on the heritage steam train throughout their busy summer period. I would like to again ask the minister: how will the recently announced Victorian Gig Fund and Live Music Festivals Fund support the local economies of the Bellarine?

#### **Kew electorate**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:55): (868) My question is for the Minister for Crime Prevention. Has the minister considered conducting a review into safety at shopping strips in Kew with a view to installing CCTV where necessary? Shop theft is up 31 per cent in Boroondara and aggravated burglary up 65 per cent. Over recent weeks we have seen multiple break-ins at shops in Kew Junction, Balwyn North village and the Greythorn shops. Windows have been smashed, cash registers have been stolen and shops have been forced to close. The Greythorn Dry Cleaners shopfront was rammed with a truck and the ATM stolen, losing Michael days of business. Minister, it is hard enough trying to run a small business in this state without also having to grapple with theft or even armed robberies. As the government continues to ignore the rising crime rates in this state, installing CCTV at shopping strips across the electorate of Kew is the least the government could do to deter crime and help the traders and their customers feel safe once again.

#### **Wendouree electorate**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (14:56): (869) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. How will the Allan Labor government's \$655 million investment to expand and redevelop Ballarat Base Hospital benefit constituents living in the electorate of Wendouree? It was wonderful to welcome the Minister for Health to Ballarat to visit Grampians Health to mark the completion of stage 2 of our \$655 million Ballarat Base Hospital redevelopment. The central energy plant and support services building house the state-of-the-art pharmacy, pathology services and an educational learning centre for Grampians Health and the Deakin rural clinical school. It is expected to be in operation in November 2024, and it was terrific to meet staff from pharmacy, environmental services and education, who are looking forward to working in this beautiful world-class building. I was

pleased that stage 2 also involved the delivery of 400 new car spaces for our hardworking and valued healthcare workers, patients and visitors.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have questions unanswered to the Minister for Jobs and Industry, adjournment 833 and questions on notice 1621, 1622 and 1623. I also have unanswered questions to the Minister for Skills and TAFE, questions on notice 1357 and 1358, and to the Minister for Economic Growth, question on notice 1591. Could you please have those answered for my constituents.

### *Rulings from the Chair*

#### **Constituency questions**

**The SPEAKER (14:58):** I have reviewed the constituency questions from Thursday 17 October. The member for Polwarth asked the minister to respond directly to two of his constituents, which is an action; the member also asked two questions. I therefore rule the member for Polwarth's constituency question out of order. The member for Mildura asked a broad policy question that was not sufficiently linked to her electorate or constituents, so I rule her question out of order. The member for Cranbourne also asked a broad policy question, so I rule her question out of order.

#### *Members statements*

##### **Beaumaris Motor Yacht Squadron**

**Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:58):** I recently attended the Beaumaris Motor Yacht Squadron sail past, where the community took part in the tradition of blessing the fleet and celebrating the start of the boating season. My thanks to commodore Michael Busuttill and the management team for making me and the kids feel so welcome. Thanks also to Marty, Liv, Josh and Connie for taking the kids out on their boat for the sail past. They had a fantastic time.

##### **Sandringham Life Activities Club**

**Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:59):** Last Friday, with the assistance of the tours team, I joined the Sandringham Life Activities Club for a tour of our Parliament. I must say I learned quite a bit from one of our guides here, Grace, whose knowledge of the Parliament is absolutely superb. It was a privilege to share this building, its stories and its history with the life activities club, who I am sure will return to watch question time sometime in the future.

##### **Black Rock Yacht Club**

**Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:59):** Last Saturday I joined the Black Rock Yacht Club for their annual open day. We were blessed by the weather. It was a fantastic afternoon of sailing, live music and community engagement. Thank you, commodore Randal Garnham and the committee, for your continued dedication to promoting a love of water-based recreation on Port Phillip. We are indeed blessed to call Bayside home.

#### *That Optimism Man*

**Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:59):** Finally, yesterday I had the great privilege of speaking to Victor Perton at the Centre for Optimism on his podcast *That Optimism Man*. Our best years are well and truly ahead of us. I sought to deliver a message of hope, unity and gratitude, and I hope that resonates with those who listen.

#### **Diwali**

**Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (15:00):** Happy Diwali. Melbourne's west is Australia's home of Diwali. This past weekend there were celebrations across our community, because Diwali cuts across countries and religions. I was able to share Diwali celebrations across western Melbourne. For those who do not know much about Diwali, it celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and, most importantly, knowledge over ignorance. It involves the lighting of candles, and

many in our community place lights across their houses to celebrate. Families come together, they eat and they exchange gifts. There are religious ceremonies and offerings too.

Over the weekend I attended many celebrations. I would like to thank the Brothers & Sisters Foundation's Jagdeep, Ekta, Jatinder, Amit, Professor Sandhu and the extraordinary MC Gurvijay Mahal. The West Seniors and their president Amman Naidu – I will hold you to your promise for the recipe and more snacks being on the way. I only wish I could have stayed longer. The hard work of Reena Rana and the team bringing Diwali to Western United is a success that will be built on in the many years ahead. I thank Sanctuary Lakes for their very first Diwali run by the team at Dreamwave Entertainment and in particular Ashish Singh – I look forward to being back next year – and Love Seabrook and especially Nasz Khan for the many events that she and the team bring together uplifting the Seabrook community. Finally, Sweet Magic in Sanctuary Lakes has provided some sweets, so pop by the office if you would like one.

### **Nepean electorate housing**

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (15:01): Last week I went down to Southern Peninsula Community Support and visited all the staff there led by their CEO Jeremy Maxwell. They do incredible work with some of the most vulnerable people on the Mornington Peninsula, especially the southern Mornington Peninsula, some of those looking for help when they cannot get it anywhere else. Some of the statistics that Jeremy shared with me and my team are quite startling. Homelessness on the peninsula has risen by 37 per cent over the last five years. In the last year alone we have seen a 33 per cent increase in the number of people seeking homelessness support. There are over 3000 current applications for social housing, of which half are categorised as priority access.

The shire recently commissioned some research into homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula. There are up to 689 people experiencing homelessness. Now, Jeremy thinks that number is actually higher – they cannot keep track of the full number of people – and the largest cohort is on that southern peninsula. Many sleep in tents or in cars. Many are escaping family violence. A lot of them are women with children. Sixty per cent of the people seeking crisis support from Southern Peninsula Community Support are women, many over the age of 50 and up to 85 years of age. Twenty per cent of people who are homeless on the peninsula are under 18 years of age, which is a scary thought. But when you look at the data on those people who need housing, when you have got 1450-odd public and community houses on the peninsula and 428 are empty, the government needs to do more to support a community in need.

### **Bayswater electorate schools**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (15:03): There is always lots happening out in Knox when it comes to upgrading our local schools. I am excited to tell the house that work on Wantirna College is powering ahead with over \$11 million to build two new competition-sized basketball courts, a new performing arts and drama space and associated facilities. The frames are up, the facade is really taking decent shape and that will be complete next year for the over 1000 students at Wantirna College. It is a great school and always a pleasure to work with principal Carrie Wallis and the team. And of course the works at Kent Park Primary in Ferntree Gully will be complete next year too. It is a fantastic local primary school. They will have a new synthetic oval and new playground; it was an election commitment. Construction is starting very, very soon – it might have already started as we are speaking right now – and it will be complete next year, delivered as promised. It has also been great to open up the new facilities at Templeton Primary in Wantirna with Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll recently. They have new classrooms and new facilities, a two-storey build that looks absolutely insane. It is probably one of the best builds I reckon we have done in our local patch. Opening soon as well are over \$4 million of new classrooms and new facilities, including a library, at Boronia West Primary School. And then in 2026 it is Bayswater South Primary School again, with over \$11 million for new classrooms to make sure we keep creating the Education State in Bayswater.

### Train noise pollution

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (15:04): I was recently contacted by a Brunswick constituent who had just bought his first home, an apartment along the Upfield line. He had expected a happy experience but told me it was more akin to a nightmare, with train horns disrupting his sleep every night. Safety measures around trains make sense, but this year's new Comeng fleet of trains have even louder horns, reaching a deafening 110 decibels at times. I live 1.2 kilometres from the Upfield line, and I hear those horns from my backyard, so I can just imagine how those living closer feel.

Melbourne's north is one of Australia's fastest growing regions, so we are seeing more high-density living along those lines. That also means an increasing number of people living very close to piercing train horns, causing insomnia, anxiety and, for some, physical and mental health complications.

We need to find a balance between preventing accidents on the one hand and protecting the health of the thousands and growing numbers who live virtually on top of train lines. The government has delayed the completion of the Brunswick sky rail until 2030, and obviously horns will be less necessary once the rail is elevated, but they cannot expect residents to wait six years for a reduction in this noise-induced distress.

### Welcoming the Babies

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (15:06): I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in Wyndham who came down last weekend to our Welcoming the Babies event, which I hosted alongside the fabulous member for Point Cook, the member for Tarneit and our federal member for Lalor. It was great to see so many new parents – young mums and dads – proud grandparents even and uncles and aunts. They came along with newborns or their young children to be officially welcomed into our growing community.

Being such a fast-growing population, more than 120 babies are born in Wyndham each and every single week, and whilst these stats are often used – sometimes in a negative light – it also highlights that so many families choose to call our suburban community home and that Wyndham is a great place to raise a family. Those were the sentiments we heard last Sunday when meeting with all of these new families. When we were not handing out certificates for our newest bubs we were linking these families up with some of the wonderful child and maternal care services that are available in our community.

I want to acknowledge and thank some of the awesome organisations that came to our event, including Services Australia and Tweddle. Even Kidsafe Victoria were down there doing car seat safety testing even after the event ended. This was an unbelievably successful event. I know that the member for Point Cook, the member for Tarneit and the federal member for Lalor share in my enthusiasm to host this event once again next year, in 2025.

### Robinvale centenary

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (15:07): It has been a huge weekend of celebrations in tropical north Victoria. Robinvale celebrated its centenary. It is 100 years since the railway extension from Annuello to Robinvale carried the first train full of dignitaries, I might add, and the first land sale took place on 23 October 1924.

The committee is to be congratulated for a magnificent weekend. We had the gala dinner on Friday night and hosted the new French Consul-General Mrs Paule Ignatio – forgive my pronunciation – and also hosted many locals, past locals and visitors to the town. The parade on Saturday featured schools and community groups, and it was fantastic. And the Storers returned to Storers Hill on Saturday night. It was a wonderful weekend, and congratulations to the centenary committee.

### Red Cliffs Urban Fire Brigade centenary

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (15:08): The Red Cliffs fire brigade also celebrated 100 years of service, and I was fortunate enough to attend the celebratory dinner on Saturday night, where a unit citation was awarded in recognition for the service shown by Joel Bailey, Walter Graham, Thomas Leach, Matthew Maher, Lachlan Shaw and Dale Taylor, along with acting commander Shane Bailey, who was also awarded a citation for his service and response to the June accident on the Calder Highway. Well done, Bec Nixon and David Thomas, for organising a wonderful event, and thank you to our volunteer firefighters, who are the backbone of regional communities.

### Housing

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (15:09): More homes mean more opportunity, and that is why I was delighted to see such significant, transformative and bold announcements made by the Premier just last week. This government is all about delivering those real, tangible differences that change lives for all Victorians, and that is why those announcements were such critical announcements for both the government and of course the people of this great state: more funding for the outer suburbs and a long-term vision for greenfields growth; the provision for the slashing of stamp duty for off-the-plan apartments, townhouses and new units; more homes in regional Victoria; and critically, the unlocking of government land near train stations and public transport.

We know of course that doing these things, making these decisions, builds upon our strong and sustained record of delivering more homes closer to where people can move about, thanks to a long-term vision and significant transport investments that have been made by this team over a long period of time. We know of course that the Liberal Party and the Greens political party are all about the politics and not about the people. These planned reforms will of course put more roofs over heads – changing lives, improving lives, transforming local communities – and only Labor will get this done.

### Diwali

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:10): It is festival season. Over the past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the Diwali celebrations hosted separately by both the Western United Football Club and also Brothers & Sisters Foundation Incorporated. These were wonderful events filled with lights, laughter and of course good company. Diwali, as many of us know, is all about celebrating light and new beginnings. It was fantastic to see everyone coming together to enjoy the festivities. Our community of Tarneit is incredibly vibrant and diverse, and it is events like these that really showcase that diversity. It is wonderful to see people from all walks of life sharing in the excitement of a festival, especially one as joyful as Diwali. Multicultural celebrations like Diwali are a big part of what makes Victoria, and especially Tarneit, such a special place to live. These events not only add colour and excitement to our lives but also bring us together, showcasing the rich cultural heritage that each community brings to our shared home. I know there is lots of celebrating still to do, so I wish you all a happy Diwali, and I hope you have had a wonderful time with your friends and family. It is always amazing to attend these fantastic events in Tarneit, and I have got a few more Diwalis to go yet.

### Greenvale electorate schools

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (15:12): What a joy it was to spend last Monday with the Kolbe Catholic College Greenvale community led by acting principal Cameron Whitford and permanent principal Nick Scully, who is working at the Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools regional office in western Melbourne at the moment, and to be with that fantastic school's community, their student leaders, their teachers and parish priest and head of mission Dishan Candappa to celebrate the establishment of the college's second campus. Its new campus just across the border in my friend the member for Kalkallo's electorate has been supported with a \$6 million contribution by this government, which I was delighted to announce with the Deputy Premier just a few weeks ago.

This is the sort of transformative investment that ensures that families across Greenvale and Melbourne's north more broadly can choose the education that suits them and their family the best. It

is an amazing school, where the STEM building of the existing Greenvale campus, which has been supported with a \$2 million capital investment by this Allan Labor government, is nearly complete; it will support the delivery of fantastic programs for the Greenvale community. As indeed will the new co-located kindergarten at Greenvale Primary School, which I was delighted to turn the sod on just last week – nearly 120 new places for local families to support our three-year-old and four-year-old programs, making it easier for families, avoiding the double drop-off and building kids for the future.

#### **Diwali**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (15:13): I would like to join with my colleagues in wishing our very diverse community a happy Diwali and a happy Bandi Chhor Divas. Like others, I was absolutely delighted to be able to visit Cranbourne West Primary School as part of BAPS's amazing kids Diwali celebration. To be with the member for Bass is always a joy; being with the member for the Bass and surrounded by children and all that that means in terms of the celebration of good over evil, light over darkness, as has so beautifully been articulated, was a particular joy.

I would like to also thank the people who came as guests on Saturday night to the Premier's Diwali: Yagnesh, Madhu, Amrishkumar, Deepali, Jayesh, Ruchir, Jasbir, Vipul and of course Amrit. I am so happy to have you in the community.

#### **Val Motta**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (15:14): I would also like to congratulate Val Motta on her extraordinary role leading the Cranbourne Italian Senior Citizens Club. What a great outcome to have such a strong and vibrant Italian senior citizens community. All the best for the future.

#### **Pakenham railway station**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (15:14): Last week I took the opportunity to follow up on the progress of the new outdoor spaces at Pakenham station and they are truly transformational. The huge expanse of open space includes walking paths, additional car parking, a bus interchange, a new playground and barbecue areas, which are all well underway, and the street basketball court is state of the art. If you get the chance to come to Pakenham, I urge you to take the elevator up to the north platform for one of the best views of Victoria's Big Build achievements in the outer south-east.

#### **Asianet News Healthcare Excellence Awards**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (15:15): I was honoured to speak at the Asianet News Healthcare Excellence Awards. This was a celebration of the outstanding work of our medical professionals of Indian origin, and I sincerely thank them for their generous donation to FightMND.

#### **Motor neurone disease**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (15:15): I want to thank everyone who turned out for the Walk to Support MND in Pakenham, particularly those supporting me and my family. There are many of you here today that made the journey with me, and I am truly humbled. A special shout-out to Sonya Boloski and her family, who successfully organised her fifth MND walk in honour of her late father and brother. Sonya and her family are tireless supporters, and they have helped fund much-needed equipment, like speech machines and scooters, to enhance the lives of so many with MND at no cost. This allows those suffering and their families to concentrate on making memories and not to worry about finding the funds to purchase these expensive but essential items. Thank you, Sonia and family, for your big hearts and for everything that you do.

#### **Diwali**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (15:16): Lastly, a big happy Diwali to my community too.

### Diwali

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (15:16): The diversity in Kororoit is something that makes my electorate extra special. This week members of our community will continue to come together to celebrate the most joyous and vibrant festival, the festival of lights. On Saturday night a number of us were welcome at the Premier's Diwali dinner, and it was great to attend it with so many community members. Thank you to each and every one of those community members that made the night so special – to everyone behind the scenes, from the officers to others, and my very own local Gary Verma, who put so much work towards making the night happen. It was truly a joyous occasion. I look forward to the rest of the celebrations. To everyone out there, happy Diwali.

### *Business of the house*

#### Notices of motion

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (15:17): I advise that the government do not wish to proceed with notices of motion, government business, today and request that they remain on the notice paper.

### *Bills*

#### **Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (15:17): It is always an absolute delight for me to be able to speak in this place on the value and importance of agriculture but also around food, because without agriculture we do not have our fabulous food that we all enjoy. In regional Victoria we grow the food on your table, we grow the fibres that you wear on your back and we really do make such a considerable economic contribution to the state. I thank all of our food and fibre producers right across the state because they are not always valued. Sometimes they are utterly disrespected, and sometimes they have to live through conditions which they have absolutely no control over.

I would at the outset like to acknowledge that we are having an extraordinarily difficult growing season this year. There are large expanses of the state – in fact most of the state, apart from probably around the Gippsland area, the far east and south-east of the state – which have had below average rainfall. In many of the areas state we have got rainfall that is within the bottom 10 per cent ever for rainfall conditions, and of course that is having a huge impact. Down in the dairy area in the south-west of Victoria there are areas where there is simply insufficient groundwater. We are not having run-off yet – it is not going into the dams – and at this point in time it looks like about 25 per cent of our dairy producers in that region will run out of water this year. They will have to cart water. Just to put that into perspective of how much water is required – it is not simply turning on a tap; there are no taps down there and they have got no access to a pipeline system – some farmers are looking at having to cart seven semi-loads of water every day to keep the water up for their dairy cattle. It is an enormously time-consuming thing to do to cart water. It allows for a lot of thinking time. It costs a lot of money, but around that thinking time, it does make you realise you are only going financially backwards.

So I would put a message out, particularly to our dairy farmers who are looking at water carting this year: we are all looking out for you, we have got your back, we will always stand side by side with you and we will certainly make sure that we do whatever we can to protect and support the dairy industry this year but also in the years to come. If it does not rain next season – if we have another season like we have had this year – 100 per cent of dairy producers in the south-west will not have sufficient water on property. This is a really big problem. While I understand the government have announced some grants that are available to people who are drought affected – \$5000, like-for-like



funding – my understanding is that they have been exhausted. It was oversubscribed before it actually even opened. I would urge the government to extend the scope of the funding that is available but also look at more substantial ways that these farmers can be supported in the short term but also in the longer term.

There is a fantastic opportunity for the government to put some money behind the Simpson pipeline project, which would provide water security to dairy farmers and communities in that Corangamite Colac–Otway area of the state around, obviously, Simpson. It is something that was considered many years ago by Wannon Water. We need to make sure that the state government are looking at putting money on the table to take pressure off farmers. We need to make sure that they are leaning on the federal Labor government to ensure their proportion of the funding is also on the table. Given that we are heading into a federal election it would be a very, very good time for all governments to be talking about that and taking that conversation to landholders down in that zone.

Further round through the Western Districts of course low rainfall has really impacted on pasture growth, impacting our lamb numbers in the area. There are estimates that on the land through that area there has been a decrease of about 20 per cent of stock – so a 20 per cent destocking rate. That does not just get restocked overnight; it will take a considerable amount of time to build that back up again. We are also seeing reverse selection. Usually farmers will select the ewes that have the most lambs, if I can put it in a simplistic way for the chamber today –

**Jade Benham:** The most fertile.

**Emma KEALY:** The most fertile, yes. The ones that throw out the most eggs are the ones that we like to keep. This year there has actually been reverse selection, so the ones that are more likely to have triplets or show a history of having triplets or even twins are the ones they are getting rid of when they are going to market. That will, again, have an impact on future stocking rates through the west.

The other thing that we are competing with, particularly in the Western District, is that our pastures – what is left of them – are turning into kangaroo feedlots. There are kangaroos absolutely everywhere causing an enormous amount of damage to farmland. We should not have so much competition. When kangaroos are breeding up in our state forests and plantation timber areas and those areas are harvested, or we get to this time when there is not as much rainfall and there is not as much grass growth on the forest floor, then we see all of those kangaroos coming out onto private land and simply grazing it down to the bare earth. There is no support available for farmers in those scenarios. There are no obligations on the state government to manage the wildlife that breeds up to plague proportions on their own land. Can I say – and I have said it in this place many times – the state is the worst neighbour you could possibly have. They do not do a lot to manage their fence lines. It is very difficult to get them to come in to manage fence lines, particularly when there are broken fence lines because of a tree which has fallen from their side.

We also have this impact, as I have referred to, of kangaroo numbers breeding up and other areas of wildlife competing with stock for grazing areas. Also, as we have seen out in the north-west of Victoria in the big desert area at Wyperfeld National Park, we are seeing the build-up of dingoes, which can now come across and attack stock with absolutely no recourse for the landholder. There is no way for them to even have those animals trapped and then taken further away, hundreds of kilometres away into the big desert of the Wyperfeld National Park forest. We are now seeing those dingoes come further and further out because they are chasing water. They are even threatening campers in the area.

Again, this is an animal – it is wildlife – that has been allowed to run outside of its normal area and outside of its normal habitat. We are not calling for these dingoes to be culled. We understand that there is a view at this point in time that they are protected, even though the numbers have stayed steady for about a hundred years. But if the government have interest in looking and understanding more about dingoes, then I urge the government to look at a different mechanism – maybe trap and release if possible. Another option which I have taken to the minister is that we actually put collars on these

animals so we can track them, trace them and understand their movements more. We could perhaps even look at e-collars so that we can geofence them into an area away from stock, away from other domestic animals and away from campers, who are feeling threatened at this point in time, as it is impacting on tourism through the area as well.

In the rest of the state we have got impacts. We have had multiday frosts, which are impacting on crop growth through the Wimmera in particular, but that goes right through again into the north-west and central districts. If you had any crop standing, I think low rainfall wiped out about 50 per cent of the usual yields and the frost has taken out another 50 per cent. Then just for the third part of being hit by issues that we cannot control, we have had a hailstorm through the region as well. North of Horsham there is considerable hail damage right through to the border, and it is south of Horsham also. Then of course the Casterton community was hit really, really hard. They are still reeling. There is certainly not a sheet of Laserlite left in Casterton that has not got holes punched through it. There are so many businesses and homes that have been impacted there, and I do thank the CFA, the SES and the council, who have done an incredible job, and all of the people who have turned out to help one another, to clean up after that mess and to offer homes for people whose homes have been inundated with water. I just think the Casterton community is incredible. I have spent a lot of time there over my entire life and particularly recently. I know that they will come together as a stronger community as a result of that hail damage.

There have not been fabulous seasonal conditions this year. I like to share that message; I have got the opportunity because I am the lead speaker on this bill. Everybody, when you are sitting down tonight and enjoying your dinner, spare a thought for the farmers. They do a really good job. They are often persecuted as destroying the land, harming animals and doing other terrible things, but they take pride in how they manage their land, they take pride in how they look after their stock, they take pride in the produce that they send to market and they take pride when they see their goods on supermarket shelves. They contribute so much to our local community. So I give a vote of thanks to our farmers, and we should all be doing that if nothing else. If there is a unity ticket on anything, it should be that. Our farmers deserve a lot more credit than what they get for what they contribute to the state of Victoria and to Australia more broadly.

To get into the details of this bill, there are a number of acts which are impacted: the Dairy Act 2000, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Seafood Safety Act 2003. A lot of these changes are around cutting back red tape and making our system a little bit more responsive to make the minister's job easier in some respects – and I mean that with due respect – to stop some toing and froing and ministerial intervention where they do not actually add anything to that process.

There are of course concerns that we have around some of the aspects that are outlined in this bill, and I will go through those in my contribution today. There are a couple of significant concerns, and I would just like to touch on one of those to start with. It is very difficult for us to form a position on this because changes in the Meat Industry Act within this legislation include elements that improve information sharing. In and of itself within this bill it seems that it is looking – and the intent is – to build more efficient systems within the department and between the department and the minister's office. However, we know that very soon we will see a new bill, the Animal Care and Protection Bill, which will replace the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986. We do not know what is in that that yet. Actually I will be briefed on this in about half an hour, so I will learn a little bit more. It may not be the final version that we see. But in opening the door to further information sharing, we do not understand what information will be available and what further information may be shared and how private businesses – our farmers, our producers and our processors – will be informed and be part of that process.

This is very important, and it is not just putting up a red flag for the sake of it. We know that there are significant changes that the government is currently considering as part of the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into pig welfare in Victoria, and there are a number of recommendations that are not supported by industry in that inquiry report. There are particular

recommendations around mandatory placement of CCTV within food processors. There is a lack of understanding at this point in time, because we are so early in the process, and we have got Labor MPs who voted for significant changes to the way that pigs in particular and meat are processed in Victoria that would widen the scope of information that is disclosed and available to the government on a regular basis.

We then have the next step of this bill coming through, which broadens the amount of information that can be shared, and then we have got another tranche of legislation which we have not seen yet, which will again be able to put different mechanisms and different reporting structures in place. So in many ways, while we understand and we take on face value what the government are putting to us – that we want to improve efficiency of sharing information – we do need to make sure that is done in a way that is inclusive of the rights of privacy of farmers and food producers, our producers and processors, to make sure that they are informed about when information is being used and where it is being shared. And we want to make sure that that in no way can ever be exploited, because we have already seen so much personal information shared through the work of – I am not going to mention their names – various people who just simply want to make sure we are all vegans or eating bugs. I am not going to be eating bugs. I like steak, I like roast pork, I love bacon, I love pork crackling and I love banh mi. I love salami too. I must admit I do love a salami. So we need to make sure we protect that and we need to make sure the balance is right. It is very difficult to assess where that will sit.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** And I know there is unified support, member for Mordialloc. He loves his bacon too. He just loves it. He does love it.

**A member** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** We will get to Moreton Bay bugs very, very shortly, actually. We will get to those.

We have got other elements of this legislation. We have got changes to the Dairy Act 2000 in relation to the sale of raw milk for human consumption. There is a loophole at the moment. There can only be penalties put in place for a breach of a licence condition around selling milk without the relevant bittering agents and other safety matters that we have got in place so people do not drink raw milk and get sick. But if you do not have a licence, you do not have those conditional requirements. So I can understand the rationale behind that and we certainly support that.

There are also changes to the administrative structures of Dairy Food Safety Victoria. This includes removal of requirement for their AGM. The industry have called for that. They have not got anybody attending and there is a lot of duplication, so they are looking at other ways they are engaging with their stakeholders and the wider industry rather than having an AGM, which is not fit for purpose anymore. It is also around making sure that the appointment process for vacancies on the board takes into account those times when somebody steps down or is no longer on the board, that decisions can still be made in a timely way and appointments can be made efficiently and effectively.

We have also got changes to the Food Act 1984. There are a number of aspects to this about reducing unnecessary burden on local councils associated with inspections of registered food premises. These recommendations are in line with the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report *Regulating Food Safety*, which was tabled last year in June 2023. These are just making sure we have an efficient timeframe. There are strict timeframes at the moment for the time that can be charges laid. That does not take into account the time it can take for testing. We were told that it can take a really long period of time – months – particularly if food substances that may be contaminated need to be sent overseas for processing. So it is opening up those timeframes to ensure that infringement notices can be issued where appropriate and the process is not likely to be hamstrung by other caps on the periods in which they can be applied.

I do have a significant concern around the changes in relation to the Seafood Safety Act. This specifically relates to the new assessments, but not in relation to being a fit and proper person; I think that we can all accept that. But I am concerned that there are further aspects to the assessment of who is a fit and proper person, in relation to family members, associates, business associates and associates of business associates of that licensee all being assessed as to whether they are of good repute.

Now, there is no definition of ‘good repute’ within the bill or within the broader legislation that the bill amends. That is why today I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government conducts stakeholder consultation on a definition of ‘good repute’ and a right of appeal for seafood licensees prior to the suspension of their seafood licence.’

This is of great concern to the commercial fishing industry. Nobody disputes that there should be a fit and proper person test, but when we look through other pieces of legislation in Victoria which mention ‘fit and proper person’ and have that test within the legislation, of the 42 acts which this is relevant to only three make reference to ‘good repute’. So it does seem that this is going a step too far in specifically targeting the seafood industry, the commercial fishing industry, and that it has not been properly considered what the impacts might be on an industry that is so very important to Victorians.

If we go through the acts where there is a fit and proper person test and a mention – this is an additional criteria – of being of good repute, it is included in the Meat Industry Act, and it is included in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, but only in relation to the cultivation of opium poppies. Thirdly, there is mention of the fit and proper person to also be of good repute within the Non-Emergency Patient Transport and First Aid Services Act 2003. There is not that additional requirement, which is in the seafood licensing elements of this bill, which refers to family members, associates, business associates and associates of business associates also being of good repute.

I find it unusual that the government is taking aim particularly at commercial fishermen around this, and it is not just commercial fisherman. This means that they are also putting under the microscope the employees, the investors in that company and their family members – their spouse, their children, their siblings. It is a very wide net – if I can use that analogy or that pun perhaps, an appropriate pun – that this assessment will cast. And we do not know what ‘good repute’ means. We do not know. Can we trust whoever will make that decision – who is of good repute and who is not – to make a decision which is sound, when there is no definition?

But more so, if you read through how this amendment works within the operating act, it appears that there is not any right of appeal for that seafood licensee before the licence is suspended. So a decision can be made that somebody has a family member or an employee who is not of good repute, they have their licence suspended and then some time later, once their licence is suspended, they have an appeal process that they can go to. But it is very clear in the bill that their licence for commercial fishing will be suspended until such time that that decision is reviewed and reversed. This is of great concern, and I do not believe it has been thought through. I do not believe that it is well understood by the government, but certainly it has created an enormous amount of unrest within the commercial fishing industry.

I will note that in the Bellarine electorate there are a very high number of businesses that will be impacted by this. In the Bass electorate there are also a large number of businesses that will be impacted by this. There will be businesses that will not be able to continue to operate. There will be commercial fishing businesses that will not be able to continue to operate simply because of things that they are not aware of that then put them to be deemed to be associating with people who are not of good repute. It is very, very concerning. And let us face it, when we look at the Labor government, how can they really assess who is of good repute, and why haven’t they applied this test to other legislation which is currently in force? Why hasn’t it been applied to the Trade Unions Act 1958? Why isn’t there a test for members of a trade union and secretaries to be of –

**Chris Couzens** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** This is the state legislation. I am getting interjections from the member for Geelong that it is okay –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** Through the Chair!

**Emma KEALY:** not to have the test in the Victorian Parliament for the Trade Unions Act. Maybe that is why – I think I might have caught one on the hook – the government is not keen to have wideranging application of this additional criteria for people within a trade union to be of good repute, because who does Labor rely on every single election? Who comes around? The CFMEU come around, don't they? We hear that time and time again. The Big Build projects –

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I am not sure what the union movement has to do with the agricultural industry and this bill.

**Emma KEALY:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I have made it very clear in my speech – and I am the lead speaker on this legislation – that I am further dealing with the changes within this bill which talk about assessing people as being of good repute. I simply am going through when that test is not applied to other legislation within the Victorian Parliament.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** I will make the ruling. There is no point of order. There was some kind of straying a bit from the bill, so I ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Emma KEALY:** It is quite clear that the Victorian Labor government have no interest in applying this high standard – which is a very grey standard, because there is no definition of good repute – to people on their own side. For some reason they want to apply this in a way that is appropriate for commercial fishermen but is not appropriate for the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. It is not in there. It is not in the Adoption Act 1984. It is not in the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2018. It is not even in the Firearms Act 1996. It is not in so many aspects of very important legislation where if you were going to apply a test that a fit and proper person must also have all of their family members, all of their business associates, their employees and all of their associates be of good repute – but we have seen that Labor are not targeting any of these groups that are their friends that make donations. We are seeing only the commercial fishing operators targeted.

This is completely wrong, but it is no surprise, because there are so many aspects where Labor will apply one set of rules to their own and one set of rules to everybody else. We look at how many members of the Victorian Labor Party would be sitting in their place if they had to go through a test of being of good repute and their family members being of good repute and their associates and businesses associates being of good repute. We have had John Setka in this place as a guest to hear a maiden speech – that is how you go for good repute! That is Labor's good repute. That is your associates in good repute. You have got members of the Labor Party in the chamber who are of such poor repute that they are not even allowed to sit in their own party room. They not allowed to sit in their own party room, but there is no test there for being of good repute when they look at their own people, when it comes to their own people.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** Through the Chair!

**Emma KEALY:** And you have got women in this place sticking up for them. You have got women in this place who are standing up for a man who is not safe enough to sit in the party room –

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, what has this got to do with the agricultural bill?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** I ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Emma KEALY:** This is entirely relevant, Acting Speaker. This is all about a fit and proper person test. The government members may not like talking about it.

**Daniela De Martino:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member for Lowan is defying your ruling.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** Member, I ask you to come back to the bill.

**Emma KEALY:** There is a whole amendment, and I encourage you to read the bill, which is around changes to the fit and proper person test to include aspects of considering that family members, associates, business associates and associates of business associates must be of good repute. It is a bar that the Labor government will not hold to their own members. It is a bar that the Labor members are happy to stand in here and defend.

*Members interjecting.*

**Emma KEALY:** They are happy to interject. The member for Wendouree and the member for Eureka are happy to stand up and defend their own friends in here who have been kicked out of their party room for inappropriate behaviour against women, and they will back them in just because they are Labor. It is hypocrisy that we see time and time and time again. It is not just that. How many IBAC reports do we need to see to show that Labor do not care about being of good repute? How many times do we need to see reports from the Victorian Ombudsman that show that Labor Party members in this place are not of good repute? How many times do we need to see that before it actually comes into effect that what Labor –

**Juliana Addison:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I take offence as a member of the Labor Party and a member of this place. I ask for a withdrawal of that offensive thing that she said about me and the many colleagues on this side of the house. You are a disgrace.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Meng Heang Tak):** It was a general statement, so it was not particular to anyone, but I ask the member to come back to the bill.

**Emma KEALY:** It is interesting that it is so sensitive for Labor members to talk about people of good repute who they associate with. I ask them to apply the same guidelines that they apply to themselves to the commercial fishing industry. They are happy to have the fit and proper person test, but do not hold them to a higher level than the Labor government is willing to hold themselves to. It will impact on jobs in Bass and Bellarine, and Labor should support my reasoned amendment.

**Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (15:47):** I am delighted to rise to speak on this important bill. I find it extraordinary that someone who in their opening statement professed to care about the agriculture industry would spend a good proportion of their time just talking about irrelevant issues and attacking the government. I think it really speaks to their commitment to regional Victoria. There is nothing more telling than the numbers in the house – that on this side of the house we have 18 regional members. I think that speaks to the connection that Victoria has with the Labor government.

But, look, I think it is really sad that this has just turned into some strange slanging match when we are actually here to try and support our farmers. We are seeing some pretty difficult times in agriculture, and I know that Minister Spence, the Minister for Agriculture, has spent a lot of time in the south-west talking to farmers about their challenges, and I was really delighted to see the drought funding package. The lead speaker seemed to think it was not enough, but I think what we have really got to do is focus on the future and how we work with these climatic conditions into the future. That funding was really about trying to look at ways to futureproof farms.

Let us get back to this bill, because that is why we are here. I am very pleased to stand to speak on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. It is an important bill in that it creates some regulatory consistency across the different sectors.

I find it extraordinary that the member for Lowan is on such a warpath about the seafood industry and the changes the amendment will make when in fact what it is doing is creating consistency. In fact the fit and proper person requirement already exists in the meat industry and really what we are trying to

do is bring consistency. So instead of the hysteria from the other side about what will happen to people's private data and why this is being inflicted on the seafood industry, it is in fact just bringing it into line with the meat industry. To suggest that we have in some way got it in for the seafood industry is pretty ludicrous. But I suppose that for the people on the other side, who like to so often share lobsters with mobsters, I can understand that they perhaps are a little bit dubious about this legislation. But let us make it very clear for the member for Lowan that in fact this is not seeking to in any way penalise the seafood industry, it is just about bringing it into alignment with the Meat Industry Act 1993, which is so important.

There are a couple of different aspects to this bill. Of course there is the public health and safety element, and it is incredibly important that we continue to strive to guarantee that our product is safe and healthy and the best in the world. I am really, really proud to be the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture. I think that agriculture plays such an extraordinary role here in Victoria. It is a \$20 billion boost to our economy, and across production and food manufacturing there are over 150,000 jobs. It is incredibly important that we continually look to legislation to support and guarantee the extraordinary reputation that our food and fibre industry already has overseas. By ensuring the public health and safety through changes to the Dairy Act 2000, we are making sure that consumers can continue to have the confidence they have always had in our fantastic product. We only need to look back to 2014 and the terrible passing of a young person who had in fact drunk raw milk and that was believed to be the cause. It is so important that consumers maintain the confidence that they have always had.

In addition to the public health aspect, what is so important about this bill is really enhancing regulatory efficiency. This will mean that PrimeSafe can share more information within a regulatory environment. In agriculture things can move so quickly, and it is incredibly important that we understand the different industries and the different supply chains out there. You only need to look at the very sad outbreak in my own electorate of avian flu last year and how incredibly important it was that Agriculture Victoria could stand up and act incredibly quickly because that information was shared. When we are looking at any sort of biosecurity, access to hands-on, fast information is incredibly important. That will be the same within the Meat Industry Act now that we bring PrimeSafe along.

It is also really about supporting industry sustainability. It is, as I say, an absolute cornerstone of our economy – agriculture – and it is really important that we continue to grow sustainably. In some ways what this bill will do is reduce some of the regulatory burden on local councils and bring requirements into alignment.

I have been absolutely delighted to travel around a lot of this beautiful state representing the Minister for Agriculture and have seen so many wonderful farm producers on all sorts of different levels. I was really delighted to visit a pig farm recently who have just got their licence for a mobile abattoir and to watch the care and concern with which they run their farm. But of course they talked about having to do PrimeSafe inspections on a fairly regular basis and that they welcome some of this fine-tuning to the act.

Agriculture really is an absolute powerhouse; it is vital to our economy. Victoria alone contributes two-thirds of Australia's dairy industry and almost half of our sheepmeat and is a leading producer of grains and horticulture. Given that we export about \$20 billion in terms of dairy, meat and horticulture, it is really vital that we continue to address legislation and make sure that we have the strongest legislation around these regulatory bodies. We need consumer and international confidence in our dairy regulators, in PrimeSafe and of course in our seafood regulators as well. This bill, whilst it might seem to make some small regulatory amendments, actually certainly protects what is a fundamental industry for us here in Victoria.

I would like to take a moment to thank the extraordinary folk at Agriculture Victoria. I see daily the extraordinary work and commitment that they put into the agriculture industry in Victoria. It has been

a delight to work alongside them and to visit many farms that are going through so much at the moment. I am delighted that our minister has put forward a very important drought support package, and I know that between the minister and AgVic we will continue to support the agriculture industry in Victoria.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (15:57): I am pleased to rise to speak on the bill before us, the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Like others, I will certainly note the importance that agriculture plays in Victoria and the contribution it makes to our economy. Having grown up living on a working farm, I am pretty hands-on and know exactly about that sort of contribution, particularly in relation to the beef industry – and probably more so with the red cattle rather than the black.

I will note that Victorian agriculture is the second largest contributor to Australia's agricultural economy, second to New South Wales. It is worth, in Victoria, about \$20.2 billion, which is not too bad a figure and is something that we need to make sure that we continue to support. Whilst this bill is not going to set the world on fire, it will just tinker around the edges a little bit.

I do feel for the staff at Agriculture Victoria. The previous member did give them a lot of praise – and I do equally, because they are very helpful – but I am feeling for them as their numbers are slashed through the government's mismanagement and mishandling of the budget.

In relation to the beef industry, I will note that in 2021–22 – I had hoped we would have some more recent figures, but we do not – the beef industry was worth \$2.9 billion and the dairy industry was worth around \$3 billion. With exports – these are 2022–23 figures; even within the agriculture sector the years, the information and the data provided are not consistent. In 2021–22, \$3 billion was the value of milk produced in Victoria, but the dairy exports in 2022–23 were worth \$2.5 billion. In 2021–22 there were just under 3000 dairy farms in Victoria, and I note how difficult it has been for a number of people working in that sector and the pressure that the dairy industry finds itself under.

This bill also refers to the seafood industry, and I note that some more than 18,000 tonnes of seafood, anything from abalone to snapper, are harvested each year. To get your head around how much a tonne is: I always like to think of a good-sized bull as being equal to a tonne, so when you have got 18,000 of those lined up you get an idea about the quantities that we are talking about.

Whilst this is about agriculture, and this side of the house particularly are supportive of that industry, I support the reasoned amendment that has been put forward by the member for Lowan, the Shadow Minister for Agriculture:

That ... 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government conducts stakeholder consultation on a definition of 'good repute' and a right of appeal for seafood licensees prior to the suspension of their seafood licence.'

I will come to that a little bit later.

As I mentioned earlier, this bill tinkers around the edges. It is there to address regulatory risks, to streamline functions of the regulators, to try and improve the consistency between acts and to provide increased clarity to Victorian primary production businesses. The acts that it amends are the Dairy Act 2000, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Seafood Safety Act 2003.

I am going to touch briefly on the dairy and the raw milk component of that. I note that changes were made to the sale of raw milk in December 2014 under Minister Garrett at the time. It is some almost 10 years on, and we are now making some legislative changes, when it seemed to be working, as far as I was aware, quite well. I know that at the time raw milk was being banned there was a lot of outcry in my electorate, actually, because we had a provider of raw milk in the Upper Yarra. So many people, nearly 400 families, relied on that raw milk, having grown up on raw milk, and those living on dairy farms will produce it and use it on a daily basis.



So currently the sale of raw milk for human consumption is not permitted. Dairy Food Safety Victoria currently use licence conditions to ban the sale of unpasteurised milk for human consumption. This is what happened in 2014. At the time there was raw milk being marketed as bath milk. It is not allowed to be sold at all without the addition of things like bittering agents so that it cannot be taken or swallowed. But apparently there is a loophole where businesses who do not hold a licence are not effectively mandated to meet these licence conditions, and so the bill will incorporate licence conditions into the legislation to close this loophole.

I want to now touch on the changes to the seafood industry, and I will note that we have some key seafood areas in the state. We have got San Remo – and I noticed the member for Bass was in the chamber before, but now she is not. Down in the Bellarine – the member for Bellarine is in the chamber. We have Lakes Entrance and Apollo Bay – different, key areas for seafood harvesting. I cannot imagine, certainly, what those members, the member for Bellarine and the member for Bass in particular, are being told by the seafood sector in their electorates, because what this bill does is it introduces or expands the fit and proper person test for seafood licensees. Absolutely you can read it here, how far it goes, and it goes very far.

It expands the definition of a ‘fit and proper person’, and it includes something that really surprises me:

... whether the applicant or licensee is ... of good repute, having regard to character, honesty and integrity ...

But further, it goes on to include that an associate, business associates, business associates of associates or a person who holds a relevant position in the seafood business must also be of good repute, having respect to character, honesty and integrity.

So this is what I love: there are 42 acts in the Victorian legislation which have clauses regarding a ‘fit and proper person’. Only three of these contain a similar reference to being of good repute. First of all I ask: who is going to make that decision around somebody being of good repute – or a business associate of their associates? This is becoming really quite far-reaching. So those in the seafood industry, their families, their friends and their associates are held to a much higher bar than most others, and in particular to a much higher bar than the government, who are introducing this, hold themselves to.

There have been umpteen reports through IBAC and the Ombudsman which relate directly to the Labor Party and to the government. I want to read a quote from Operation Watts, which was a joint investigation from the Ombudsman and IBAC into the allegations of serious corrupt conduct involving Victorian public officers, including members of Parliament. It says –

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is on relevance. We are talking about an important agricultural bill, and all we are getting from the other side is some sort of political game. Can we talk about the bill, please? Can we talk about agriculture?

**Cindy McLEISH:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, if the member familiarises herself with the legislation and perhaps turns to page 17 and works through each of these, she will know exactly what –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage):** Thank you, member for Eildon.

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage):** The mood until now had been not soporific, it had been interesting and engaging. I ask members to recommit themselves to discussing the bill.

**Cindy McLEISH:** I am talking about part 5, new section 14(3), which outlines the proper person test, honesty and integrity, and I am making that comparison and I will continue to make that comparison about the bar that is being set for the seafood industry and that of the government. We have quotes here from Operation Watts:

... I always knew I was on the taxpayer dollar. I know that it wasn't right ...

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, why are we talking about anything other than the agriculture bill? I know that the member would like to try and prosecute this argument, but let us stick to agriculture instead of political game playing. Perhaps they would have more regional members if they did.

**Roma Britnell:** On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this is absolutely within the bill and the scope of the bill. How can this possibly not be relevant to this bill? It is about a fit and proper person test within the seafood industry licensing act.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (16:07): I rise also to make a contribution to the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and I am very pleased to do so, because the Allan Labor government is all about ensuring that we have the right legislation and the important legislation to make sure that we are protecting Victorians and consumers. This bill of course is all about that as well as making some amendments to just increase efficiencies based on feedback and experiences that there have been with the various pieces of legislation. The Agricultural and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 is going to improve – and we have heard previous speakers talk about these things – the operational functions of the Victorian food safety regulators, and it aims to provide more effective and efficient delivery of safety regulations in Victoria. There will be amendments to the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the Dairy Act 2000. The purpose is, as was mentioned a little bit earlier, to amend some deficiencies in some aspects of legislation, because of course this is what legislation is all about – it is a living thing. It is in response to and covers things that are happening in the real world, and of course because of changes maybe some people have found a loophole or a way around something or information that has been received shows that something is not working in the way that it was intended. We then talk about coming here and making amendments to improve that legislation, which again is to improve the way things work for Victorians.

I am just going to go through each aspect of each act and do a bit of a brief outline of the changes that are going to be made to each of those pieces of legislation. I should also add that some of these changes have been based on recommendations from the Auditor-General's office and also based on consultation with stakeholders, including the peak bodies of all of the industries that are affected by these legislative improvements that we are looking to make.

I have to say before I go into that it is good to be up here, because I have had a great interest in food labelling and food safety for many, many years since my time with, originally, the food preservers union as an official and then later on as the secretary of the food and confectionery division of the AMWU. I know the union along with consumer groups, the farmers federation and a number of other employee groups did a lot of advocacy around improving food labelling laws in particular but also using those labels to ensure better protection for food safety. This now does happen, although there probably could be a bit of a bigger font – things that talk about how much of a particular manufactured food item in the grocery store or the supermarket actually has local content. There was often really shonky labelling that implied, for example, that it was made in Australia or made from products of Australia, but then when looking further it might have only been 1 per cent of the total product or just the packaging rather than the actual food that was in that packaging. So this sort of legislation is important, and my union background in the food industry has of course given me a great interest in it.

The Food Act 1984 – this is around trying to support and assist local councils, who have carriage of a lot of food safety legislation, to ensure that they can better and more efficiently go about their inspections. Small things, for example, also make things a bit easier – requirements to display registration and things like that – and make compliance and checking a little bit easier for authorities. There are also changes to the Meat Industry Act, and those are around allowing PrimeSafe, Victoria's regulator, to share information with other agencies in specific circumstances. What this is all about is that PrimeSafe may go into a place and it may well be that in terms of PrimeSafe or the meat industry

legislation that that operator is complying, but it may be in breach of other legislation that is covered by other agencies or regulators, and this is about clarifying that, for example, a representative of PrimeSafe could pass on breaches of other regulations or other areas, such as animal welfare, to the relevant authorities for that to further be investigated, so it is just clearing up something like that.

Agriculture is and continues to be one of the cornerstones of the Victorian economy, and the Allan Labor government fully supports and recognises the enormous contribution that the industry makes to Victoria. When looking at the agriculture industry there is also the food manufacturing industry, and I would like to give a bit of a shout-out to all those food manufacturers that operate in the north. There are many food manufacturing businesses that operate in Thomastown, and of course we also have the Melbourne markets, which bring produce down from all over the state to sell to wholesale. This sort of legislation then also does have quite a bit of an effect on the food manufacturing sector as well as the agriculture sector.

There was discussion just before about the changes to the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the strengthening of the fit and proper person criteria for assessing food licence applications. Well, I would not have thought there is anything wrong with ensuring that licence holders in the seafood and fish industry are tested in terms of fit and proper person criteria to ensure that the industry is operating to a particular standard that we expect and also to ensure that we are protecting consumers.

It seems fairly hypocritical, because I think there is certain –

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY:** Well, I think the opposition seem to have a bit of a hypocritical view in terms of these things where they are asking for people that represent workers to strengthen fit and proper person tests and things like that, and yet they do not want that in other places when it comes to unions and supporting workers rights.

The bill introduces into the Dairy Act new offences looking at some changes to the sale or the provision of raw milk, and as has been said, a former minister and former member of Parliament sadly passed away as a result of some terrible things that were going on way back when this legislation was introduced when raw milk was becoming a danger in Victoria. Legislation was passed there, but of course as I was saying earlier, going back to the introduction of my contribution to this bill, things happen, experiences are observed or technology changes – whatever that change may be – and legislation has to change to adapt to ensure that whatever those new circumstances or things that have arisen that were unintended or were not expected, then the legislation is amended to ensure that those protections continue. That is what is happening here where we are reducing some of the loopholes in raw milk sale, ensuring that there are penalties and consequences and regulation whether you hold a licence or not, so pretty obvious things.

Just before closing I would like to give a quick shout-out to a number of food manufacturers both in dairy and meat. We have got That's Amore Cheese in Thomastown and Florida, also in Thomastown. We have got Bertocchi and La Ionica and so many other important and great businesses that are providing employment as well as great food for all of us to eat.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (16:17): I rise to speak on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and I do so coming from an electorate that relies heavily on the agricultural industry and is a very proud producer of food that is exported all over the world. Whether it is food or fibre, the electorate of South-West Coast is a massive contributor and one of the largest contributors from the agricultural sector in our state.

Agriculture is clearly important, and we want to see improvements. This is a bill that comes before the Parliament when we have got a state Labor government who have clearly dropped the ball in Victoria. We have got a massive debt pending of \$200 billion, and we have got some major problems: a crisis in health care, a crisis in education, a crisis in housing – we cannot get enough roofs over people's

heads, you cannot get a rental property. We have got child protection issues, and as the Shadow Minister for Child Protection I cannot believe we have got a system where we are seeing record numbers of children dying in care and reports of abuse of children in record numbers. So we have got a state in crisis, and here we are with an agricultural bill which does some pretty minor things, and one of those minor things is the changes to the raw milk part of the act. I have been very involved in dairy for decades, and I understand the importance of not selling raw milk and the importance of how we have to pasteurise milk to keep the reputation of our markets safe, so I do not disagree with this at all. However, in 2022 the amendments were made because there was a loophole where raw milk could end up causing grief, and here we are again, because the government forgot in 2022 to include businesses that do not hold a licence to come under the area where you can effectively prosecute someone for selling raw milk, so a very minor change.

Another minor change is where the meat and livestock industry will have an information-sharing aspect, and all we can really understand from this bill is that it will make it easier for the department, not for farmers. So we are not even really sure what this all means.

And then there are changes to the Seafood Safety Act 2003. I know Labor are getting really upset by us talking over here on the other side about the government putting this fit and proper person assessment in for the seafood industry. There are some acts of Parliament that do have that, but why are you picking on the seafood industry? Why are you picking on commercial fishermen? Why would you pick on commercial fishermen? What was the rationale for that? No-one has asked for it, no-one has called for it, but here we have a government who are just tinkering around the edges while the state is in crisis, trying to find a piece of legislation to introduce into the Parliament to look like they are actually doing something, instead of actually addressing all these critical issues like the housing crisis, the health crisis, the education crisis, the energy crisis or the child protection crisis. I cannot even begin to fathom why we are picking on the commercial seafood industry and are checking out whether their family members, their staff members, their cousins and their brothers are of good repute and then actually putting in the legislation that they have no right of appeal if their licence is removed. Can you imagine your assets like a boat sitting idle, your staff sitting idle, your assets not working while somebody at their leisure within the government department decides whether or not you are a fit and proper person or you are associating with people of ill repute? It just makes no sense. This government is out of control and has completely lost the plot.

I certainly recognise the importance of agriculture. Agriculture is a very challenging industry to work within, because you cannot control the elements; you absolutely cannot. That is why farmers deserve our respect. It is the same with the commercial fishing industry – they deserve our respect. They work in all sorts of conditions to produce amazing-quality seafood so we can have seafood that comes from Victoria. Just like the farmers – we can have the products of beef and dairy and lamb that come from Victoria. In my part of the world we have got an incredibly important dairy industry, and I will just share some of the figures. We have 858 farmers who go out morning and night, and in all conditions, milking cows, caring for the young calves, looking after the environment. They have to understand the agronomy of the soil. They need to know what fertiliser regimes to put on to keep the equilibrium within the soil profile. They understand animal health and wellbeing issues. They are nutritionists, they are agronomists, they are vet nurses and vets – they have to have the skills of an all-rounder individual. Obviously we are calling on experts as well, like qualified agronomists and qualified vets, but the depth of knowledge and understanding of a farmer is extraordinary.

The farmgate value of dairy products produced out of the south-west alone is \$1.3 billion of revenue that is generated from the dairy farmers who do that hard work. That is 109 billion litres of milk per year. That is an enormous amount of product that we should value. That includes one freight train every single night going out of the region filled with meat and milk from our region. My region alone produces 36 per cent of Victorian milk. The people employed equate to 2600 employees, and that is just on farm. It is important that we recognise the value of agriculture and do not just get up here in the Parliament and have the Allan Labor government constantly saying, ‘We really care about

agriculture.’ It is time to put your money where your mouth is. We have seen farmers go through some really challenging times around the south-west, particularly in the north or down in the Heytesbury area, where they do not have water underground and the area relies on run-off. As my colleague the Shadow Minister for Agriculture Emma Kealy, the member for Lowan, outlined earlier, these farmers are having to bring semi-loads of water in to make sure the animals can have enough water to drink. Also in times like this you are seeing truckload after truckload of hay. These are tens of thousands of dollars per truckload, and a truckload twice a week is absolutely not unheard of. We need to recognise that if we want to have clean, green food produced in our state, we do need the Allan Labor government recognising the importance of farmers, not picking on people like the commercial fishermen or making things easier for the government rather than the meat and livestock industry. Actually talk with the farmers and say, ‘How can we really embrace what you do to ensure a sustainable future?’, because that is what the farmers want.

That is what they have practised for absolutely generations. Generation after generation, they have been thinking of the future, understanding the past and the impact they make on the soils, on the environment, on the animals, to make sure it is as sustainable as it possibly can be. You know, we have only got 7 per cent of the earth’s crust that we can actually harvest. Anyone who thinks that we can just all become vegans – each to their own. But the actual earth’s crust, you cannot harvest from cropping all over it. Go to Scotland. Have a look at the moors. Tell me how you could run a tractor up some of those hills and put a plough in. Have a look at many of the areas around my volcanic country. I farmed on a volcanic farm that you could not possibly run a plough through. You have to be able to farm to the conditions. If you take all the animals off, you may end up with more blackberries, more ragwort and more gorse than you could ever imagine or contend with.

Trust the farmers who have been working the land, and work with the farmers. They do get the balance right. They do understand where to harvest crops, where to plant and where animals are best utilised, whatever animal that may be. Sometimes, in some parts of the world, that is goats, and in some parts of the world it is crops where we can see it is better for the environment than leaving it go to waste. That is what we would see if we put forward this idealistic overlay of thinking from people who do not know how to farm, who have never worked with animals and never worked with the environment and never worked in the weather day after day, who think they are experts on how to farm and how to get the balance right between the environment and food production. But farmers do know, from generation after generation of experience. And together with science, together with the community, let us work towards a future that is sustainable and embrace our farmers.

As a government, that is what we always think is the best way forward as Liberals. What I see across the aisle is a very idealistic Labor Party who pretend they care, when really they have not got an absolute clue. We cannot see the benefit of the \$5000 benefit per farm that we are seeing at the moment. I mean, one truck of hay on my farm was at least a \$20,000 investment, which probably lasted half a day. But anyway – *(Time expired)*

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (16:27): I am very happy that it is my time to make my contribution to the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Just to touch on what this bill seeks to amend, it will make small changes to the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the Dairy Act 2000 aiming to improve the operational functions of Victorian food safety regulators and deliver more effective food safety regulation. Basically what that means is this bill is there making small changes to support our farmers, not to regulate them or push them into a little box, but just to help them to do, and continue to do, what they do so well.

Food – we all need it. We all have our favourite dishes, places to eat and places to buy from, and we all want to make sure we know what we are getting and that it is not going to make us sick as well. I have got a story for you. As consumers we can do our part to make sure that the food we prepare is safe. We wash our hands before touching anything, clean vegetables and make sure things are cooked through, even if it means sacrificing a few pieces of chicken to see if it is no longer pink in the middle. Please actually do not do that. Please get a food-safe fast-read food thermometer – much better for

you. But we also want to be sure that where we buy our food from is safe, and our producers across Victoria certainly want this as well, which is why food safety is so incredibly important. This bill will make sure that our food safety regulations are effective, transparent and doing their job to protect consumers and producers as well. This bill will also better protect the restaurant trade, as restaurateurs can be safe in the knowledge that the produce they buy and prepare comes from a place where it has been treated appropriately.

It reminds me of a story from way back in 1986 –

**A member:** You weren't born in 1986.

**Paul MERCURIO:** I was. My then girlfriend and I were travelling around Florence – I married her the year after; I am still married to her, which is great – and we went to a little trattoria in the back streets of Florence. We had a lovely meal. I cannot quite remember what my girlfriend had, but being an adventurous eater I had the rabbit. At the end of the meal the waiter came up and took my girlfriend's plate and said, 'How was that?' My girlfriend said, 'Delicious.' Then the waiter took my plate and said, 'How was that?' I said, 'It was delicious.' As he walked off, he looked me in the eyes and went 'Meow'. Now, I am pretty sure it was rabbit, but there are a lot of stray cats in the streets of Florence.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul MERCURIO:** I am not going there. But my point is: if they had this kind of bill back then in Florence, that would not have been at all a possibility. Anyway, moving right along, when it comes to food, a safety concern has to be tackled quickly and effectively – especially if you do not think you are eating what you are. Any time wasted can lead to an outbreak of illness or, in worst-case scenarios, death.

**A member** interjected.

**Paul MERCURIO:** Indeed. This bill will make changes to the Meat Industry Act 1993 that will allow the regulator, PrimeSafe, to share information on specified circumstances directly with the Minister for Agriculture and Agriculture Victoria. Currently PrimeSafe inspectors cannot share information that they have legally gathered as part of their duties with other regulators, government agencies or law enforcement unless the minister intervenes. These changes will allow those inspectors to report directly to the minister or Agriculture Victoria, ensuring that animal welfare is taken seriously and those who are doing the wrong thing are identified and steps are taken to rectify the situation. Further, with these changes PrimeSafe will not be able to provide information to the media, creating online naming and shaming, or share information about the compliance history of a business. It is simply to allow them to pass on information to the appropriate body or regulator, ensuring a more transparent food safety process and reducing the risk of poor business practices.

The bill will enhance and clarify regulations surrounding raw milk, which is prohibited for consumption in Australia due to serious food safety risks. I did hear a member previously in the debate say that we got it wrong because we did not include this in the act when it was looked at in 2022. The fact is, our job is to find things we may have missed and clarify them, and that is what this bill is doing. We are looking after our community. Raw milk can contain harmful bacteria, such as salmonella, E. coli and listeria, which can cause severe illness or even death, particularly in vulnerable groups, such as young children, pregnant women, the elderly and those with weakened immune systems. To mitigate these dangers, requirements to pasteurise milk in line with the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code and to treat raw milk products such as bath milk in ways that deter human consumption by putting bittering agents in them will be incorporated directly into the Dairy Act 2000, currently administered by Dairy Food Safety Victoria. Moving these requirements from existing dairy licensing conditions into the Dairy Act will make it simpler for those in the dairy industry and sellers of raw milk products to understand their food safety obligations regarding raw milk. These changes

will also ensure that penalties for non-compliance reflect the significant risk that raw milk presents to public health.

I am aware that in the market in Victoria you can buy something called cold-pressed raw milk. What happens is once this milk is bottled and sealed it is then placed into special machinery and it goes through a process of cold-water high-pressure processing to destroy harmful microorganisms. Interestingly, there are other food substances, like juices, dips, meat products, seafood and some beers, which are also pasteurised with high-pressure processing. The Food Standards Code requires milk to be pasteurised either by heat or by other methods that achieve an equivalent food safety outcome. The high-pressure processing pasteurises the milk without heat, but the cold-pressed raw milk is by no means raw milk. I thought I would just let people understand that if they are listening at home or even in the chamber.

An additional change this bill will make is to the Seafood Safety Act 2003, and a lot of that has been talked about already. This change is essentially bringing the seafood industry in line with the meat industry, as it is allowing for PrimeSafe to ensure that seafood safety licensees are fit and proper persons, and not allowing businesses to use the illegal activity of phoenixing, which is where someone closes a business and transfers it to a new business yet everything is still controlled by the same people.

Putting in place a fit and proper person provision just makes sure that seafood licences are being issued to those that are doing the right thing, which is producing high-quality seafood for Victorians. We have all gone to fish shops and we are not sure whether we are buying tiger prawns that have been farmed up in Queensland or out in the Indian Ocean or in Vietnam, so there is to some extent unfortunately people that will always flout the law.

Not only will this bill make food safety regulation more transparent, safe and effective, but it will also address key recommendations made by VAGO, which is the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, in their June 2023 report *Regulating Food Safety*. VAGO audited five of Victoria's 79 local councils to examine whether councils were complying with their legislative responsibilities for food safety to protect the public. VAGO found that not all audited councils were complying with the requirements to assess or inspect all premises, and they made a number of recommendations to the Department of Health. The amendments to the Food Act included in this bill address one of those recommendations, and work relevant to the other recommendation is being processed and progressed by the department.

Just talking about not just farmers but food producers and manufacturers, I used to do a food show, and I travelled around Australia and New Zealand and I also went to Kenya meeting farmers, going to farms, going to producers, talking to the people that really cared about their animals, really cared about their crops, really cared about the land. I always felt that it was the farmers that really understood what was going on with climate change – the farmers that have their feet in the dirt every day and are looking after the future of the land for our families. This bill is not about farmers or producers doing the wrong thing. They care deeply about their produce, they care deeply about giving us the best possible food and produce that they can. The changes are small changes to the Food Act, they are needed and I think they should always be taken seriously. In closing, I would like to say I am pretty sure it was rabbit. I commend this bill to the house.

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (16:37): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the agriculture and food safety legislation. The irony of speaking on this bill today protecting and supporting agriculture is that many in this place have heard me talk about Meadow Creek. It is a little village, a little farming area, just 24 k's south-east of Wangaratta. There is an application process for a solar farm or a solar factory that is going in there, and that closes today, and everybody in our region has been trying to feverishly put in objections to this solar farm – or this solar factory, as we call it up there – because it really will be a scar on the landscape like the one at Glenrowan.

In this bill we are talking about protecting agriculture and food safety in legislation. It is really important that we do not just look at what is here in front of us in terms of this legislation. If we are

serious about protecting agriculture and food safety, we need to be more broad about all this because, as I say, communities like Meadow Creek deserve to be heard and they deserve to be able to go on and produce food for the world. If we want to get concerned about food safety and agriculture, we have got to start there. By doing that we could send some ministers up our way to have a talk to the locals and understand exactly what they believe is going on here, and we could make sure they do it during the day, because they would drive past the Glenrowan solar factory that is currently there and they would see what the landscape will look like going into the future.

However, I will talk about the bill for a moment. It talks about the new offences in the Dairy Act 2000 relating to raw milk, and as an ex-dairy farmer myself for 20-something-odd years, I certainly understand the dairy industry well. It is an area that we do need to protect, this food safety. I know the raw milk was done in about 2020, I think – maybe three or four years ago – so I do not know whether it is a fix-up of a botched mistake or whether there is a value-add to what we did back then.

Certainly we will not have to worry about raw milk if we keep putting solar farms on all our beautiful dairy land, and we will have farmers like the Hourigans in Milawa that will not exist anymore if we continue down this this pathway.

I do have concerns about the amending of the Seafood Safety Act 2003, and I know the member for Eureka got a little bit hot under the collar when the member for Lowan started talking about the fit and proper person test. There are genuine concerns about that fit and proper person test. New section 14, which is inserted by clause 30 of the bill, seeks to expand consideration of a fit and proper person to include whether the applicant or licensee is of good repute, having respect to character, honesty and integrity. This is further extended to include an associate, business associations and business associations of associates. A person who holds a relevant position in the seafood business must also be of good repute, having respect to character, honesty and integrity. I think the member for Lowan was merely trying to sort of point out that if you are going to accept this in the seafood industry, make sure that we have this fit and proper person test across all industries. Do not just make it for the seafood industry. Let us go for the building industry, the CFMEU, trade unions, as she mentioned. We need to do this across all sectors to make sure –

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim McCURDY:** In fact we should also make sure that members in this place pass the fit and proper test. The member for Frankston is asleep, I think.

**Paul Edbrooke:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, could you please bring the member back to the bill? It has been a wide-ranging debate, but he is now waffling on into an area that no-one knows what he is talking about.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage):** I uphold the member for Frankston's point of order, and I ask the member to refer to the bill when he is discussing the fit and proper person test in relation to the bill, please.

**Tim McCURDY:** I do point out that this is in the bill. New section 14 is in the bill, and I had read that out.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Lauren Kathage):** Yes. Discussion in relation to the bill, please.

**Tim McCURDY:** It is in relation to the bill, and it is in relation to agriculture. As I say, the member for Lowan said we need to apply this across all industries, not just hand-pick the industries that suit you to do it that way. It is important that we look at it across all industries.

As I say, this fit and proper person test for the seafood industry, which is in the bill – let us clarify that it is in the bill. Good luck to the member for Bass when she sits down to talk to fishermen at San Remo. I grew up down in that region, so I do know a lot of the fishermen. I am more than happy to take her to meet and sit down and discuss with the fishermen how this is going to affect their industry,



whether or not it is going to affect their industry, and explain to them how this fit and proper test applies and how it may or may not affect those people and what the words ‘good repute’ actually mean. I think, as I say, we should all need to pass that test. I also note the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee has written to the minister about new section 14, expressing that this section trespasses unduly upon rights and freedoms. It is not just us who have got concerns about that new section 14. As I say, introduce it for one, introduce it for all, because I think the member for Lowan said it is not even in the Firearms Act 1996, and I would have thought it would need to be in there.

We are talking about agriculture and food safety legislation. In this place last sitting week I spoke about the Queensland fruit fly and the funding that was ripped out by this government – \$14 million. Fruit fly prevention funding is not about supporting farmers on their farms, because they combat fruit fly on their own farms. They do an excellent job of making sure that fruit flies are kept to a minimum or eradicated on their farms, but you cannot stop fruit flies in a backyard of a veggie patch in Cobram or Mooroopna or Invergordon or Shepparton, somewhere like that. That is where this program was very good at educating and assisting people in towns to make sure fruit fly did not explode and end up on our farming communities, and now the money has been taken out of that. Again, on one hand we talk about looking after and protecting agriculture and food safety, and on the other hand, we are ripping money out of fruit fly prevention. Again I say to the Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture if you want to come to Cobram, I will sit down with the fruit growers association, and we can talk about the funding of protection against the Queensland fruit fly, because that money is going to make it very difficult for their industry. Not through anything that they do, it is what others do that is going to affect them. As I say, Labor come here and talk about protecting farmers, and there are two examples: Meadow Creek and certainly in the solar factories and fruit fly as well.

So if the government wants to truly support agriculture, let us talk about the pork industry, the poultry industry, the meat industry and the dairy industry. Mother Nature can be very difficult, and between international prices, exchange rates and dumping of products, it does make life difficult and a very difficult landscape for farmers. That is why they do need the support, because every year is different. We are seeing a green drought down in the south-west at the moment down near Warrnambool. We have got a fairly good season up north and it is not bad in Gippsland. But Mother Nature can deal a pretty average hand sometimes, so it is all about supporting the farming community when they need it.

I do want to support the reasoned amendment from the member for Lowan:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government conducts stakeholder consultation on a definition of ‘good repute’ and a right of appeal for seafood licensees prior to the suspension of their seafood licence.’

I think it is important that we do that, and I do hope the government sees fit to support that reasoned amendment because it would be a sensible and a fair result to do that and make sure that everybody gets a fair hearing.

Again, there are other industries and other areas, not just in my patch. The member for Euroa would agree with me that over in Colbinabbin there are other solar renewable projects that are affecting agriculture again. So we cannot stand in this place and just say we want to protect agriculture and say we want to protect this part of agriculture but not that part of agriculture. I think it is important that the Minister for Agriculture and the parliamentary secretary come and understand some of the smaller issues that are going on in our smaller communities, because they are not small issues. They are big issues for them in smaller communities, and I think it is really important that they understand all that, rather than just cherrypicking what they want to talk about in protecting farmers.

I note the member for Thomastown said there is not anything wrong with strengthening a fit and proper test, and we are saying, as we have said all along, if it is good for one, it is good for all.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (16:47): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to debate on what is yet another important piece of legislation that is before the house this evening. It is always dangerous, I find, to follow someone like the member for Hastings on a bill that relates to food, because the member for Hastings is very much known for his ability in the kitchen.

**Paul Edbrooke** interjected.

**Josh BULL**: He is, member for Frankston; he is very passionate, and certainly in conversations that I have had with him I think he puts most of us to shame in terms of his cooking ability.

I do want to say, though, that this is another important piece of legislation, as I mentioned earlier, that is before the house and goes to strengthening food security and food safety practices and is an important step in strengthening Victoria's food safety regulatory framework and supporting that ongoing safety and quality of agricultural products, as other members have mentioned this afternoon.

The bill comes before the house after what has been extensive consultation with Dairy Farmers Victoria, the Australian Dairy Products Federation, Dairy Australia, Victorian chicken meat council, Australian Pork Limited, Australian Meat Industry Council, Seafood Industry Victoria, Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance, Victorian Farmers Federation and many, many others. What is important when it comes to this bill and other bills that are before the house is to ensure that the work on the ground, the work that is done by a whole range of industry and agricultural bodies and of those that work within industry each and every day, and those conversations with government, those messages, are heard. We know and understand, and it should be a shared view across both sides of the chamber, that working with key partners and listening to the work that is done with the spirit or the intention of making sure that we can get the very best possible framework in place is something that is very important, and that relates to not just this bill but other legislation that comes before the house.

As other members have mentioned, the legislation addresses the complexities of the agricultural sector by amending several key acts, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the Dairy Act 2000, aiming to ensure the effective operation of our food safety regulators and aligning with the government's commitment to safeguarding consumer health and the integrity of agricultural industries.

We know that the bill aims to streamline food safety regulation in our state, not just improving the operational efficiency of regulatory bodies such as PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria but also introducing new provisions to strengthen the oversight of high-risk products like raw milk, enabling more effective information sharing amongst regulators and reducing the administrative burden on local councils and businesses, leading to what should be a more transparent, consistent and effective food safety system, providing benefits to consumers and producers alike.

As we know and as I have heard a number of members touch on, this is a very important industry to the Victorian community. It is very important in terms of jobs and economic benefit to our state and an important part of our social fabric in many ways. What we need to do as legislators is to make sure, as I mentioned earlier, that we are working with those peak bodies and that we are understanding some of the challenges and the nuances that come through the day-to-day operations of these entities but also ensuring that we are providing a range of changes that are contained in this bill, which as I mentioned earlier, go to efficiency and improving safety and standards. Reducing administrative burden is something that we very strongly support.

I will go to the amendments to each act – to the back end of the speech, if we can call that. The amendments to the Meat Industry Act look toward changes to enable PrimeSafe, Victoria's regulator for meat and seafood, to share information in specific circumstances. This allows PrimeSafe to collaborate more effectively with other agencies like Agriculture Victoria, which is vital for maintaining confidence in the meat industry. That goes to the point before, that having the opportunity to collaborate and share across different agencies is something that is important and goes to a more streamlined and efficient approach.

If we look at the Seafood Safety Act, the key change is the introduction of the fit and proper person criteria for assessing seafood licence applications with the aim of ensuring that licence-holders meet appropriate standards, safeguarding the reputation and quality of our seafood sector, and by setting higher standards to ensure that those who meet strict criteria can participate in the industry and going to improving consumer trust.

The updates to the Dairy Act go to the regulation of raw milk, which I have heard other members speak about at length about, and the high-risk product by creating new offences for the sale, delivery or provision of raw milk. As is expected, this is critical for protecting public health and making sure that those risks that can arise in this space are minimised, and that is important when it comes to community safety.

The revisions to the Food Act go to reducing the administrative burden on local councils by amending inspection processes for registered food premises and allowing for a more efficient approach, empowering the Secretary of the Department of Health to declare requirements for food premises to display registration information, increasing transparency for consumers. These are important changes. Finally, there is the removal of the 90-day requirement for instituting proceedings based on food sample analysis, providing greater flexibility and enforcement actions.

What this all comes down to is making sure that public health and wellbeing are at the heart of changes within this bill, and ensuring, of course, that it enhances regulatory efficiency, making sure that processes and pathways are done in a sound and effective way – something that I am sure you support, member for Bentleigh – and that industry sustainability continues to move forward. Taking us back to where I was earlier, it ensures that two-way conversation in what is a very dynamic industry – an industry that, as I mentioned earlier, provides for significant employment and provides for what is in many ways a sensational product that goes from market to communities for a whole range of events in a whole range of places. It will make sure that we are working with industry to not just reduce burden but improve safety, which is something that this government will continue to deliver, and this is a key component of that.

If we take for just a moment some of the challenges that I know other members have spoken about before, our hope and our intention with this piece of legislation is that many of those challenges and the operations that are conducted within the industry are improved, not just from a regulatory sense but by making sure that we continue to grow and thrive and work with our partners right across government. That is something that I know we are bringing forward and we are making sure that those conversations continue to happen in what is yet again another piece of legislation that goes to making our state both stronger and fairer, and supporting industry but also providing for a safer product for so many people right across this state, which is something we support. For those reasons and many more I commend the bill to the house.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (16:57): I am very pleased to rise today to talk on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Where I live, I come from one of the highest dairy-producing areas in Australia. Any protection in the agricultural space I will always support, especially around dairy. In my area, the wider Gippsland area, we actually produce around 2 billion litres a year of milk down our way, which equates to about 23 per cent of Australia's supply, and they do that over 1100 farms. So anything that protects the dairy industry I will always talk passionately about, because if this industry fails in my region a lot of my communities will suffer in the long run. It is as simple as that. I have a lot of friends who are dairy farmers in my electorate, everywhere from Buln Buln to Willow Grove, out to Neerim South, out to Erica and around the whole region. The region is 4500 square kilometres; I am not going to name every one of them. But it is very important that we protect the dairy industry, and part of this bill does that.

I think the biggest problem we are having with this bill in the debate today is probably amending the Seafood Safety Act 2003 to introduce a fit and proper person criteria for assessing licence applications

under the act. I think that is the bone of contention here today. It is not that this side of the chamber disagrees with all of the bill; it is only some of the bill.

The member for Sunbury talked about spirit and intention, and that is all well and good, but I think the other thing we need to talk about is unintended consequences. It is one thing I am finding more and more often in this job when I see bills come through – although the bill may have good intent, it may be in the spirit of what was put forward, there is always an unintended consequence at the end of the day where the government has to really, really think about what they are doing.

In regard to the seafood safety section of the bill, the contentious issue here is:

whether an associate of the applicant or licensee is not of good repute, having regard to character, honesty and integrity –

It goes on to say:

whether the applicant or licensee ... any business association with any person who is not of good repute, having regard to character, honesty and integrity –

The problem we are having here is that section, because there is no definition of ‘good repute’ and that is the problem. I suppose if we look at it in a practical sense, if the owner of a fishing vessel employs someone who somebody else’s opinion deems not of good repute then their business suffers.

Look, I get along with the Minister for Agriculture pretty well. I actually think she does her best; I really do. But I think this section of the bill we have got to be very, very careful of, because I do not see too many ex-accountants on fishing vessels. Quite often they may pick up people that have had a chequered past, but they can be people that are trying to rebuild their lives too. People deserve a second chance. If it is the case that the person that owns the fishing vessel employs someone that has a previous conviction, does that mean their boat has to sit in the dock because that person might not be of good repute? This is the point. Who determines it and what it is? This goes to the reasoned amendment from the member for Lowan. The reasoned amendment reads, and it makes sense:

That ... ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government conducts stakeholder consultation on a definition of ‘good repute’ and a right of appeal for seafood licensees prior to the suspension of their seafood licence.’

It would be pretty upsetting for an owner of a seafood licence to get shut down because he may have unintentionally been with someone who is not of good repute. This is the problem right here.

I agree with, definitely, fixing up the Dairy Act 2000. Obviously prior to our time in this chamber – it sounds like from what I have heard today – a bill was brought forward, and this is fixing a loophole or something that was missed out in that bill. That is all well and good. As I said, I want to protect the dairy industry as much as I possibly can.

There has been a good argument today about one rule for one and not for the other. On this side of the chamber this year we tried to introduce a bill around the CFMEU. We were very specific in what we said about that, and that was that any person working on a government project needed to have a police check. We actually defined what the problem was: if you were linked to bikies or linked to organised crime, you could not work on a government project. That was very, very different to what this is. We had defined the problem, and that was the part we wanted to clean out of the construction industry. This part is too broad. It is way too broad. This is why the member for Lowan has put this reasoned amendment forward. It is a commonsense reasoned amendment.

I know the minister’s staff over there have probably done their best, but I really do think they need to go back and fix this part up, because it is just too broad. It comes back again to the unintended consequences of a bill and the ramifications of that bill. Who determines what behaviour is of good repute? For example, if I got a speeding fine, does that disqualify me? This is what we do not know, and I think it is a very fair question. Is a person who lost their licence for doing 130 k’s an hour down the road of good repute or not of good repute? Where is the threshold in this? It could be more defined,

like if you had committed murder. Let us talk about the fishing industry, for example. Maybe this is where they were trying to go, but they did not quite get there. If you had broken abalone laws, for example, if you exceeded your bag limit on abalone laws – fair enough, you are not a person of good repute, because that is reflective of that industry.

Or maybe you keep exceeding catch limits; maybe that person is not of good repute to hold a fishing licence. Those types of clear definitions make sense to me, and I think they would make sense to normal people. I think this is the problem. This is why we are having this debate today around this bill, because it is all around that seafood act and just the ambiguity of what it is – good repute – and how broad that term can be. If you stole a fishing vessel, then you are not a person of good repute. I mean, God forbid you might be trying to sell a cat and pass it off as a fish – that would not be too good either – or a rabbit. But that is the problem with the bill, and that is why we are here where we are today. We do not fully endorse this bill for good reason, mainly because of the seafood section of the bill and the broadness of what ‘good repute’ can mean.

I am concerned for – just around the corner from me down at Inverloch – the member for Bass’s area, and the member for Bellarine should be a little bit concerned too, because she has a lot of fishing vessels down there. The member for Bass has a lot of fishing vessels in her area, and it is not that far from your area either, Acting Speaker Mercurio, in the seat of Hastings. You would hate to get knocks on your doors from constituents, from fishermen, saying, ‘I’ve been shut down because I associated with someone who this authority has deemed of not good repute.’ This is the problem. This is where the government needs to fix it up. Spirit and intention are one thing – it is all great to have spirit and intention – but unintended consequence is the reality of the bill that is going to pass today. And the unintended consequence of this bill is people with fishing vessels, with fishing licences, could really be held at dock because of a good-repute clause.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (17:07): I am also rising to speak on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Listening to the debate that we have had so far in the house, it explores a calibration of safety and of risk and of efficiency in the context of effective regulation. I do want to respond to a couple of the things that the member for Narracan said in his contribution, recognising that he represents a lot of dairy farmers in that part of West Gippsland – and a beautiful part of the world it is too. The reason I think he is concerned on their behalf is that he recognises the consequences of what would happen if, for example, there was a bad actor in the supply chain and the evisceration of the value that has been accumulated over generations in the Victorian dairy industry because of the reputation we have, the very valid and well-earned and hard-worked-for reputation as being a clean and green producer and a market that can be trusted on the global market to be an exporter of reliable and, crucially, safe products.

But the member for Narracan and several of his other colleagues have talked about and have expressed concerns with the dimensions within this bill which would amend the Seafood Safety Act 2003 to harmonise its operation with the meat and livestock industry. I am not going to touch upon the remarks of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I do note that SARC, which does play an important role in the legislative process, has written to government and government is considering that letter and will provide a response in due course. But the purpose of that fit and proper person test and the amendments within the Seafood Safety Act are in a sense designed to prevent exactly the same kind of bad actor from destroying the accumulated value in the dairy industry and to make sure that there are those safeguards in the seafood industry.

I think the member for Bass and the member for Bellarine and others who represent coastal communities would get a lot of knocks on their door if government had not taken action to prevent bad-faith actors, those who engage in phoenixing, from undermining the reputation of the entire aquaculture and wild catch industry we have in Victoria, which has been growing significantly in recent years. I believe the value of aquaculture in Victoria is already over \$50 million. The wild catch take is a similar amount. The sector as a whole makes a \$300 million contribution to the Victorian

economy, and of course that is concentrated in regional areas, like those represented by the outstanding members for Bass and for Bellarine and for the other coastal regions.

The outstanding member for Bellarine has entered the chamber. Those fishermen down on the Bellarine that are represented by her I know would be concerned if there were not safeguards built in to our regulatory system, because if you take consumer confidence for granted, you can lose the value of that whole industry instantaneously. I point to a couple of examples I have had, I suppose, second-hand or indirect exposure to. The first: in the UK in the 1980s when bovine spongiform encephalopathy, a condition that affects animals and causes incredibly significant brain damage, in effect, entered into humans via variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. It came about because farmers were feeding beef cattle in effect the ground-up bones of other livestock. The reason it affected me is because until this year I was not able to give blood in Victoria because there was, as with anybody who lived in the UK for longer than six months for a certain period of time, a significant risk, or a risk that was deemed unacceptably high, to the recipients of any blood transfusion. But perhaps even more significantly, the value of the beef industry in the UK was destroyed in effect overnight, and it has only very gradually repaired its reputation. Beef and the beef cattle industry accounted for about 38 per cent of British agricultural output before the BSE outbreaks came about in the 1980s. That dwindled incredibly quickly, and it is that kind of risk that we are grappling with, whether it is seafood, whether it is the dairy industry or whether it is other primary producers across Victoria. Those people who are working so hard, who are in the elements and who have worked the land for generations, and all of that hard work is put at risk if we do not have an effective biosecurity agricultural regulatory regime that can ensure an alignment or a balance, if you will – or calibration rather is the word I am looking for – between safety, risk and efficiency, because the consequences of not getting it right can be absolutely catastrophic.

As I said, the BSE outbreaks indicate it, but also another classic British example is foot-and-mouth disease, which was traced back to a farm very close to where I grew up, where it emerged that the farmer had been feeding his livestock untreated waste. He had not notified authorities of the outbreak, and given that speed is of the essence in those scenarios, the actions of one farmer – one bad actor – had a catastrophic impact for the entire UK agricultural sector as well as that of Europe more broadly and indeed the tourism sector, given its reliance upon access to green open spaces. So they are just a couple of indicative snapshots of what can happen if the settings are not right.

I come back then to the rationale for having a fit and proper person criterion within the Seafood Safety Act 2003. I note of course that the minister and government will respond to SARC, but the intent is to prevent bad-faith actors, people who engage in phoenixing to move seamlessly from one business to another and through their actions can perpetrate significant harm upon every other person who is working hard to make a living, as it were – to coin a phrase – and to contribute to that significant output that we have in the aquaculture and wild catch industry in Victoria.

It is important, because the economic contribution of food and fibre and of seafood to the Victorian economy cannot be overstated. I talked a little bit about the contribution of aquaculture, which has grown very significantly in recent years, but again for all of these industries, whether it is our beef cattle, whether it is our wheat or whether it is our milk exports in whatever form they might take – whether it is milk solids or powder – none of it is viable and sustainable unless there is consumer trust in the products that we have. There is a reason why our milk products are so keenly sought in countries and markets like China. It is because consumers in countries like China do not have confidence in their own agricultural sector and in their own food regulatory systems, and as a consequence they have voted with their feet and their dollars and are chasing Victorian products instead. The competitiveness and the competitive quality – the differentiators that our products have – can only endure as long as that consumer confidence in Australia and in Victoria as a well-regulated, clean, green, as it were, but fundamentally safe food market endures.

Acting Speaker Mercurio, you have talked a little bit yourself about the consequences of that being taken for granted or people playing fast and loose with it. If we take excessive risk with this, it would

have a cataclysmic impact upon not just the Victorian economy but the Australian economy more broadly. Certainly in Victoria our food and fibre exports – and that is exports; that is not economic activity but in just exports alone – totalled \$19.6 billion in 2022–23. We are Australia’s largest food and fibre exporter by value, and we account for well over a quarter of the national total. Again, if we do not get the regulatory settings right, if we do not have a harmonisation of the regulation of meat with seafood, we put at risk that hard work. We put at risk the generational hard work of farmers, of primary producers across Victoria. That is something that I think the Minister for Agriculture and her team are keenly aware of, and it is why they have engaged in so much consultation with peak bodies throughout the aquaculture, the dairy and the broader agricultural sector to ensure that there is an awareness of the intent of this bill – because it is farmers themselves who will lose the most if we do not get this right, if there is a biosecurity outbreak, if there is an erosion of trust in our dairy industry, in our aquaculture industry or in the catch that comes from our coastal waters. These are critical parts of both what it is to be a Victorian and to engage in as a tourist or as a visitor to our beautiful regional economies, but it is also the underpinning of our economic vitality as a state. These are significant drivers of export value. They are significant employers. All of that is put at risk and can be put at risk by a very small number of people. It is important to get this right. I commend this bill and the regulatory changes that it makes to the house, and I hope it has a speedy passage.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (17:17): I rise to make a contribution on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. As we have heard from previous speakers, this bill amends the Dairy Act 2000, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Seafood Safety Act 2003, and it is intended to address certain regulatory risks, streamline the functions of regulators, improve consistency between the acts and provide increased clarity to Victorian primary production businesses.

There is one particular element of the bill that I wish to mainly focus on. I want to go into a bit more detail on that than maybe some of the previous speakers have, and that is the element that expands the fit and proper person test for the seafood industry. I acknowledge the member for Greenvale just gave some additional detail on that, which was good. But between houses I would like to see quite a bit more detail provided on that particular issue, and I would like to explain why. This bill expands consideration of a fit and proper person to include whether the applicant or licensee is of good repute having respect to character, honesty and integrity. That is fine. But there are so many unanswered questions in relation to the other elements of this, including, obviously, what is the definition of ‘good repute’. But where it gets more complicated is that this bill intends to further extend it to an associate. It extends it to business associations, and business associations of associates. Good luck policing that. Does that mean you need to do a background check on every person that you are developing some sort of a friendship with or you might be caught out by this? It also says it relates to a person who holds a relevant position in the seafood business – they must also be of good repute, having respect to character, honesty and integrity. When it talks about a position within the seafood business, this is in reference to staff. It is talking about staff, so let me paint a bit of a picture for you here.

That then applies to the deckies on the fishing boats, it applies to the filleters of fish, and we have very significant fishing fleets operating at a number of our coastal communities: I think of Lakes Entrance in my electorate but also San Remo and down at Portarlington on the Bellarine. You have got Port Phillip. You have got Warrnambool. You have got Port Welshpool. There is a fishing presence in Port Fairy and in Portland. No doubt there are many other locations as well. These are fishing sector businesses that, like many other businesses in this state at the moment, are finding it very difficult to access staff. It is not easy for them to source appropriate staff. A job at sea with its very, very long hours and hard manual labour is certainly not for everyone. Among these crew members, these deckies, are people who are getting their life together. They are on the road back. They might have made a poor decision or two in the past, but they are getting their lives together and trying to make the most of their second chance. This fit and proper person test proposed by the government relates to a person who holds ‘a relevant position in the seafood business’; we want to know what that relevant position is. Does that apply to all staff or not?

That is the level of detail we have not got, and I am hoping speakers on the other side or the government between houses can give us a bit more detail on that. Will the business owner who has given this person a helping hand – and maybe even they have advanced to a management position within the business – be punished for giving these people a second go if they fail this fit and proper person test? As other speakers have said, why is this being applied to the fishing sector? I am reliably told there are 42 acts in the Victorian legislation that have passed through Parliament which include clauses relating to a fit and proper person, but of these only three or four contain a reference or similar references to being associated with a person, and that is another grey area. I am sure the commercial fishing sector in the Labor electorates of Bass and around the Bellarine Peninsula have got some question marks over this, because the fishing sector more generally, including some of their representative groups and agencies that we have spoken to in the last few days, need clarity on these issues. If there is nothing to worry about, tell us about the detail, but it should not be applying to a sector that is going to have people knocked out who are having a go and trying to get their lives together in an area where employees are hard to find.

I am also aware through this chamber that the Scrutiny of Acts and Legislation Committee has written to the minister expressing concern that this section of the bill has impacts on freedom of association. It is simply unreasonable that we are applying a test that all associates of seafood licensees must be of good repute. It is just unreasonable. It is not consistent with food safety regulation in other jurisdictions throughout Australia, and as yet – and I have been listening in my office down there – I have not heard a good explanation of the detail that we would need and the seafood industry would be comfortable with to support this bill. I will also add that these extra layers are an administrative burden to these fishing operations. It will add more cost to ensure these processes are undertaken, it will disadvantage us with other states and therefore it will disadvantage us with seafood imports. The cost of local seafood rises when we put additional administrative burdens on the seafood sector. I said in this chamber just last week when I was talking about the commercial fishing sector in Lakes Entrance that we are already a net importer of seafood. We are an island nation and a coastal state and we import 70 per cent of our seafood. It appears to me the government either has not fully considered the impact of this on the seafood industry and those staff members working in it or does not know the detail as yet that we need to know to be able to support this bill. So apart from the financial disadvantage and the impact it will have on some employees – or the potential impact, because we do not know the detail – there are two major questions in addition to those that need to be asked. The first is: why is this being applied to the seafood industry and covering off on associates of those in the sector? And what are the details of this test?

Is it going to impact our deckies? Is it going to impact our fish filleters? Does it prevent a deckie getting promoted to a management position because they would then be implicated in this issue? They are the issues I have got around the seafood industry.

Just briefly before I finish, as our lead speaker the member for Lowan stated, there are some simmering concerns in the meat sector that broadening information sharing will allow for private information to be shared and potentially published without the knowledge of the business – we need some clarity on that between houses – and with no right to a fair process or natural justice being outlined if that occurs. Further, on the type of information that will be mandated to be gathered or reported, I believe there will be an overarching framework in future legislation. That is likely to be covered off not through the legislation but when the minister goes through the non-legislative process of putting those details in place, and that is of particular concern as well. This means that changes to information gathering or reporting will not be known until the regulations are determined by the minister.

So again we have a bill with an overarching framework, and it will be the detail in the regulation that will determine whether it is appropriate or not. So we do not really know what we are signing on for here; we have got some of this stuff that will be determined in regulation later. We are being asked to pass a fit and proper person test for the seafood industry with no detail whatsoever. At the very least we should not be disadvantaging the commercial fishing sector by burdening them with this.



There will be a lot of people very uneasy at the moment. I know of a number of people in the Lakes Entrance fishing sector that, yes, have made some poor decisions, but they are on the way back. They want to know that this is not going to rule them out of having a job or getting a job promotion. It is another case of legislation coming in here lacking the details that we need, and hence we will not be supporting this bill. I certainly support the reasoned amendment of the Shadow Minister for Agriculture.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (17:27): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. I might speak a little bit about what this bill means and what it will do, and then I will get into the fabulous Bellarine electorate. We have heard a little bit about the Bellarine electorate today, which is lovely. This bill will amend the Food Act 1984. It will also amend the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the Dairy Act 2000 to improve the operational functions of Victorian food safety regulators and provide more efficient and effective delivery of food safety regulation in Victoria. This is about implementing some food safety and public health policy and streamlining those organisational functions of the Victorian food safety regulators, including the meat and seafood regulator PrimeSafe and the dairy regulator Dairy Food Safety Victoria. This aims to improve overall consistency between the acts, it will address several recommendations of Food Act reforms that had been made by VAGO, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, and it is going to provide clarity around various regulation requirements, particularly for Victorian food businesses.

This bill is important for all of us as consumers of food. We need to ensure there is a safe system of regulation enforcement, and it is there to help prevent any illnesses, hospitalisations or even death, or eating the wrong things, like maybe rabbit.

The Bellarine Peninsula is truly a foodie's paradise. I represent an electorate that is a significant contributor to the food and fibre sector and the food manufacturing industry as well. It does draw a whole lot of visitors and locals with its rich array of all those culinary experiences. We have fresh produce. We offer a diverse mix of that paddock-to-plate or farm-to-table dining experience, artisan products, award-winning wineries and distilleries, and if you can picture it, it is also set amongst the stunning coastal backdrop with hinterlands in the middle of the Bellarine, our true agricultural centre.

Bellarine has incredible cafes, restaurants, farm gates, producers, bakeries, butchers and food manufacturers, including some of my favourites: Lard Ass Butter, who do an absolute amazing butter – garlic butter is my favourite – and Bellarine brownies. We have Lonsdale Tomato Farm, roadside stalls for honey, farmers markets nearly every weekend and you can go and pick your own berries at a couple of the berry farms as well.

As we have indicated today, many have said we have an incredible seafood industry on the Bellarine. We have our famous Portarlington mussels and abalone. Portarlington is very much known as the mussel capital of Victoria and I would argue probably Australia in that 60 per cent of Australian mussels come from Portarlington. It is an absolute booming industry for us on the Bellarine, but it is not only fantastic for our economy in terms of jobs and tourism and our local food industry; the mussels themselves are also cleaning our waters in our bay. They are really important to our marine ecosystem, and they do actually filter our waters in our bay.

I have been very fortunate to go out on Portarlington Mussel Tours, which is a 40-year-old mussel trawler that has been refurbished. It is a beautiful boat that you can go out on. You will sail along Portarlington, learn about mussel farming and hear directly from Lance, who is the owner and the farmer of Portarlington mussels. He will take you out to the waters where the mussels grow. He lifts up the ropes with the mussels growing there and you pick your own lunch. You get a bucket, and you get to pick the mussels and put them in the bucket. You then get to go have a drink or sit down and watch him clean and cook the mussels. Then he presents you with an absolute culinary delight of a whole lot of different mussels cooked in different ways. It is absolutely fantastic; I recommend people go out and do it. You really get to learn about the food and the importance of our farmers who are

relying on that type of industry. I think there is more and more appetite – excuse the pun – to learn about where our food comes from, the producers of that food, the story behind their food and where it comes from and of course that it is safe and healthy and fresh.

That is what you can also do at a farmers market. I have actually got a little bit of my own personal experience. A few years ago another family and I, two busy mums who thought we did not have enough to do, started a little boutique farm, and we would sell garlic and berries at farmers markets. Doing that, I got to speak directly to customers, and they were so passionate about knowing how the food was grown, how it was cleaned, how it was produced, where it was from, the kilometres it might have travelled and any pesticides or things that might have been used. We were organic, which is a great story to also tell, but people were really wanting to know about their food. In doing that I had to go through the council and make sure that we were complying with all the regulations that we do here as well and that we are setting today, and it is a really important process. Proudly I would do that to ensure that the food that we were producing was also healthy and safe.

We also have a thriving tourism industry on the Bellarine and that is surrounded almost by food itself. We have a terrific experience called the Q Train where you can jump on an old steam train and experience Bellarine food and wine; it is absolutely a magnificent way to experience the Bellarine on a plate. We have many cafes and bakeries. Ket Baker is one I have had the minister come visit. They do incredible sourdough and croissants, and there is a line out the door every time you visit there. It really is a foodie experience. We are committed to fine producers, we have a place to enjoy that delicacy and we learn about the farmers as well.

I think that is probably my audition for *Postcards* or *Getaway*.

Food safety is also very crucial, though, for our trusted brand on the Bellarine and our Victorian brand as a tourism and food destination. When visitors come to enjoy the unique flavours of the Bellarine and our fresh offerings they do bring those expectations of high-quality safe dining experiences. Upholding our food safety is not only protecting the health of our communities and our guests, but it also ensures the sustainable reputation of our region. With a commitment to vigorous standards and transparency we do enhance our visitor confidence, we promote the return of tourists and we celebrate our local food scene in a responsible way. Food safety plays a significant role in building and maintaining that consumer trust, and when businesses adhere to those strict food safety standards consumers do feel more secure in their choices and more likely to return. Additionally, a strong food safety culture enhances reputable industries such as restaurants, grocery stores and food production, and health is that priority. Beyond individual health and trust in food safety, it does have a broader implication for our public health and our economy. We know that widespread foodborne illnesses can strain our health system and can lead to economic losses, closures or decreased spend in affected sectors. Ensuring our food safety is not just for individuals but for stable, healthy and thriving communities, and that is certainly what we have on the Bellarine.

I am really pleased to speak on this bill and contribute to a bill that is about improving our regulations of food safety, increasing that clarity around Victorian businesses and making sure that consumers are at the heart of our food regulations as well. I encourage people to come to the Bellarine, experience the food wonder that we have on offer on the Bellarine, from seafood to all those cafes and bakeries and other food producers – come to a farmers market, speak to farmers, hear about the food. I commend this bill to the house.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (17:37): I rise today to contribute to the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and I do that because of course it is of great interest to the people of Polwarth, who I enjoy representing here in the in the Parliament each week. We are dealing with amendments in this omnibus bill to the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003, the Dairy Act 2000 and the Food Act 1984. Those four acts are vitally important for the day-to-day operations of a seat like Polwarth, whether it is our prime cattle and lamb markets that grow, produce and value-add right across my region, whether it is the Australian Lamb Company, the big lamb

abattoir in Colac, or the variety of boutique meat producers right around and increasingly at farmers markets, food fairs and festivals right across not only the Polwarth region but Geelong and Melbourne and elsewhere. You will buy meat which has been beautifully grown, butchered, produced, packaged and sold right throughout Victoria, coming from our beautiful countryside.

The Seafood Safety Act – the Apollo Bay harbour of course is renowned for its lobster and crayfish exports. The changes from China, being prepared to take on that market again, will be of huge benefit to our crayfish boats and licences along the coast and the smaller catch out of Port Campbell also, which ebbs and flows a little bit, but it will probably pick up again now that the Chinese market is opening up opportunities again. It is a fantastic industry. Of course many visitors from around the state will have spent some time in recent years at the Apollo Bay Seafood Festival. Unfortunately the seafood festival did not go ahead this year because this government ran out of money and failed to support the local community in keeping that world-class event up and running, so that was a bit of a loss to regional tourism, I must say, but hopefully we can get the support back behind a festival like that, that not only brings great regional tourism to further points in the state, but also celebrates the wonderful food and produce from that area

Of course you cannot talk about Polwarth and not talk about the Dairy Act. The dairy industry of course is much better than in Gippsland. In south-west Victoria we are the dairy capital; 30 per cent of the dairy product of the country comes out of Colac. It depends on who you want to talk to, but I think about 80 per cent of our cream and ice cream in the country comes out of our part of the world. Whether it is the wonderful Bulla brand or packaged up for various supermarkets and others, we produce a world-class product out of our part of the world. Not only have we got big, well-run family operations like the Bulla ice cream company, we also have some smaller producers such as Schulz Organic Dairy, Apostle Whey Cheese and others, who do a great job with a boutique dairy product. Not only are they putting our brand and our dairy product right around the country with a high-quality twist, they are also providing great employment opportunities throughout the region.

Of course the Food Act, the instrument that allows local councils to make sure that our restaurants and cafes and food providers are doing it well and doing it safely, is vital along the Great Ocean Road region in particular, where in only a few months time, from Melbourne Cup Day onwards, we will be welcoming on a regular basis literally thousands and thousands and thousands of people from all over Victoria, all over Australia and from around the world down to try some great restaurants rivalling those on the Mornington Peninsula and other second-rate spots around the state that sort of try and vie for the spectacular coastline that we offer in Polwarth, where we have real waves and real beaches as opposed to sort of manufactured waveless beaches.

**A member:** Haven't you been to Gunnamatta?

**Richard RIORDAN:** Yes, but then you drown like prime ministers if you go out that side of the bay. We have got good, safe beaches with surfing carnivals and opportunities for everybody.

These four bits of legislation are important. It is always welcomed when the government cleans these acts up from time to time and contemporises them when necessary. However, as we so often mention in this chamber, it is hard to trust this government when it comes to getting its omnibus bills. We have had a flood of them in recent weeks where they come in and they disguise some otherwise reasonable work but they go and throw a few sneaky ones in.

I have got to say I was reading this bill in preparation for the presentation today, and it is actually like a marriage guidance counsellor's reform act. The bit to deal with the fishing industry, the amendment to the Seafood Safety Act, is two or three pages discussing people's personal relationships. I sort of thought to myself that we have got descriptions here of what an adult partner is, whether you live with them, whether you do not live with them, whether they can have financial interest in your life or not have financial interest in your life. There is quite an obsession with the personal relationships that fishermen have. I thought, 'This is rather strange. What on earth could be the ulterior motive? Of all

the things for this government to obsess about, it is who is having sex with who in the fishing industry.’ I thought, ‘This is a rather strange obsession,’ because we have seen this government turn a complete blind eye to crime in the building industry. We have seen this government turn a complete blind eye to the misbehaviour of its own members in this chamber, where they take dogs for chauffer rides. We have had Speakers go off and live in caravans and claim hundreds of thousands of dollars. We have seen all sorts of strange things happen, and this government turns a blind eye. But now we have a piece of legislation that wants to know every intimate detail of a fisherman’s private life. I thought, ‘That’s strange.’

But it gets worse. Not only do they want to know who you are having sex with and if you live with them and what your mortgage repayments are, they are now obsessed with who your friends are. Imagine if they applied some of these things, like whether an associate of the applicant or licensee has any business associations, to the member for Mordialloc, for example. Where did he get his stamps from? I mean, that would be the question you could ask. The Labor Party could apply some of this to its own membership and applications.

**Anthony Cianflone:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the honourable member has totally strayed from the bill here. On relevance, what he is talking about has nothing to do with the substance of the bill. I ask that you draw him back to the substance of the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Mercurio):** I would ask the member to come back to the substance of the bill.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Thank you for that guidance, Acting Speaker, but I am just talking about the relevance of the fit and proper person and people of good repute test that we are applying to the fishing industry.

The fishing industry, certainly in my part of the world – as I said, in Apollo Bay and Port Campbell – is an important industry. It is vital. Fishermen often engage in value-add to their business. So when the catch comes in in the morning, certainly in Apollo Bay, there is a fisherman’s co-op.

Are we now sort of having to judge your character and whether you can have your fishing licence and your involvement in the fishing industry depending on who is at the fryer cooking the fish in the fish shop? We now need to know who your wife is, who your partner is, who your husband is and who their association is with. These are sort of strange provisions, and I guess the reason we raise that question is because the fishing industry, like all other industries in primary industry, are often small- to medium-sized enterprises. They are hardworking people and they are out doing the hard yards. A fisherman’s life is pretty rugged. It is hard work; it is long hours. To think that you have now got to come back and in order to keep your licences and in order to keep your business and have a relationship with the government – because unfortunately to maintain your accreditation and to be able to export your product and be engaged in long-term profitable financial and commercial arrangements you have to maintain a good relationship with your business. So it is of concern to the opposition that this government has decided to bring this in. They have not explained what the rationale is for this rather intrusive element that takes up about half of this rather thin document, this omnibus bill that they are bringing in.

**Michael O’Brien** interjected.

**Richard RIORDAN:** Well, that is right. Yes, member for Malvern, the fishing industry is probably not the most important thing in Malvern, but they could apply to the legal profession, I guess. Are the legal profession fit and proper people? That could be something. But do not pick on our fishermen. They are good people down in Apollo Bay. I think they have enough to worry about in life: what the swell is like, whether the south-westerly is coming in, whether the catch is going to be decent and whether the Chinese are buying the lobster and the crayfish. There is a lot for fisherman to worry about on a day-to-day basis, and one should not have to be the marital status of people in the industry, who they are associated with or what they have done in their past. These are not relevant concerns.

Unfortunately, this has been brought to the Parliament without proper debate and discussion with the industry. The industry are telling us they have not been sat down with, and this has not been justified. So I support the amendments made by the Shadow Minister for Agriculture.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:47): I too rise from our side of the house to support the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Before I go to the substance of the bill, I would like to just address some of the points that were made in terms of the reasoned amendment that was moved by the member for Ovens Valley, I believe, but were elaborated on by today's member for Lowan. Because the reality is and the fact is that most of the other industries across the food sector and agriculture sector actually already do have a fit and proper person test across respective sectors. The test is already in place. All we are doing, Leader of the Nationals, is streamlining and making the seafood industry consistent with the meat industry. It is already in the Meat Industry Act 1993. The fit and proper persons test is already in the Meat Industry Act 1993, in the beef industry, across the poultry sector and across the pork sector. So I was very confused, to say the least, when the current member for Lowan seemed to be a bit irate – as other members have been – that the test would be applied now to the seafood industry if this bill were to pass, to such an extent that she and others have proposed, and continue to propose, a reasoned amendment. As I said, what we are proposing is not inconsistent with what is already in place across the sector.

I note that the clause formed part of the original Meat Industry Act 1993, and the Minister for Agriculture at the time in 1993 was a guy by the name of Bill McGrath, a Nationals MP who was also a former member for Lowan. In his second reading speech on 8 April 1993, he spoke glowingly of the fit and proper person test:

Finally, the Meat Industry Bill significantly broadens and strengthens the provisions for ensuring that only fit and proper persons operate in the Victorian meat industry.

Under the new arrangements, every applicant for a licence will be required to nominate a natural person as the operator of the meat processing establishment covered by the licence and to display the name of that operator prominently on the premises.

So it is curious and baffling to see that today's member for Lowan very much is arguing against the spirit of the member for Lowan at the time, who moved that fit and proper person test into the then Meat Industry Act 1993. It was good then, but it is not good for today.

In speaking to today's bill before us, the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill, I would like to also acknowledge the Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence and her team for bringing this bill to the chamber. Of course Victoria is Australia's agricultural heartland, with Victorians and many other parts of Australia relying on our farmers, our food producers, our agribusinesses and our food beverage manufacturers every single day. Playing a critical role in supporting economic, employment and social wellbeing of our regional and rural communities, the agriculture and food sectors also play a very important role in supporting the prosperity of our suburban and inner-city communities through, as I said, food and beverage wholesalers, fresh fruit markets, food processors, our manufacturers, our agribusinesses, our restaurants and our cafes.

**Peter Walsh** interjected.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** You can come and have a coffee in Coburg one day, Leader of the Nationals – I will show you what it is all about. These sectors have a big flow-on effect in terms of economic and employment outcomes across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West.

That is why this bill is so important, building on many previous reforms designed to protect and sustain this important part of our economy in terms of agriculture and the food sector. Of course along with our ongoing action to combat climate change to strengthen the resilience of these sectors, the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023 that we moved almost this time last year was also another example of our commitment to preserve and protect these sectors from risk. This bill represents yet another important step towards protecting and strengthening Victoria's food

safety regulatory framework and supporting, as I said, the ongoing resilience, safety and quality of our agriculture products.

The bill aims to streamline food safety regulation in Victoria, improving the operational efficiency of regulatory bodies such as PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria. It introduces new provisions to strengthen the oversight of high-risk products like raw milk, enables more effective information sharing among regulators and reduces administrative burdens on local councils and businesses. In essence it will lead to a more transparent, consistent and effective food safety system, benefiting consumers and producers alike. The bill, as we have heard, addresses many of those complexities across those sectors by amending a number of acts, including the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993 and, yes, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 by inserting a fit and proper person's test, as well as reforms to the Dairy Act 2000, because, as I did touch on earlier, maintaining the health, wellbeing and confidence in our agriculture and food sectors is critically important to our entire state's prosperity.

As set out in the Victorian government's agriculture industry overview of January 2023, the sector continues to play an increasing role in terms of economic and jobs output, contributing \$17.5 billion in production to the state and \$17.9 billion in total food and fibre exports for the state. It is made up of 21,600 farm businesses. It supports 150,000 agricultural, food and beverage manufacturing jobs across the state, and overall it contributes \$16.5 billion directly towards our gross state product. Victoria is also the number one producer of milk, with 5.65 billion litres or 64 per cent of our national milk production coming from Victoria. We are the number one Australian producer for sheep meat, making up 47 per cent of national production. We are also Australia's number one producer for vegetables, making up 22 per cent of production. Finally, in terms of prepared foods such as prepared milk formulas and the like, they make up 36 per cent of national exports.

With respect to the seafood industry, the bill very much goes to our state's seafood exports which were previously valued at \$245 million, with Victoria accounting for around 17 per cent of Australian seafood exports as of a couple of years ago. According to ABS data, it shows that the average take-home seafood expenditure per person in metro Melbourne is approximately 14 per cent higher than the Australian average. We love our fish and chips.

Speaking with respect to the diligent work of our public health and food safety officers across my community of Merri-bek, most of whom will likely have some sort of role to enforce many of these reforms and monitor them, according to the council's 2022–23 annual report, the average time taken by council officers to respond to food-related complaints locally has remained stable at 2.92 days. That is below the three-calendar-day average since 2018. Seventy-two per cent of identified food premises received a food safety assessment in 2022 – an improvement on the previous year – and 277 noncompliances were identified through assessments and inspections for the last financial year of food premises, all of which, 100 per cent, council says, were followed up to ensure compliance, with relevant safety food standards having been since achieved. I thank and I acknowledge the CEO Cathy Henderson and her team of officers for this diligent work in maintaining safe hygienic standards across our local food outlets.

As I said from the outset, while rural and regional Victoria may be the heartland of our agriculture sector, it is very much our state's manufacturing sector which has long been the vehicle through which the value of the sector has been leveraged and maximised.

Of the 150,000 jobs associated with the sector, over 82,400 jobs, more than half, are directly associated with the food and beverage manufacturing sector, with our state's overall manufacturing sector home to 30 per cent of the nation's manufacturing output, consisting of \$31 billion of industry and 23,000 firms and employing 260,000 people. As I have previously also said, NORTH Link is our regional economic body and plays a tremendous role in advocating for Melbourne's north, increasingly becoming the home of food manufacturing in this country. I also acknowledge the role of La Trobe University in the north, which has over \$300 billion in assets, out at Bundoora mainly, specifically dedicated and devoted to studying agriculture and food processes.

Along with these opportunities there are also many current businesses in my community I would like to acknowledge that really value-add to the agriculture sector and provide an amazing array of local food and culinary offerings, employing many local people. Emil's Cafe at 347 Reynard Street in Pascoe Vale is the latest addition to our local culinary scene. Brothers John and George El-Khoury have literally refurbished their parents' old corner milk bar and family home into Pascoe Vale's newest brunch spot. It was originally opened in 1978; their hardworking parents Emil and Houda El-Khoury raised their six children at the rear of the building while running the milk bar out the front. Years later the brothers have come back to their roots and realised a dream, taking over the lease of the building they humbly grew up in. Now it really serves a beautiful Arabic, Middle Eastern and Lebanese influenced menu utilising some of the very best produce from across the state.

Down the other end of Reynard Street at number 202 is the gorgeous, new cafe Two Franks, in West Coburg, founded by sisters Angie and Chrissy, who, like yours truly, grew up on the Reynard Street corridor. Two Franks draws on our suburb's long multicultural history to begin a new chapter where locals meet to share in their love of soulful food and hospitality. The cafe is named Two Franks because the shop at 202 Reynard Street was previously a butcher for many, many years – which I went to, living around the corner as a young kid. It was owned by two butchers – separate butchers, by the way – who were both named Frank. I have also had the pleasure of welcoming the Minister for Small Business Minister Suleyman to my electorate to visit a number of local businesses, including Jack & Daisy cafe in Pascoe Vale and Di Benedetto as well in the lead-up Father's Day and to celebrate their role in fostering a prosperous local economy. I commend the bill.

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (17:58): It is important for the member for Victoria's food bowl – in fact Australia's food bowl – to contribute on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. As you probably know by now, I am very, very passionate about the agricultural space given that we are producing food and fibre for the entire world in our red sandy loam soils, which can grow just about anything. Because this is part of the agriculture bill, it is a great chance for me to do as others have done and talk about the agriculture sector and particularly what a terrible season this season is going to be and already is.

Harvest has started for our broadacre farmers. Without rain, it is very low, if crops have survived the hail and frost; it is being cut for hay at the minute. Beulah is a place where beer is born, and I say that because they grow a lot of barley, and that is where beer comes from. It is going to be a very, very challenging season for our food producers in the north-west. Like I said, there has been very little rain, less than 10 per cent of average annual rainfall to get us to this point. There are some real challenges ahead. In the south-west, we have heard already, it is a green drought.

I think it is really important while we are talking about agriculture and food in particular – they go hand in hand – that we acknowledge the struggles that our food producers are under at the moment and the challenges that they face coming into this season and acknowledge those that are out on headers 24 hours a day for the next couple of months, harvesting what they can to get some sort of revenue into their pockets.

I hear often from farmers and from food producers that they feel like the government is trying to put them out of business with all of the audits, with all of the new legislation, the impossible compliance. This is not going to help those involved in the industries that are pointed out in this bill. But it is very important that I do contribute on this bill and mention how challenging this season will be, not just in broadacre farming, in irrigated agriculture as well. Like I said, there was hail not that long ago and we have had late frost. It is going to be a hard season, and it is very important that I get that on the record.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:01): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

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

**Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Tim Pallas:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (18:02): I rise to address the government's Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024, a bill that was made available in this place only hours ago – a bill that was made available in this place shortly after midday when the Parliament resumed for this sitting week. I could not have imagined in my wildest dreams that at 6 pm on the same day the government would seek to debate this legislation in the Parliament. The opposition has had very limited time not only to consider the bill before us but very limited time to consult with stakeholders and very little time to speak amongst ourselves and work out what our precise positioning on this could be. But we have done that. In the short time that has been allowed us by the government we have consulted with a number of people, we have spoken amongst ourselves, and I can inform the house that the opposition will not be opposing the government's bill.

It is important above everything else that Victorians are respected, that Victorians are valued, and that the important aspiration of more Victorians getting in homes and having a roof over their heads is respected and held as the most important thing and the most important driver. Now, although we will not be opposing this bill, I can inform the house that I fully intend to critique this bill. I fully intend to critique the way that the government has gone about announcing this policy and bringing this bill to the Parliament. I fully intend to critique that Victorians may be winners as a result of this bill, but there are many, many more Victorians who will be losers as a result of this bill.

This measure that we are discussing has origins that go back to 2017 when this same Labor government – the same Labor government occupying the government benches now; the same Treasurer occupying 1 Treasury Place now – sought to remove this exemption. They sought to scrap this exemption in 2017. Now in 2024, because there is a housing crisis which Victorians are dealing with, here comes the government – here they come, coming back seeking to reverse something which they imposed upon Victorians in the first place, after the harm has been done. That is not just me speaking – that is the Real Estate Institute of Victoria at the time, and I am happy to provide this to Hansard. This is a quote directly from *Hansard* in 2017:

The REIV does not support the removal of the off-the-plan concessions for investors. This change will reduce the attractiveness of property investment in Victoria, further limiting rental supply at a time when vacancy rates are already tightening ...

This Labor government in 2017 received this warning from industry, and yet they proceeded with it; they proceeded with scrapping the exemption. They proceeded to make life harder for Victorians, often vulnerable Victorians, many Victorians who could not afford to buy a home without this exemption being in place, and now they come to the Parliament in 2024 not even with a sorry, not even with an apology, not even with an acknowledgement that what they did in 2017 was the wrong thing by Victorians. No, no, they do not do that. They come here simply seeking to reverse it – and not reversing it in whole, reversing it in part. The Shadow Treasurer at the time was Mr O'Brien. Gee, I am looking forward to his contribution on this debate; that will most certainly be a ticketed event. If I could eat popcorn in this place I would, and I am sure the member for Malvern will make that contribution at some stage over the next few days. But Mr O'Brien in 2017, the then Shadow Treasurer, warned the then government, warned the then and now Treasurer, Mr Pallas:

If you take investors out of the pool for off-the-plan projects, which is the intended effect of this tax increase, you will simply see fewer projects get the go-ahead.



And lo and behold! If I was the member for Malvern I would feel vindicated at this point in time. I would feel like saying to the government, ‘Gee, I told you so.’

But we are not arrogant about this. There is no hubris coming from the opposition benches on this at all, because the impact of the government’s poor judgement and poor decision making in 2017 has meant that fewer Victorians, often vulnerable Victorians, have had the opportunity to own their own home. Fewer Victorians have had the opportunity to have a roof over their head. And we know in this place – well, we should know in this place – that a roof over your head is not just that, it is not just about the bricks and mortar, it is about the stability that housing offers those people who occupy it. It is about the stability for families. It is about the stability for single Victorians, for older Victorians, for vulnerable Victorians that was cut out from underneath those people in 2017, and now the government comes back in 2024 seeking to partially reverse their decision at that time. At the time, the Treasurer claimed that axing the off-the-plan concession was about fairness and ‘ensuring that the government is supporting first home owners over investors’. I will say that again. At the time, the Treasurer claimed axing the off-the-plan tax concession was about fairness and ‘ensuring that the government is supporting first home owners over investors’.

I would like to hear the Treasurer come into this place and frankly eat those words. He caused this problem; this government caused this problem. This government over the last 10 years has contributed significantly to the housing crisis that Victorians are now being impacted by, and yet they come in here with this measly proposal saying that this will be the panacea to the woes which we have created. Well, I am telling you now it will not be. It will not be – it is time-limited. The government has said that they will reverse this change which they made in 2017, and it will only be available for 12 months. It will only be available for 12 months. There are very few Victorians who I think will take up this new initiative by the government, and we know that by the government’s own modelling on this. We know this, because the government itself has said that this will only cost the budget \$55 million. They themselves know that a measure like this will be limited in its uptake.

Now, there is something very interesting: let me run you through a little bit of a timeline. Shortly after midday today we received the bill. We then confirmed with the government that we would have a bill briefing at 4:30 today. That bill briefing was still taking place when the government first indicated that this bill will be debated in this chamber from 6 pm tonight.

So while we are in the bill briefing, while we are scrutinising the bill, while we are asking questions of the government, the government then indicate to us that they want to debate this bill in this place at 6 pm tonight. During the course of that bill briefing there were a number of questions raised – very valid questions, eminently sensible questions – by my colleagues in this place.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Member for Mordialloc, you are being disorderly by commenting and not sitting in your place, which is over there. So you just calm down, sport. You will get your turn. It will not be a ticketed event, but you will get your turn. Just do not get Simon Love in here. There will be mass confusion.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** Through the Chair.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Sorry, Acting Speaker. We were asking eminently sensible questions during the course of that bill briefing. For example, we heard during that bill briefing that this temporary and time-limited measure will be extended not just to citizens but also to investors. And a valid question to ask is: what does the government expect? Does the government expect there to be more investors taking up this offer, this time-limited offer, or does the government expect more citizens to be taking up this time-limited offer? Because if the intent of this policy is to get more Victorians into homes and the reality of this is that the government expects more investors to engage with this temporary and time-limited measure, then there is no guarantee that more Victorians will get into homes. There is no guarantee. If the aspiration of this policy is to get more Victorians into homes, then the government

should surely be able to demonstrate that this policy will deliver that. And in that bill briefing at 4:30 today we asked that question. We asked for the modelling. That question was taken on notice, and we still do not know.

The government will come in here and they will say that this policy will get more Victorians into homes, but they cannot demonstrate that that will actually be the case. They are licking their finger and they are putting it in the wind, hoping that this temporary and limited measure will in fact do that. What if the majority of people who take up this time-limited measure that the government is proposing are in fact investors? What if those investors in fact sit on that property and do not occupy it or sit on that property and do not rent it out – sit on the property simply to increase their asset base without it becoming viable housing stock for Victorians, which should be the intent of any housing policy? What if that occurs?

I think the government perhaps – and I do not want to give them too much credit – are a little bit smarter than they look. Because that property if it is bought by an investor and if it sits there unoccupied, I am sure the Treasurer, I am sure the Premier and I sure the State Revenue Office will be there rubbing their hands with glee waiting to charge the vacant land tax on that property at 1 per cent in the first year, 2 per cent in the second year, 3 per cent in the third year, after the dirty deal they did with the Greens in the other place, and that 3 per cent sitting for the foreseeable future. I think it is an eminently sensible thing to ask the government. If the intent of this policy is to get more Victorians into homes, then demonstrate that that will be the case. Show us the modelling. Where is the modelling? They cannot show us the modelling. They cannot for the life of them confirm that that is in fact the case.

Look, the bottom line on this is that the government cannot be trusted to deliver real taxation reform. The government cannot be trusted to deliver outcomes for Victorians that will benefit them in the housing policy space. That is the bottom line. They have had 10 years to demonstrate that they actually care about Victorians. They have had 10 years to demonstrate that they care about where Victorians live. They have had 10 years to demonstrate that they have the policy settings and the policy solutions to get more Victorians into homes. But as I have contended in this speech, what they have actually done, by reducing the ability of Victorians to get into homes in 2017 by removing the stamp duty concession that we are now partially considering today, is make policies that have in fact contributed to the housing crisis that Victoria is in at the moment.

Fifty-five new or increased taxes in the last 10 years, with 29 of those being property taxes. It is really simple, and I will say it slowly for government members so hopefully they have a better chance of understanding: if you tax something more, it gets more expensive. If you tax something more, it does not get cheaper.

**Juliana Addison** interjected.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** And for the benefit of the member for Wendouree, who has a puzzled look on her face at the minute, I am happy to say it again: if you tax something more, it does not get any cheaper; in fact, it gets more expensive.

On the front page of Sunday's *Herald Sun*, what did we see? We saw this smoke signal being sent up from the government's economic statement, an economic statement that apparently will promise and deliver the world – except for tax reform. They have no appetite for reducing those 29 taxes on property that they have introduced over the last 10 years. They have no intent of doing that at all. Fifty-five new or increased taxes in the last 10 years, 29 of which have been on property – and you wonder why Victoria is in the middle of a housing crisis. It is because Labor cannot be trusted to deliver the tax reform and the structural reform that are required to get more Victorians into homes. They simply cannot be trusted. And this is the truth: it has taken 10 years of Labor treating Victorians with contempt, it has taken 10 years of budget mismanagement and it has taken 10 years of Labor taxing Victorians more than they have ever been taxed before for us to be in the situation that we are in at the

moment – the economic basket case that Victoria is recognised as at the moment. Just a warning: should we have the opportunity to govern after 2026 – and I fully intend to be sitting on that side of the chamber after that point, together with my colleagues – it is going to take at least 10 years to unpick the circumstance that Labor has got us into over the last 10 years.

Some people have described this temporary measure that the government has proposed as insignificant, and I would be one of those people. In fact at a recent doorstep interview with the Leader of the Opposition I referred to this measure as a drop, in a drop, in a drop in the Pacific Ocean, and I do that again today. That is exactly what this is. It is a drop, in a drop, in a drop in the Pacific Ocean.

The government say that they listen to industry experts. They say that they hear industry experts, but I can tell you they simply do not. At the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, in response to this measure, which was introduced only last week, their newly appointed CEO Kelly Ryan said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

This move is a good first step to release the pressure valve, but REIV was hoping for more and is now calling for broader stamp duty reform in Victoria.

Industry sees through the spin. They see through the spin, the Labor spin, over the last 10 years. They know that over the last 10 years Labor has increased taxes on property and that has had an impact on housing affordability and home ownership. They see through all of that, and they are calling them out. The Real Estate Buyers Agents Association of Australia president Melinda Jennison said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The government likely has a hidden agenda to this reform, with increased infrastructure charges and levies likely to flow from inner-city developments.

Off-the-plan projects also come with greater risk for homebuyers, including a lack of certainty in the eventual quality of the build and the timeline for their construction.

Melinda Jennison of the Real Estate Buyers Agents Association of Australia sees through Labor's spin. She knows that over the last 10 years Labor could not be trusted on property taxes and taxes generally. She knows the impact of Labor's 29 new or increased property taxes, which have actually made property more expensive, have made housing more unaffordable, have made home ownership more out of reach and have made Victoria a place where investors are fleeing from.

Propertyology head of research Simon Pressley said that the government's stamp duty offer is a trap for buyers.

It is well known that off-the-plan property purchases have significantly more associated risks than established properties ...

The government's proposal to lure people into such a trap by scrapping stamp duty on new dwellings is reckless policy.

I daresay that Mr Pressley, the head of research at Propertyology, is saying this because he knows the truth of this Labor government. He knows that Labor cannot be trusted. He knows what Labor has done and has not done over the last 10 years, and he has formed this view as a result.

Charter Keck Cramer national research executive Richard Temlett said that while industry data shows that this reform could result in 32,000 additional sales, results are likely to be lower as there are fewer than 7000 off-the-plan options currently being marketed. He said:

The government can't fall into the trap of thinking it will bring –  
more development –

online, the market will not turn on overnight.

A very sensible contribution indeed from Mr Temlett of Charter Keck Cramer. This of course is just the latest warning bell that has been sounded to the government, and here is hoping the government will in fact listen.

One of the other critiques that we have of this bill currently before the house, and at 4:30 today during the government's bill briefing I asked this question of the Treasurer's office: is the government considering extending this currently time-limited proposal further than a year, because we know that in the investment world investors need more than 12 months to make investment decisions. Sure, a 12-month measure might very well create some sort of stimulus, but what we really need – what Victorians really need, what those looking for their own home, their first home, really need – is the certainty of more than 12 months. Under the policy in this bill, they simply do not have it.

The government claims that this temporary cut to stamp duty will support their plan to build some 80,000 new homes per year, a target that the government continues to fall well short of by a 30 per cent margin each year. In reality this reform will not meaningfully address the core issues driving Victoria's housing affordability crisis. The Allan government's exorbitant property taxes are deterring the supply of new housing development across the state. As I was saying before, since 2014, 29 of the 55 new or increased taxes and charges introduced by the Labor government have been property-based taxes. Of course it is not just time limited, it is also limited in scope. Under the Allan Labor government's new concession, freestanding family homes are excluded from this exemption. While Victorians interested in living in an apartment or a unit or a townhouse could claim this exemption up to any value, Victorians seeking to build a house on land to accommodate their family will simply not have this option.

See, on the side of the chamber in the Liberal and National parties, Victoria's alternative government, we do not believe that Victorians searching for homes should be crammed into one- and two-bedroom units. No, no, no. We believe in housing choice. We believe in enabling Victorians to have the choice to live in an apartment if they so wish or a townhouse if they so wish or a family home if they so wish, and that is another flaw of this bill being considered today – it limits choice.

The bottom line for me is this: after 10 years of Labor and after 10 Labor budgets, Labor simply cannot be trusted to deliver meaningful housing reform and meaningful tax reform. We have already seen that in recent communiqués from this government.

One of the other questions we asked in the bill briefing, again at 4:30 just shy of 2 hours ago, was: did the government ever consider capping the property value when they were considering this policy? The answer from the ministerial adviser was that a number of options were considered, but in the end, they decided not to cap the rate at which stamp duty would be exempted.

Now, here is the thing. Here is the absurdity: there are properties available that fit the government's definition that would be subject to this exemption. For some properties, their value is \$23 million. There are apartments that are available for quite literally multimillions of dollars. If there was a person – or persons or a group of people or a blind trust or whatever you like – that sought to acquire an off-the-plan property that had a value of \$23 million, their tax saving would be up to \$1.475 million. Again, I think this has been completely and utterly rushed. It is completely and utterly rushed policy – policy on the run – by a Labor government who is being dictated to by the polls as opposed to good policy. And we see that today – \$1.47 million in potential savings. If the intent of this policy is to get more Victorians into homes, if the intent of this policy is to make housing more affordable and more available and if this policy is targeting younger Victorians or vulnerable Victorians, why then wouldn't the government have considered a cap? It is an absolute and utter absurdity for there to be a \$23 million apartment – and they do exist. They do exist. The member for Bentleigh is here. He is on realestate.com, double-checking my assertion.

**Nick Staikos:** Just you wait.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** And please do, member for Bentleigh. I encourage you to. The member for Frankston is being a bit quiet over there. Are you doing your research as well? \$23 million and a tax saving potentially of \$1.475 million – that is an absolute and utter absurdity. It is not in line with

community values and it is not in line with community expectation. It is just incredible that the Labor government would allow such a circumstance to take place.

Industry experts have told us that Labor's increased taxes make up to 42 per cent of the cost of a new home, with the Urban Development Institute of Australia stating there is a direct and well-documented correlation between property taxes and growing house prices:

... almost half of every mortgage repayment goes towards paying off these taxes.

When will they learn? When will they learn that basic principle that if you tax something more it does not get cheaper? If you tax something more, it gets more expensive. When will they learn that taking genuine tax reform off the agenda is not the answer to getting more Victorians into homes and it is not the answer to making housing more affordable? It is in fact the repellent of that. It will make housing more unaffordable, it will make housing more unavailable and it will mean that housing is further out of reach.

I say to Victorians; I say to you, Acting Speaker Mullahy; I say to government members, those who care to listen; and I say to my colleagues: the people who can be trusted to actually make housing more affordable and more available in this state are not the Labor government. They have had their chance. They have had 10 years to fix this, and they have not. In fact they have stuffed it further. Because of their actions, because of their inaction, they have made housing more unaffordable and unavailable for Victorians. What Victorians truly need at this point in time is a new way of doing things. What they need is to say goodbye and ta-ta to a tired Labor government who have had their chance and who have frankly stuffed it. What we need is a change in government, a Liberal and a National party together, in coalition, working in the interest of Victorians – a Liberal and National party working in coalition, understanding and respecting Victorian taxpayer dollars, Victorians' hard-earned money, and understanding the plight of many vulnerable Victorians who want to get a roof over their head but who cannot get a roof over their head because of the high-taxing regime imposed upon them by this Labor government over the last 10 years. What we need in Victoria at the minute, now more so than ever, is a fresh start. It is an opportunity to say Labor, and the Labor government over the last 10 years, is but a thing of the past. Victorians need a reset and we need it now.

Labor are the people who have caused this problem. The Premier has had a seat at the cabinet table over the last 10 years. The Treasurer has been Treasurer over the last 10 years. It is because –

**Nick Staikos:** Wrap it up, Brad.

**Brad ROWSWELL:** Member for Bentleigh, I have still got 1 minute and 55 seconds to go, and I will be taking all of my time, don't you worry. Sit back, mate. Sit back and relax as I am –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** Order! Through the Chair!

**Brad ROWSWELL:** This is what is referred to at Toastmasters as the crescendo, mate, and I am pleased you are here to listen to it.

They have had 10 years to get this right, and all Victorians know that they cannot be trusted to deliver that. All Victorians know that the lack of integrity with which this government has operated over the last 10 years has impacted them. Victorians know that when Labor say that they are introducing a temporary tax measure, as the head of research at Propertyology has indicated, what that truly means is that there could be more taxes on the horizon. They have had 10 years. The Labor government have had 10 years to get this right, and they have not. Victorians are suffering because of it.

It is policy on the run, introduced in this place shortly after midday today, with a bill briefing at 4:30 and now debated in the chamber at 6 pm. This is no way to run decent, well-considered, thought-through policy that will have a lasting impact on those vulnerable Victorians who simply want a roof over their head. Victorians need a fresh start. We are the parties to deliver that fresh start in November 2026. Between you and me, Acting Speaker Mullahy, I just wish it would come a hell of a lot sooner than two years away.

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh) (18:31): Look, I do not dislike this guy, I have got to say. I do not dislike this guy. I went to school with Brad.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy)**: Correct titles, please.

**Nick STAIKOS**: I went to school with Brad. I remember when we were in year 12 the school production of choice that year was *Les Misérables*, and the member for Sandringham starred in *Les Misérables*. In fact on our last day of school you sang *Bring Him Home*, I remember that.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy)**: Through the Chair, member for Bentleigh.

**Nick STAIKOS**: I remember that. But he is not leading a revolution in this place. He was very, very long odds for the leadership of that kombi van opposition, so he is not leading a revolution in this place. And after that 30-minute contribution, I do not think he is going anywhere. He did declare halfway through that rant that he was on his way to this side of the chamber. We will not have you, member for Sandringham; we will not have you in our caucus.

I have got to say I am really pleased to be speaking on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024, because, frankly, this speaks to our values. It speaks to our values as a government, and it has exposed them for their values. You often hear from members of the opposition about vulnerable Victorians, but what have they ever done for vulnerable Victorians? They have paid lip-service to vulnerable Victorians; they have never actually done anything.

The member for Sandringham declared that a roof over your head is not about bricks and mortar, it is about stability. Isn't that what we have been saying? Isn't that the position of this government? Well, on that side of the house it is just words, because when it comes to actually ensuring that we have the housing for the next generation, this government is looking 30 years into the future – we are looking at what Melbourne is going to look like in the 2050s; we are planning for the next generation – and we are met with complete opposition by those opposite.

We should not be surprised at that, but I sat here for 30 minutes listening to the member for Sandringham's contribution on this bill, and I was absolutely amazed by the things that were coming out of his mouth, including lamenting the fact that 'freestanding family homes are excluded' and saying that people should not be crammed into one-bedroom units.

Well, these tiny homes he is talking about – I have been living in one for the last six years. My tiny home has three bedrooms. It has three bathrooms. It has a front yard, it has a backyard, it has a driveway, it has a garage. I have been living in a townhouse for the last six years, and my townhouse is on a block that used to have just one property; it now has two. I would not consider that a tiny home; I would consider that a family home. The Premier recently said that she wants Victoria to be the townhouse capital of Australia, and I fully support her in that.

You know, way back in 2005 I was elected to Glen Eira council. I was 19 years old, and I remember discussion in the community about inappropriate development centred around this new phenomenon of people with quarter-acre blocks subdividing their properties and building two in the place of one home. Back then some people considered that inappropriate development. But you know what, the community has moved on since then. Everyone except the Liberal Party I think has moved on since then. The reality is in the middle ring of Melbourne we need to use land more efficiently. I would have thought that the Liberal Party would have understood that and would have been supportive of that.

I listened to the member for Sandringham; he was all apoplectic about this bill, where we are actually slashing stamp duty for off-the-plan townhouses, apartments and units. He was all apoplectic about this bill, but then 20 minutes into his contribution he wanted it for more than a year. He was going on about this bill for 20 minutes, but then he wanted more of it. That does not really make much sense. Then he said, 'They've had 10 years to demonstrate that they care about where people live.' Well, member for Sandringham, who is no longer in the chamber, we do care about where people live. We want people to live in your electorate. You do not want more people to live in your electorate. We

want more people to live in the Sandringham electorate. That is why the Suburban Rail Loop starts – where – in the Sandringham electorate. And who is opposing the Suburban Rail Loop? The member for Sandringham.

The member for Sandringham and I are regular guests on a program on Southern FM called *A Newsman and His Music*. It is hosted by Walkley award winning journalist Colin Tyrus. Recently the member for Sandringham was on *A Newsman and His Music* and he said, and I have the transcript in front of me:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

As I said over the weekend when I spoke to media, you can't actually raise a family in a tunnel. You need a home to raise a family, and, you know, the priority of the Suburban Rail Loop over other things that our community needs is simply wrong.

Then you go further down the page and Colin Tyrus says:

You mentioned housing before, and there is a lot of talk about more multistorey housing and particularly affordable housing, which is much needed in our community as you know. What's your attitude to so-called high-rise in activity centres? That is, near railway stations and so on?

What was his response?

Well again the community didn't vote for it. I mean, the government says that they went to two elections saying, you know, that they would introduce a Suburban Rail Loop, and yes they did, and yes they were elected at both of those elections and good on them, but we're only finding out about some of the implications of the Suburban Rail Loop now, including 18-storey high-rise, high-density developments neighbouring residential areas. The community didn't vote for that. It doesn't want that. It's out of step out and out of character with the area.

Well, those 18-storey developments that the member for Sandringham is talking about are on the old Highett Gasworks site on the Nepean Highway. So if the member for Sandringham is saying that we cannot have this sort of development on an old gasworks site on the Nepean Highway on not just the Frankston line but also the new Suburban Rail Loop, between two activity centres, where can you put this development? The answer to that is: not in the electorate of Sandringham, not in the electorate of Brighton, not in any of their electorates – let us push this development to the urban fringe.

You know what? As I said, I have known him a long time, and the member for Sandringham needs to check his privilege, because he has the opportunity to live in the area in which he was raised. Me too; I own a home in Bentleigh. I was born in Bentleigh. I was raised in Bentleigh. I am as Bentleigh as you get. You know what? I visit the 23 schools in my electorate, and I want all of those young people to also have the opportunity to live in Bentleigh. That is what we are about.

When you talk about values, that is the difference between the people on this side of the house and the people on that side of the house.

I will repeat, the member for Sandringham needs to check his privilege because, frankly, that contribution has given me a bit of motivation to get in touch with every millennial and every zoomer in the Sandringham electorate and to tell them: this is what your local member thinks. Your local member believes that unless you are wealthy you should live 2 hours away from Melbourne. Frankly, that is what he thinks.

When it all boils down to it, we have a housing crisis which is just getting worse. As our population grows – and our population is growing for all sorts of reasons – it will get worse and worse. He did not talk about housing supply in his 30 minutes, but if we do not ensure that we are increasing housing supply, it is just going to mean that only the wealthy will be able to afford a roof over their heads. Is that the society that we want? I firmly believe it is the society that those opposite want. That is why I am proud to be Labor: because we believe in dignity. We believe in the dignity that a roof over your head brings. If you do not have stable housing, you do not have a hope for a life of dignity – for a

secure, well-paid job. That is what we believe on this side of the house, and that is what our Premier is absolutely committed to. I commend the bill to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (18:41): I rise to make a contribution on this particular bill. I would like to rename this bill the road to Damascus bill. If you think about Damascus and Paul the Apostle and his trip down the road to Damascus and his conversion to Christianity and supporting Jesus, if you go to the definitions, the road to Damascus is about an important point in a person's life where a great change of idea or belief takes place, usually a reversal of some pre-existing idea or belief. If you actually go back and read *Hansard* from 2017, read the current Treasurer's *Hansard* in the Matter of Public Importance (MPI) and then read the current Treasurer's *Hansard* in the budget of that time and the tax act of that particular time and then you fast forward and you look that the bill we are dealing with now and you particularly look at the current Premier's press release, they have both had a road to Damascus moment.

Back in 2017 the Treasurer, talking about the *Homes for Victorians: Affordability, Access and Choice* policy announcement of the government at that particular time, talked about the fact that:

This government will not stand idly by, watching the benefits of a rising property market returned to increasing fewer hands. We want to ensure that we can broaden accessibility to the housing market and return some stability and comfort to those renting or in community housing.

In other words, they hated people that owned property and might provide a rental property for someone. That is how people actually rent a house. Someone else owns it so they can rent it. But this government seems to have the concept that somehow those people who own a home, who have scraped and saved to buy a house as an investment, as part of their superannuation, should not be able to rent it, or if they do, they should be taxed out of existence to do that. That is what we are seeing in this house. At that particular time the Treasurer talked about the fact that he effectively did not like people that owned houses for rent. He also said:

The Andrews government is not content to sit on its hands while an entire generation is locked out of housing.

Well, I think from 2017 to 2024 we have seen an entire generation locked out of housing by all the property taxes that this particular government has put on – as the Shadow Treasurer said, 55 new and increased taxes since this government came into power, 29 of those taxes on property. That is what has locked people out of the housing market.

He went on to say in his MPI contribution of March 2017 that the:

... concession only exists in this state, and it is about time it became ... more targeted. This will help to tilt the scales back towards buyers who intend to occupy the property as their primary place of residence. This will even the playing field between owner-occupiers and investors, and it aligns with the government's goal of improving home ownership.

Everyone aspires to home ownership. It is the great Australian dream. But this government has done more in living memory to take that dream away from people than anyone else that I know because of those 29 taxes, of the 55 new and increased taxes, that are on property.

And then the Treasurer went on to introduce the changes in the budget that year that took away the stamp duty exemption for investors, and it was there just for those that wanted to buy houses as their primary place of residence.

At that time a very wise person made some comments. The Shadow Treasurer at that time said in answer to what I have spoken about:

What the Treasurer does not understand or chooses not to understand is that off-the-plan projects need a huge amount of pre-purchases before banks will lend developers the money to let them happen. Banks usually require 60, 70 or 80 per cent of projects to be presold before they will finance them.

Surprise, surprise – they want to make sure they have got some guarantee that if they loan the money to a developer to build these properties, they will actually be sold. There are lots of cases at the moment where developers have approvals for development but because they cannot sell enough of them to get



them going and cannot make any money, they are not actually going through with those particular projects. The Shadow Treasurer at the time when on to say:

If you take investors out of the pool for off-the-plan projects, which is the intended effect of this tax increase, you will simply see fewer projects get the go-ahead.

Surprise, surprise. What have we seen since 2017 through to today? We have had fewer projects go ahead because the government changed the rules back in 2017, which took the investors out of the market. They deliberately penalised investors because somehow they hate investors. They hate someone that has capital. They want to socialise everything here in Victoria. As the Shadow Treasurer said:

Fewer projects will be financed, and it will take longer to get them done.

That has been proven to be a very correct statement, which was made by the member for Malvern, the Shadow Treasurer at that time.

**Michael O'Brien** interjected.

**Peter WALSH:** You could.

To continue my road to Damascus theme, if you fast forward we have had a change of beliefs. We have the Treasurer introducing a bill with urgency – introduced this morning and being debated this evening – because of such urgency to put back in place an exemption from stamp duty for investors. Surprise, surprise, surprise. Because there are not enough projects going ahead – surprise, surprise, surprise – there are not enough properties available for renters. Those horrible investors, because the government had penalised them, were not investing and there are not enough properties for renters to have.

If you go to the Premier's press release from Monday 21 October:

More homes, more opportunity

...

Off the plan stamp duty concessions to build more homes

...

With a concession reducing upfront costs for more buyers, developers can look forward to more pre-sale success – which will help meet finance requirements faster and start the construction of new homes sooner.

I think the member for Malvern must have had a word with the Premier and explained how you get more money into the property sector to get more homes built. The press release goes on to say:

Bringing more projects to market sooner will boost housing supply, support the construction sector, and grow the amount of housing available for rent.

Well, talk about a road to Damascus moment – if you actually allow investors to buy units so developers can build those buildings, you will have more supply of property for rent. Surprise, surprise, surprise. I think we have had a reversal of some pre-existing idea or belief that the Treasurer and the Premier – the Allan government – had that if you keep taxing and making it harder for investors, somehow you will still get more properties for rent. They have now realised that that does not happen. We have got this bill before the house at the moment, which we do support, and we opposed this exemption when they took it away. Those on the other side of the chamber are somehow trying to rewrite history or paint us as being against tax reductions. We want to see tax reductions. You go back to those 55 new and increased taxes that we have had over the last decade. You go to the 29 of those taxes that are on property. The way we will increase housing supply here in Victoria, the way will get more people into home ownership and the way will get more properties available for renters is to reduce taxes.

The Housing Industry Association had a report recently that said that more than 40 per cent of the price of a new house and land package is actually state government charges. Do the mums and dads

that are going out there and trying to buy their first home realise that more than 40 per cent of that money they are paying goes to this mob on the other side to waste on cost overruns on major projects here in Melbourne? That \$40 billion on cost overruns on major projects would lead to a huge reduction in taxes on housing and would increase the housing supply here in Victoria. The way we will increase the housing supply is to actually take the monkey of the Allan government's taxes off their back. A 40 per cent reduction in the price of a house and land package by getting rid of all the taxes on those particular projects would make a huge difference to new homebuyers. Yes, we support this reduction. We opposed them actually putting the changes in place in 2017. It is pleasing the government has had their road to Damascus moment and realised that if you keep actually taxing private capital and you keep actually taxing investors, you will have less properties for people to rent, and that is impacting on the rent market. I think they should hang their heads in shame that it has taken this long to realise that.

**Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (18:51):** This is how interested the opposition are in housing: one, two, three members of the coalition are in the house at the moment speaking about housing.

**Peter Walsh:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think it is actually a reflection of the fact that no-one is interested in the member for Frankston.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** There is no point of order.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** They will come in now you are on your feet, Walshy.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** Correct titles and through the Chair.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** What a week it has been, and this has been the first time I have heard anything negative about the announcements this week, unless it was from a member of the opposition of course. The Victorian government has unveiled a series of transformative housing policies over the past week that really promise to transform Melbourne's landscape. First we had the introduction of the 50 new activity centres near Melbourne's tram and train stations. Then we had the first phase of development zones identified, with the 25 initial zones for development, which were primarily in Melbourne's east and south-east, in the Belgrave, Lilydale, Sandringham, Frankston and Glen Waverley train line areas. They were announced. That of course builds on the pilot program, and one of those 10 pilots was in Frankston. As the chair of the community reference group, I have had my finger on the pulse as far as what our community thinks goes, and I think these changes are welcome.

Of course we have got the development contribution reform, which has been welcomed, and today we are talking about a move to encourage development with these stamp duty changes. I have been as confused as the rest of you about some of the speeches we have heard from the opposition. I have always heard the opposition saying that they are the party of aspiration, but here they are saying that they do not want people who buy a \$1 million property to get a tax cut. It just seems like they are a little bit unburdened by common sense and self-doubt maybe. We heard the member for Sandringham say a roof over your head is not about bricks and mortar, it is about stability. If it is not bricks and mortar, what do we make homes out of? Marshmallows? I am honestly just lost. This is a government that is building more houses than ever. We have a massive mandate, and the people of Victoria voted us in to do this.

I also heard from the honourable member for Sandringham that very few people will take this up. It kind of clashes with one of his critiques where he quoted a commentator saying that this will only stimulate around 32,000 sales of homes, and that is meant to be a negative. I am not quite sure about that one. I guess I just wonder overall: what is their plan? It is fine to get up and say, 'We don't like what you're doing. We don't like this announcement. We're NIMBYs. We don't want people living where they grow up. We don't want people living next to me. We don't want more dense apartments and buildings,' but what is their plan? I would say there clearly is not one. I just wonder, though – we have got those opposite talking about the fact that they do support this, but clearly the way they are

speaking is not really supporting it. I think that goes to show they know, as far as polling and as far as their focus groups go, that this is popular, but they do not want to be seen to support –

**Roma Britnell:** Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

**Quorum formed.**

**Nick Staikos** interjected.

**Paul EDBROOKE:** No, member for Bentleigh, I did not upset them. I think they wanted more people to hear what I was saying. So what do people think about this, besides those in the opposition? Well, at Urbis.com:

Major Housing Announcements from Vic Government: A Game Changer for Melbourne's Future.

Where are we? We have got:

... the Property Council of Australia (PCA) and other industry stakeholders have welcomed the initiatives for reform. The PCA sees the news as a crucial step towards increasing housing supply and affordability. The industry has also acknowledged the need for tax concessions to support development within its activity centres. The Urban Development Institute of Australia (UDIA) welcomed the announcement on stamp duty changes and recommended an extended timeframe to stimulate the new apartment market.

As of course they would. We also heard the member for Sandringham saying that 12 months was not enough time for people to make a transaction on a house. Again I scratch my head a bit on that one, and I put myself in the position of some of my constituents in Frankston to give a practical point of view for this. A lot of you in this house, either on this side of the bench or that side of the bench, will have been through this, where you need to go to the bank for a loan. You are looking at building off the plan – you might be looking at a house, building off the plan or one that is already constructed, but let us say building off the plan. The bank will give you a loan-to-value ratio which is generally about 80 per cent, depending on how much money you have got in a deposit, but let us say 80 per cent. So if you are going to buy a \$600,000 property off the plan, you are looking at about \$120,000 in your savings as the deposit. All of a sudden you get told by the Premier, 'With these stamp duty changes we are going to ensure that you are not going to pay stamp duty on the build, just the land.' So your stamp duty goes from around \$32,000 to \$4000, which is a \$28,000 saving. That is about a quarter of your deposit. When you look at LVR and figure that in, that is going to be a significant saving for people, and I think something that gets people across the line if they are near that loan-to-value ratio. There are going to be a lot of people, first home buyers and people getting into the market again, that are looking at this and saying, 'Well, if I can save that money, that means I've got a different LVR and I need a different deposit.' I think that is something that cannot be overlooked.

Again I will not go through the people that are raving about the announcement this week. I was at the press club event and there were people just nodding their heads saying, 'This is fantastic, this is great,' as the minister here was as well. As I said, in my neighbourhood in Frankston I have not heard one negative thing spoken, an email or a text about this. The only negative thing I have heard today was that there has been a rumour that the Frankston City Council, which have obviously been speaking to incumbent councillors, had a bit of a bee in their bonnet about making some housing in Frankston CBD. It looks like when the councillors come back in, perhaps the officers might write to me and say, 'We actually don't want 60 new homes in Frankston CBD next to the train station, near buses, near all the amenities, near sporting grounds.' I kind of wonder where they are getting this from. I hope that the councillors that are voted in this week are a lot more in touch than the last lot, if that is their attitude, because as I have said, I have not heard one negative thing about these announcements this week, especially the stamp duty announcement.

We need to get this in as soon as possible. We need to stimulate more homes being built. We need to stimulate developments off the plan that are in planning and their contracts are signed, and make sure we get them done.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Adjournment*

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

That the house now adjourns.

**Patient transport**

**Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (19:00):** (881) My matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to sort out the mess that patient transport has become for those living in and around Alexandra who require dialysis in Seymour, almost an hour away. The minister needs to find a proper and enduring solution to address the shambles patient transport has become.

By way of background, on 24 September patients were notified by Seymour Health that their transport funded by Ambulance Victoria would cease. This was to happen almost immediately, but I understand it was extended to finish on 8 October. Further, patients were advised that if they could not find their own way there, their treatment too would be discontinued. This is exceptionally distressing as dialysis is a life-saving treatment. I do want to commend the staff at the Seymour hospital, who have shown care, dedication and compassion trying to help patients find a solution to the matter, and it was a real scramble to find a solution in the short term.

National Patient Transport has been deployed in recent weeks, but that too has whiskers on it and has not been reliable. There has been inconsistent pick-up notification of times for pick-up and return. It needs to be booked two weeks in advance despite there being a permanent need. It is not available on Saturday and some patients have treatment on Saturday, so then transport is provided by a two-member ambulance crew which can be diverted to emergencies at any time. The use of ambulances obviously leaves the rest of the community with reduced services or even without access to that emergency assistance.

There are also impacts on the health service. The dialysis machine has to be prepared ahead of the patient's arrival, and the fluid required has a lifetime of 2 hours. If the dialysis patient is late, the fluid has to be discarded and the machine has to be prepared again, thereby incurring additional costs and delays. The Seymour dialysis staff have to be finished with the patients and their paperwork as well as sterilising the machines by 3:30. The staff are put under stress if patients are late.

There are a couple of options. I understand that the state is broke, and Ambulance Victoria have had their fair share of issues. The cost of a private taxi between Alex and Seymour is \$183 each way. I suggest the government undertake a cost-benefit analysis to determine the feasibility of having dialysis chairs in Alexandra. There are currently 10 patients in the Murrindindi shire requiring dialysis, and I also understand that the transport situation is the same for cancer patients requiring treatment. There are solutions, and I urge the minister to intervene to make sure that they are implemented on a permanent basis.

**Werribee Cup**

**Dylan WIGHT (Tarnet) (19:03):** (882) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Racing. I would like to invite the minister to join me later this year at the Werribee racecourse to talk about the Allan Labor government's support for the Werribee Cup, an exciting event held right near my patch in Melbourne's west. The economic impact of horseracing in Victoria is profound. Annually the thoroughbred industry injects \$3.4 billion into Victoria's economy, with \$1.8 billion of that directly benefiting regional areas. My understanding also is half of that is household income. These events are not just about showcasing our excellent jockeys and horses. It is also a key part of our economic development of Victoria's regions and the state as a whole. Racing events like the Werribee Cup are supported by the fantastic equine care facilities located right nearby.

The Werribee International Horse Centre and the University of Melbourne Equine Centre exemplify our region's commitment to excellence in equine care, ensuring the success and safety of these fantastic events. Complementing the WIHC is the University of Melbourne Equine Centre in

Werribee, renowned for its cutting-edge veterinary services. This facility is at the forefront of equine health care, offering extensive diagnostic and treatment services including advanced imaging and emergency orthopaedic care. These centres are pivotal in supporting both local and international racehorses whilst playing a crucial role in the economic development of the western suburbs. Almost every Melbourne Cup winner for the last two decades has come through Werribee. I cannot wait to show the minister the crown jewel in Victorian thoroughbred racing, and I cannot waste to host the minister at these fantastic facilities.

### **Police powers**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (19:05): (883) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Attorney-General in the other place, and the action I seek is an increase in stop-and-search powers for Victoria Police. Last week in Traralgon a security guard was violently assaulted with a hammer by a group of youths. In April I stood in this place and detailed a string of three violent attacks that took place in the valley – two that involved machetes – and urged the state government to get serious on youth crime. I could use every contribution allocated to me in this place to tell stories of violent crime in my electorate and it still would not touch the sides of this issue.

We have recently seen the government backflip on bail penalties, which the opposition had been calling for, and some strengthened stop-and-search powers for police, but they are only in designated areas. Our police do a power of work in keeping our community safe, but this is hampered by legislation that prevents them from doing this to the best of their ability. You only need to listen to the family of the late Dr Ashley Gordon, who was tragically killed during a house invasion earlier this year, for a minute to understand why they are calling for police to have greater stop-and-search powers. Their petition, which I will table next month, has attracted some 6000 signatures. Victorians want this change.

Labor has cut nearly \$20 million from the courts and has cut money from prevention and diversion programs, and statistics show there was a massive 30 per cent increase in crimes committed by 14- to 17-year-olds last year. Our Latrobe Valley streets are becoming more dangerous every day. Our train and bus interchanges are places you now enter with no guarantee of your safety. Our shopping centres are becoming places where it is dangerous to shop and more and more dangerous to even work. This is a wicked and complex issue, and often there are many contributing factors at play, particularly when it comes to young people. There is no solution to this problem, but there are real, decisive actions the state government can take to prevent certain crimes from occurring in the first place, including affording police greater stop-and-search powers.

### **Beaconsfield Reservoir**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (19:07): (884) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water, and the action I seek is for the minister to work with me to coordinate an update from Melbourne Water to my community on the cultural heritage and environmental impact studies relating to the Beaconsfield dam safety project.

I understand the Beaconsfield dam was built over 100 years ago and that significant works are now needed to mitigate risks to downstream communities and to meet the current national guidelines set by the Australian National Committee on Large Dams. As part of the works that are currently underway, a drawdown of water is needed to enable construction work to begin on the dam wall. This slow drawdown of water will occur over a three-year period to allow the vegetation around the edge of the reservoir to migrate with the changing waterline, following advice from environmental specialists at the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research. Once this work has occurred, I am advised, a substantial body of water will remain in the reservoir – over 5 metres in depth – due to variation of the reservoir floor. It is also significant for my community that despite it not being currently required for firefighting water extraction, Beaconsfield Reservoir will remain an available extraction point for aerial firefighting post drawdown should it be required in addition to other water storages in the area.

The native flora and fauna in our community in Melbourne's south-east is incredibly special, and it was great to hear that Melbourne Water will be monitoring the impact of this drawdown on environmental values so they can be protected for future generations. While the Beaconsfield Nature Conservation Reserve has been closed to the community since 1988, I have heard from my community that there is strong interest in what is next for the site, while recognising the fact that there are endangered native species there that we need to protect and preserve. I will continue to discuss with Melbourne Water and with both the Minister for Water and the Minister for Environment options for how we can provide the community with more access to the reserve.

I was pleased to hear about Melbourne Water's plans to work with my community on how best to document a conservation management plan, which will help guide how best to capture the local history of the area in the next phase of their upgrade project. Cultural heritage management plans looking at Aboriginal heritage are important for projects like these, which is why it is great that throughout this process Melbourne Water will engage with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and my local community. I look forward to sharing further updates on this process and hearing how the community can help to capture and preserve our fantastic local history at the Beaconsfield Reservoir.

#### South-West Coast electorate roads

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (19:10): (885) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I ask the minister to meet with Dr Anver Sethwala, a cardiologist from Geelong who drives to and from Warrnambool to provide specialist cardiology services, to explain to him why he should risk his life on our roads while he is trying to save other people's lives. Recently I was contacted by Dr Sethwala, who tells me that he is the only cardiologist in the area. He has tried to hire cardiac professionals to join him to help meet the large unmet demand in the region, to no avail. He commented that the commute on hazardous roads – swerving to miss potholes at high speed, particularly after a long day, and driving back to Geelong in the dark – is deeply concerning to him and dissuading others from working in Warrnambool. He said:

#### [QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Road safety is of the utmost importance, and it is sad to see us jeopardise our safety to serve the community. I plead that work is done on this stretch of the Princes Highway and the Cobden-Warrnambool Road so that we can in turn look after others.

This is outrageous. People do not feel safe driving on our shocking roads. Consequently, they are discouraged from working in our area. This means that regional Victorians have difficulty getting the medical services they need locally. I have been raising these concerns in the Parliament consistently. It is clear we are facing a road crisis in South-West Coast. This is not just unfair to locals but also to visitors who are commuting long distances to provide essential services and other business services. This story highlights the very real and dangerous impact the roads conditions have, not just on everyday commuters but on the ability of the regions to attract and retain critical health professionals. Another recent event concerns a road accident. Emergency services personnel told me that a police car hit a pothole on the way to the scene of an accident and blew a tyre, and the damage was so great they could not turn up.

The Allan government recently announced roads maintenance funding which was allocated in the 2024–25 budget. This reannouncement attempts to mask reduced spending and the neglect of our roads which has led to deterioration at a very dangerous level. This is just insulting to Victorians. Roads need regular preventative maintenance, otherwise they deteriorate to the extent that they need replacing.

There is an old proverb: 'A stitch in time saves nine'. If you do not patch a hole in a garment, it grows to a gaping hole and becomes unwearable, and that is what has happened here. Our roads are riddled with potholes, rutted, cracked and breaking up right across the state. It is not just a pothole here and a pothole there; it is a pothole everywhere. The metrics for road maintenance used are per square metre

per annum. This is the number of potholes they are measuring, and that figure is skyrocketing. It is a sign of complete and utter failure.

#### **Laverton electorate bus services**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (19:13): (886) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is that the minister updates me on the new bus route that is being developed between Tarneit and Laverton North. As the minister knows, earlier this year \$39.7 million was allocated through growth areas infrastructure contribution funding to establish a brand new bus route to connect Tarneit station to Laverton station via new and developing estates in the mighty Truganina and the industrial precinct in Laverton North. As someone who has proudly been advocating for additional bus routes in our growing community, practically since I was first elected, this new route presents a jewel in the crown of what Wyndham's bus network can be.

Currently folks have made great use of the existing Tarneit North FlexiRide service, and this new fixed route has the potential to close off a major public transport black spot in our local community. Just last week I was down talking to locals and businesses at Trug Central shopping centre, which is located in this new and developing part of our suburb right next to a brand new community centre that we have helped build and not too far from the Truganina North education precinct, which yes, we built and opened this year. Right across the road will one day be a future train station that I am keen to see become a reality. A bus that services this area will do absolute marvels, and that is what this new bus route has the potential to be, which is why I would greatly welcome an update from the minister on where we are at in developing this new route.

#### **Anti-vilification legislation**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (19:15): (887) My adjournment matter is for the Attorney-General, and the action I seek is for the government to extend the consultation period on the proposed changes to Victoria's anti-vilification laws to ensure that all Victorians can have a say. I have received many emails from constituents in my electorate who are concerned about the government's proposed changes to Victoria's anti-vilification laws, which would be some of the most far-reaching changes since the laws were legislated. My constituents are concerned about their ability to speak freely on matters of conscience and to adhere to their religious beliefs without the risk of being dragged before a tribunal in costly legal battles. Their concerns are justified. If enacted without amendments, these changes would be a direct and egregious assault on free speech in Victoria under the guise of protecting citizens from harm. The proposed laws would lower the standard for illegal behaviour or speech simply to that which is likely to incite hatred and expand the list of protected attributes from two to 10, including sex and gender identity. Even if the harm had not occurred, the simple fact that something was likely to cause harm would be enough to put Victorians on the line for up to three years in prison.

It is absolutely important that we have strong laws that protect people from discrimination based on their immutable attributes. However, it is equally important that such laws are not based on vague legal definitions and are not open to be weaponised. The problem with making speech illegal based on vague perceptions of hate is deciding who gets to determine what qualifies as hateful speech and what does not. In a democratic society many people passionately disagree about important issues. Therefore freedom of speech is a civil liberty that we cannot take for granted. For example, in the Voice referendum last year there were claims on both sides that the other side was spouting hate, yet scores of Australians supported both 'yes' and 'no'. If these laws had existed then, it could have restricted Australians from genuinely debating a very important issue.

Criminalising harmful speech is not an objective standard, and it will only lead to censorship and self-censorship for fear of saying something that could be misinterpreted as offensive. The proposed laws would cover all forms of communication, including speech, signs, gestures, clothing, social media and even events held on private property, potentially criminalising religious teachings in churches, mosques, synagogues or schools if someone finds them offensive. Many Victorians, including those in faith and multicultural communities, have deeply held and deeply personal beliefs on sensitive

issues like faith, sex, gender and sexuality, and their right to discuss and express these views must be safeguarded. Freedom of speech is critical to our multicultural society in Victoria.

### *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (19:18): (888) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on the homework club grant program delivered under the *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*. This was an important initiative from the last budget which delivered funding to continue implementing 14 African Australian led homework clubs across Victoria to students who require additional tailored support. This was part of an overall budget package worth \$12.2 million.

Last weekend I was delighted to attend the third edition of the Melbourne Afropreneurs Summit at Victoria University, and the action plan and other state government initiatives were the talking points. Thank you to the organisers Africa Media Australia Ltd and Australian Multicultural Media Centre along with Victoria University. It was a wonderful event. It provided a forum to showcase African Australian entrepreneurship and innovation. It was great to see the connections being made at the event and the encouragement, learning, networking and collaboration. It was great to be part of the event supporting and strengthening the African community in Victoria and beyond and the contribution they bring to the socio-economic prosperity of the state.

We also have some amazing organisations supporting our African community locally, including the Multicultural Youth Support Services Inc. Afri-Aus Care is another. I had the pleasure of visiting Afri-Aus Care on many occasions with the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs as well earlier this year together with the Minister for Employment and the member for Mulgrave to see the amazing work taking place there in the Jobs Victoria mentor program. Afri-Aus Care do a power of work providing assistance and support to individuals with a host of exciting and important initiatives, many of which I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand, from the Black Rhinos to South East Community Links youth engagement, Ubuntu peer support and the Empowering African Mothers Project: Ubuntu in Practice just to name a few. I thank the minister and look forward to his response.

### **Country Fire Authority tanker replacement**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (19:20): (889) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to fund the replacement of all CFA fire trucks aged over 30 years in next year's budget. Recently I received a letter from Adrian Straw, who is the Mount Rouse group officer, and he has raised his significant concerns around the age of his fleet. Within the Mount Rouse group there are six brigades. Of those, three of the six tankers are more than 30 years of age – at Gazette, Croxton East and also at Buckley Swamp. Of course this is just a small picture of what is happening across the entirety of the state. Across Victoria there are 474 CFA trucks that are over 26 years of age. There are 230 CFA trucks that are over 31 years of age. This is a real risk because in the former days the specifications of a tanker or a fire truck were much, much different from the safety requirements that we have today. It is simply not safe to take these trucks into some fires, because the firefighters stand on the back of the trucks, so they are exposed to the heat and the flames and the smoke and also falling debris and branches which might fall on top of the truck, rather than on a modern vehicle, where those firefighters – those volunteers – travel in the cabin.

We also know that we need to put the safety of our volunteers first. Our volunteers are giving up their time and their energy not just in turning up for fires but also for all the training that is done. We know that whenever there is a show, whenever there is an event that needs some fundraising, the CFA volunteers are on the back of their trucks helping out. I particularly thank all of the CFA volunteers who help out every year to raise money for the Good Friday Appeal. I always take part in that with the CFA vols, and I am very proud to do so.

The other side of this of course is that our property owners are paying more and more as part of their fire services property levy. As I said, Adrian has written to me. He is currently paying \$1105 this year



towards the fire services property levy. That is an increase of almost 50 per cent – in fact 49.5 per cent. All Adrian is asking for is to make sure that that money is put towards equipment that will support CFA volunteers so that they can protect country people and country property. I support the work and commend the work of all of our CFA volunteers, and I ask the minister to back all of our volunteers in. I ask the minister to ensure that there is sufficient funding to make sure that all of our CFA trucks aged over 30 years in particular are replaced and to ensure that funding is provided in next year's budget.

### **Jamieson Way Community Centre**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:23): (890) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to Jamieson Way Community Centre, a place she has already visited on announcement previously. The suburb of Point Cook of course, as many here would know, particularly those in the western and northern suburbs, is a growing suburb. Since 1996 it has gone from 50 residents – except for the RAAF base – to 70,000-plus residents today; an extraordinary growth. This government continues to invest in Point Cook, most recently announcing a new kindergarten alongside the next school that we will build in Point Cook. The government has also demonstrated its support for children across the community that I represent through the Jamieson Way upgrades, and apart from redeveloping the community centre we are also building a third kindergarten room for 33 children and upgrading the play area and the maternal child and health spaces. The front entrance is actually already open, and it is looking sensational. I look forward to the minister having an opportunity to visit what is an important project alongside Wyndham council.

### **Responses**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:24): The member for Eildon raised a matter for the Minister for Health to sort out patient transport in and out of Alexandra for those who need dialysis in Seymour, and I will pass that matter on.

The member for Tarneit is a very strong supporter of our sport of racing and the jobs that it creates, and I want to thank the member for Tarneit for his matter. I would be very pleased to visit the Werribee racecourse and Racing Victoria's international quarantine centre with him to see the wonderful contribution that racing is making to our community in Melbourne's west.

The Allan Labor government of course is a big supporter of racing and the industry right throughout Victoria and understands the contribution that the industry is making to jobs, to the economy and to the local community. The Victorian racing industry generates some \$4.7 billion in economic activity across the state. Not only that, but it sustains some 34,900 full-time equivalent jobs locally every year. My friend the member for Tarneit also noted that thoroughbred racing alone contributes some \$3.4 billion to the economy annually – 25,000 jobs across our state. Critically \$1.17 billion of that economic activity is generated in regional Victoria, where the industry supports some 9000 full-time equivalent jobs. I know our regional MPs across the chamber understand the value of the racing industry and the sport for jobs and tourism investment right across our regions. \$1.3 billion and nearly 10,000 of those jobs are generated out of Melbourne, which includes the Werribee racecourse.

That is why our government is committed to providing some \$87 million during this term to support our Victorian Racing Industry Fund and our Major Racing Events Fund. That fund supports racing clubs and controlling bodies, state-of-the-art training and racing infrastructure and events for marketing and delivery of support for those promotions and supports country clubs to maintain their customer facilities to the highest standards to keep people coming back and generate local revenue at clubs. It has been a very popular program, with grants of up to \$100,000 out of that fund. We have also seen the support for breeding and the sales sector and of course for ensuring the welfare of our participants, human and equine, the industry's number one priority. We have got to look after the

jockeys that make it happen. They are very courageous and brave and very talented, but for them, their families and our horses, we want to make sure their welfare comes first.

Of course the Werribee International Horse Centre and the University of Melbourne Equine Centre in Werribee have been very important components of the industry's support of animal welfare. The quarantine centre is also an essential part of ensuring the ongoing participation in our biggest and best races of horses from all over the world. The appeal of the Melbourne and Caulfield cups and the Cox Plate on the international stage is a testament to the quality and prestige of the Victorian Spring Racing Carnival. I very much look forward to joining the member for Tarneit at Werribee. I am sure he is gearing up for a big Werribee Cup in December.

The member for Morwell raised a matter for the Attorney-General in the other place to increase the stop-and-search powers of Victoria Police members, and he related the matters of an assault in his electorate. I will be sure to pass those matters on. The member for Pakenham raised a matter for the Minister for Water seeking an update around coordinating what Melbourne Water's work is around the cultural safety plans for the Beaconsfield dam project. She went into the details of that project, which is important in her electorate. The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety with regard to a Geelong cardiologist who she believes is risking his life on the roads to provide healthcare services to locals across the south-west. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport seeking an update on the bus route between Tarneit and Laverton North. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Attorney-General in the other place seeking the extension of the consultation period with regard to changes to the anti-vilification laws, which I know she has worked extremely hard on in her leadership role and her work with stakeholders and the community. I will be sure to pass that on to the Attorney.

The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for Education and Deputy Premier seeking the latest update on the grants programs and how they are affecting communities in his electorate with regard to VACAP, the *Victorian African Communities Action Plan*. As a past chair of VACAP along with the member for Sunbury and the member for Footscray, I know it does amazing work. I give a shout-out to the Somali community in my own electorate in West Heidelberg. I know the member for Clarinda has a significant community, and that program is providing a lot of great results. The member for Lowan raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services in the other place to fund the replacement of CFA fire trucks aged over 30 years. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the Minister for Children in the other place to join him at Jamieson Way Community Centre, which is providing great services to local families in his mighty electorate of Point Cook.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Correct weight, Minister for Racing. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

**House adjourned 7:30 pm.**