

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 13 November 2024

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Wednesday 13 November 2024

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Drugs, Poisons And Controlled Substances Amendment (Paramedic Practitioners) 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) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to establish paramedic practitioners as a class of registered paramedics authorised to obtain, possess, use, sell and supply certain substances and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:34): I ask the minister for 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) (09:34): This bill amends the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to establish paramedic practitioners as a class of registered paramedics authorised as paramedic practitioners to autonomously obtain, possess, use, supply, administer and prescribe scheduled medicines.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

The SPEAKER (09:35): General business, notices of motion 25 to 27 and order of the day 4, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Petitions

Firewood

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) presented a petition bearing 270 signatures:

Issue:

This petition is to draw to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the decision to end Victorian native hardwood forestry has resulted in the decimation of the Victorian firewood industry. Without access to the State Forest firewood supplies, tens of thousands of Victorians will be forced to pay more for their heating, cooking and hot water. Victorians require the ability to purchase sustainably harvested firewood from Victorian forests, to ensure they can heat their homes as a basic right. Sustainably sourced firewood as a heating and cooking fuel facts: • Relied upon by more than 30% of residents in rural areas • A carbon neutral fuel source, on par with other renewable energy sources • Local harvesting reduces the cost of firewood, due to reduced transport expense • Most affordable source of heating for homes/helps with cost of living • Additionally used recreationally for camping, fire pits/braziers, secondary heating & ambiance • Stops the market for illegally harvested firewood and the inevitable environmental damage

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria guarantee a secure sustainable supply of Victorian firewood for residential heating and cooking from State reserves that have been sustainably managed for decades.

Ordered that the petition be considered tomorrow.

*Bills***Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024***Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (09:36): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024*Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (09:36): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024.

*Motions***Government performance**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Allan Labor government for signing multiple multibillion-dollar Suburban Rail Loop contracts before submitting its project proposal in order to receive funding from the Commonwealth and condemns the Minister for Transport Infrastructure for misleading the house under the cover of parliamentary privilege by denying this in question time yesterday.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut the \$300 School Start bonus when they were last in government, driving up the cost of living and making life harder for busy families, including in the community that I represent in Point Cook.

Leave refused.

Government performance

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (09:37): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Melton for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when motor vehicle theft in Melton West increased by 185 per cent in the last 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut the young readers program when they were last in government, driving up the cost of living for families and making it harder for kids in my community of Tarneit.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Ringwood for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when residential aggravated burglaries in Mitcham have actually increased by 325 per cent in the last 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut Free Fruit Friday when they were last in government, driving up the cost of living and making life harder for Victorian families in the Laverton electorate.

Leave refused.

Government performance

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Point Cook for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when theft from vehicles in the suburb of Point Cook has increased 43 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 vacancies of police across the state. Shame!

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for staying silent when the former Morrison government announced devastating price hikes to higher education when they were last in government, driving up the cost of getting a degree and making life harder for Victorians in Kororoit.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bass for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when residential burglaries in Wonthaggi increased 250 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut Take a Break funding, which supported families to access flexible occasional child care, driving up the cost of living and making life harder for Victorians in the community of Melton.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for St Albans for failing to reach a pay deal with Victoria Police at a time when property and deception offences in Sunshine North increased by 28 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut \$3.7 million in funding for FReeZA, denying children access to instruments and music, driving up the cost of living, and making life harder for Victorians in the community of Narre Warren North.

Leave refused.

Government performance

David HODGETT (Croydon) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bayswater for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when retail theft in the suburb of Bayswater increased 73 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut the first home owner grant when they were last in government, making it harder for Victorians to buy their first home in communities like Greenvale.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Niddrie for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when theft offences in the suburb of Niddrie increased by 29 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they abolished the rural and regional first home buyers bonus of up to \$17,500 when they were last in government, driving up the cost of buying a home and making life harder for Victorians in the community of Bass.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Box Hill for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when theft from a motor vehicle in Blackburn South increased 43 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut funding for multicultural affairs by nearly \$25 million when they were last in government, driving up the cost of living and making life harder for Victorians in the community of Thomastown.

Leave refused.

Government performance

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:43): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Carrum for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when crimes against the person in Carrum Downs increased by 20 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut funding for social housing by two-thirds when they were last in government, making it harder for Victorians to have a home in the community of Yan Yean.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Cranbourne for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when residential aggravated burglaries in Botanic Ridge increased 700 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they tried to axe Labor's level crossing removal program, cutting jobs and making life harder for Victorians in the community of Sunbury.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (09:45): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Eltham for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when theft from a motor vehicle in the suburb of Eltham increased by 133 per cent over 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies remaining statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Katie HALL (Footscray) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they tried to close Labor's West Gate Tunnel Project, cutting jobs and making life harder for Victorians in the community of Footscray.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Chris CREWTHER (Mornington) (09:46): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Frankston for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when residential burglaries in Frankston South increased 82 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their planned job cuts during a cost-of-living crisis, including the 4000 jobs that will be constructing the Suburban Rail Loop.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Hastings for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when criminal property damage in Somerville increased 73 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (09:47): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut funding for childcare services in Ballarat when they were last in government, driving up the cost of living and making life harder for families in the community of Wendouree.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (09:48): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the Labor member for Monbulk for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when crimes against the person in Cockatoo increased 70 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:48): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they gutted Ballarat TAFE when they were last in government, driving up the cost of living and making life harder for Victorians in the community of Eureka.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:48): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Mordialloc for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when theft from motor vehicle in Aspendale has increased 48 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Opposition performance

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Victorian Liberal Party for their history of cuts and closures after they cut \$4.9 million and closed 24 beds from the Geelong hospital when they were last in government, making life harder for sick Victorians in the community of Geelong.

Leave refused.

Government performance

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Narre Warren South for failing to reach a pay deal with police when residential burglaries in Hampton Park increased by 21 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:49): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when property offences in the suburb of Pakenham have increased 34 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (09:50): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the ever-absent member for South Barwon for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when serious assaults in Grovedale have increased by 30 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:50): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Yan Yean for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when residential aggravated burglaries in Doreen increased 366 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:51): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Ripon for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when crimes against the person in Maryborough increased 18 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:51): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Glen Waverley for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when motor vehicle theft in Vermont South increased by 78 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:52): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Ashwood for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when crimes against the person in Chadstone have increased by 35 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:52): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Greenvale for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when motor vehicle theft in Roxburgh Park increased 44 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (09:52): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Northcote for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when residential aggravated burglaries in Thornbury increased 65 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:53): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Ripon for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when crimes against the person in Maryborough increased 18 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:53): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bentleigh for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when assaults in Moorabbin increased 105 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:53): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Bellarine for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when criminal property damage in St Leonards increased 64 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (09:54): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the Premier and the member for Eureka for failing to reach a pay deal with police at a time when residential burglaries have increased 86 per cent in 12 months and when there are more than 1000 police vacancies statewide.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Croydon electorate roads

David HODGETT (Croydon) (09:55): I rise to talk on the state of the median strips across the Croydon electorate, which are disgraceful, with overgrown grass, out-of-control weeds, broken branches and rubbish continuing to litter these areas. Time and time again I have raised this matter with the minister, with responses stating that the long grass is not a priority. On the rare occasions that the grass is mowed, the issue continues – overgrown grass recurring due to the very poor regularity of the maintenance schedule. My office has been inundated with complaints over the lack of maintenance being undertaken by VicRoads along Dorset Road, Mount Dandenong Road and Maroondah Highway – major arterial roads in the Croydon electorate, and these are only to name but a few.

Residents should be able to drive around their suburbs and see mowed and tidy median strips. Constituents deserve to live in an area they can be proud of. The overgrown median strips make the electorate look like it is neglected and uncared for, with the government dismissing it and saying it is not a priority. Some of these median strips are so overgrown they impede drivers' vision – their line of sight – when they are trying to turn, thus the potential for an accident and someone being seriously injured is heightened. The government must ensure that the upkeep of median strips is carried out on a more regular basis as part of a road maintenance plan to ensure the safety of all road users and to ensure the people of Croydon can be proud of their electorate.

Manufacturing sector

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (09:56): One of the best parts of my job as the Minister for Jobs and Industry is visiting Victorian manufacturers. The Victorian manufacturing sector is worth over \$33 billion to the state's economy and provides over 260,000 jobs across this state. These numbers are impressive, but just as impressive are the individual stories behind these numbers. Recently I visited Australia's largest pillow and quilt manufacturer, John Cotton, with the member for Broadmeadows. Established with the help of funding from the Victorian government, I got to see the new production line that has been put in place which combines robotics and ultrasonic bonding. Then there is Essential Flavours in Carrum, which I visited alongside the member for Carrum. With a Made in Victoria grant this company invested \$1.7 million to continue crafting amazing flavours for brands such as Nestlé and Bulla. Another highlight was opening Pfizer's new Mulgrave facility with the member for Mulgrave. This facility will ensure that even more life-saving treatments for breast, ovarian, bladder and other cancers are manufactured right here in Victoria. I recently visited other companies such as Sealed Air, Concept Caravans, Warrnambool Timber Industries, Mondalez International, ARB Global and IDT Australia – all fantastic facilities here in Victoria.

Country Fire Authority

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (09:57): On the cusp of what is forecast to be another very, very troublesome fire season, here is what our local CFA captains have been told by their local office. They all got this local email:

... be aware that due to further ongoing staffing issues the District Office may be closed temporarily at times over the next few weeks.

This is on the verge of summer.

The phones may also be diverted to another District ...

And it goes on to say:

... the front door may be locked.

This is in a period when CFA operational volunteers have dropped by around 2000 over the past five years, leaving it unable to gain the strike teams it needs to fight a campaign fire. All this is while bushfire loads in East Gippsland have been allowed to again build up to an all-time high through lack of fuel reduction burning. So we have seen a massive reduction in volunteers and allowed fuel loads to increase, and now we are keeping the doors shut on the local CFA office. This is only going to end one way, and that is in another massive fire, and this government will have to take some responsibility for it.

The Australian Workers' Union and the Community and Public Sector Union have stated they are considering taking the government to Fair Work over the loss of 208 Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action jobs – 118 in forest fire management. All this is while we are about to commence another round of costly brumby shooting in East Gippsland, which the majority of locals are opposed to. How did we ever arrive at a point in time where shooting brumbies is more important than funding our fire defences?

Eureka electorate events

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:59): It was all on last weekend in Eureka, with some amazing family events happening across Ballarat, Moorabool shire and Golden Plains. While, sadly, the Ballarat show is not happening this year, it was still great to get together for the annual Ballarat show dinner on Friday night with the Ballarat Agricultural and Pastoral Society. I join everyone in looking forward to all the festivities coming back next year in its wonderful new home.

On Saturday I attended the Ballarat Indian Association's Diwali event at Fed Uni. The Festival of Lights event was wonderful, showcasing some beautiful performances from the local community. It was great to see so many people from so many backgrounds coming together to celebrate.

Sunday was a big day for the community. The Hide + Seek Festival was on in Bacchus Marsh, and I went along for their A Day on the Village Green. It was great to watch the Unite Foundation dancers perform and to see so many families out and about enjoying the great weather and family fun.

Finally, I ended the weekend by heading along to the Bunjil's Lookout community gathering in Maude. The day featured everything from science experiments to CPR training and to local markets, and it was an absolute joy. An added bonus was that I got to stock up on one of my favourite wines from Rowsley Fault winery.

Eildon electorate primary schools

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:00): It is a season of sesquicentenaries, with Merrijig Primary School, Christmas Hills Primary School and Woori Yallock Primary School all celebrating their 150-year milestone in October. At each school students, teachers and parents did an excellent job in marking the occasion.

Woori Yallock began in a tent on a 5-acre site with 15 students in 1872, erected by public subscription at a cost of £14. In 1874 when the school fell under government regulations the Education Department had to lease the school back from the parents at a cost of one shilling per week. Woori Yallock Primary School captains Milla Robertson, Tyson Warren and Molly Benson spoke so well to the large audience who gathered for the celebrations. Their enthusiasm for their school, principal and teachers was evident, and I wish them the best for next year.

Christmas Hills Primary School organised a wonderful celebration for their 150th. The small school pulled in a big crowd with loads of activities for all. They had an envious collection of letters from the early days, which showed things were not always easy. Whilst the principal borrowed a table and a few rough bush seats, he wrote to the department outlining his needs, which included a blackboard, a bell, a whistle and a map of the world.

I was sorry to miss Merrijig Primary School's 150th celebration. The school went all out with games and activities, encouraging families to dress up in old-fashioned attire. Impressively, the original school building is still standing and being used today. Merrijig clearly had the runs on the board there because it was built by those who knew how to build.

Point Cook electorate sport

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:02): I had the pleasure of meeting a very talented young badminton player from Point Cook. Ira recently won a silver medal at the Badminton National Championships, in Ballarat no less, alongside winning a gold medal with the Victorian team. She is a wonderful person, and so is her family. For all the hard work and motivation that it took to achieve this great accomplishment at the start of her sporting career, I hope to see her at many other sporting events nationally and internationally. And, Ira, I hope your sister gets a few wins against you too.

It has been a great year for sport in Point Cook. I also had the opportunity to participate in Walking Football 4 Health, which puts teams together to play a modified version of soccer. Walking football is fun; it is a family-friendly activity that keeps people active and social. They were recently in Parliament, and I thank Mick Trim for his passion for the sport, which is unmatched.

Sanctuary Lakes Point Cook Probus

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:03): On another note, I would like to extend my congratulations to Sanctuary Lakes Point Cook Probus for recently celebrating their 10-year anniversary. I was invited to attend their anniversary event and celebrate the history of Probus, which I learned so much more about. Thank you to the terrific emcee Eva Duggan, and my special

congratulations to the member who achieved life membership Cheryl Hughes, who really drags the club together – what an extraordinary person – and to the many members who got their 10-year membership medallions, all of them founding members as well. Congratulations, and keep up the terrific work.

Housing

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:03): I wish to rise this morning to make comment on the government's Big Housing Build. It is the fourth anniversary this month of that commitment the government made. The former Premier, Premier Andrews, stood before the people of Victoria and said, 'We will increase public housing—social housing by 10 per cent.' And here we are, four years later, and where are they with this commitment? This commitment has fallen well short. This government is not even a third of the way. They are not there yet on providing public housing. The Premier made a commitment to the homeless, to the needy and to the desperate in Victoria that there would be 8600 new homes by this time. And where are we at? Barely 2600. At the same time this complete lack of performance has seen the Victorian housing register, the list of people desperate for a home, grow exponentially over that time. And just in the last reporting quarter 3000 extra families were added to that list. Can you believe it? Three thousand more families were added in one quarter over what this government has been able to provide in housing in four years. It is a terrible indictment. And not only is there poor performance there, but the overall bed numbers for the homeless in Victoria continue to decline – 3000 fewer beds are available to the homeless of Victoria.

Motor neurone disease

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (10:05): I recently joined several of my colleagues, friends and community members to walk around Lake Pakenham in support of MND Victoria and the wonderful member for Pakenham. As we all know, the member for Pakenham has recently had a diagnosis of motor neurone disease. The fifth annual Walk to Support saw hundreds of people don blue shirts and walk or wheel to raise awareness and funds for MND Victoria. MND Victoria are a not-for-profit delivering care, support and vital assistive equipment to people living with MND. They also undertake crucial research into the cause of and cure for the disease. The member for Pakenham has handled her diagnosis with grace and courage, and we are all just so proud of the way that she is raising awareness about the beast while continuing to serve her community.

It was also wonderful to see nine-year-old Finn Cadman and his mum Colleen there too. Finn attends Hillsmeade Primary School in my electorate. At that age he is such a passionate advocate for MND after his grandpa, also known as Glampa, was diagnosed with the disease this year. He managed to raise some \$6000 at the Great MND Relay earlier this year, making him Victoria's top fundraiser. His dedication to the cause has seen him visit our Parliament as well as meet several MPs and the Premier too. We keep fighting for the member for Pakenham.

Renewable energy infrastructure

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:06): The rapid development of renewable energy projects across my electorate has raised significant concerns among residents and environmentalists regarding their impact on local biodiversity and native wildlife. Projects like the Goorambat East solar facility, Glenrowan solar farm, Cooba solar farm and others in Winton, Ruffly and the Strathbogie Ranges are either underway, already built or about to begin. With each new project we see large areas of land cleared, hundreds of trees removed and constant activity disrupting natural habitats. While national attention has been drawn to gliders and koalas, here we are seeing local species like birds, bats, insects and unique plant life facing similar threats. Many residents have shared photos of injured animals appearing on their properties and displaced by nearby construction. We know these projects are already challenged by issues like insufficient community consultation, poor site selection and potential harm to local wine and agricultural industries. Now we are witnessing an environmental toll that contradicts the very principles these projects claim to uphold. Renewable energy projects in the region serve a purpose, there is no doubt, but there are a lot of factors that need improvement. If this

government or the corporations in charge of these projects will not do it, then it is crucial that our local wildlife groups receive the resources and support needed to protect our native species as construction ramps up across the region.

Middle East conflict

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:08): Thank you to Elia Melhem, his family and all of those associated with Lebanese Forces Melbourne for hosting such a wonderful gala dinner on Saturday evening, which raised tens of thousands of dollars for displaced communities in South Lebanon. This gala coincided with a visit to Victoria of Mr Pierre Bou Assi, a member of the Lebanese Parliament for the Baabda District and a past Minister of Social Affairs in Lebanon. Lebanese Forces in Melbourne are working together with the broader Lebanese community to ensure the dignity of communities in South Lebanon and are working tirelessly for peace, stability and good government in Lebanon, which is what the Lebanese community here in Melbourne wish to see and what the Lebanese community abroad in Lebanon of course deserve.

Remembrance Day

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (10:09): Thank you to Kevin and all of the members of the Craigieburn War Memorial and Remembrance Committee for their tireless work in ensuring the memories of those who served our nation and gave their lives are never forgotten, nor their impact in preserving the democratic freedoms and values we all cherish today. I was delighted to join with Maria Vamvakinou, the federal member for Calwell, and Basem Abdo, the federal Labor candidate for Calwell, and so many from across our community at Craigieburn War Memorial this week for a truly moving ceremony in remembrance of those from Craigieburn and beyond who served our nation in war and gave their lives to ensure that we enjoy the freedoms that we do today.

Kew electorate colouring competition

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:09): Last week I hosted afternoon tea in my office for the winners and runners-up of my Halloween colouring-in competition. With hundreds of creative entries from primary school students across the electorate, it was incredibly difficult to judge and select the winning entries, but I give my congratulations to the winners: Will from Andale School, Evie from Boroondara Park Primary, Cleo from Chatham Primary, Chloe from Giant Steps, Allan from Greythorn Primary, Elise from Kew Primary School, Charlotte from Ruyton Girls' School, Caylee from Sacred Heart Primary and Miles from Trinity Grammar. Congratulations to the runners-up from each school as well: Mallea from Andale, Sajjad from Belmore School, Jayden from Boroondara Park, Claire from Chatham Primary, Angus from Giant Steps, Emilia from Greythorn Primary, Jana from Greythorn Primary, Evelyn from Greythorn Primary, Cataleya from Kew Primary, Olivia from Ruyton Girls' School, Isha from Ruyton Girls' School, Charlotte from Sacred Heart Primary and Enzo from Trinity Grammar. Congratulations to you all, and I hope you will be putting entries into our Christmas card design competition.

Kew electorate road safety

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:10): Road safety is always on the front of our mind, and more so at the moment given the tragedies that have happened across Victoria, but can I bring the house's attention to the number 16 tram route, which terminates at the top of Glenferrie Road with a T-intersection at Cotham Road. This is a very busy intersection that services many students daily and desperately needs a pedestrian crossing moved closer to the tram terminus so it is a safe place for students and pedestrians to cross every day.

Tertiary Scholarship Fund

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:11): Congratulations to this year's winners of the Tertiary Scholarship Fund awards of excellence. Established in 2005 by Mr Yin Choi Lam, the owner of Mekong Pho on Swanston Street, with the aim of encouraging academic excellence and community

involvement. This is a fantastic initiative, and it was great fun presenting some of the awards. Congratulations once again to all the recipients of 2024.

Diwali

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:11): Happy Diwali to all those celebrating. It has been wonderful to join in celebrating, together with friends, colleagues and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, across Clarinda and across the south-east, including Kingston Diwali organised by Aumsai Sansthan Temple. I hope the Festival of Lights has filled homes with light, hearts with love and days with success and joy. And again, I wish all Victorians a happy and prosperous Diwali.

Kathina ceremony

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (10:12): The Buddhist community in Clarinda is celebrating the Kathina ceremony, also known as the Robe offering or Robe presentation to Buddhist monks. It marks the end of the three-month Rains Retreat period.

Uncle Robbie Thorpe

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (10:12): Krauatungulung elder and Richmond local Uncle Robbie Thorpe has been fighting for First Nations justice in the courts since the 1980s. He first challenged the Australian government in 1982 over their failure to protect First Nations people and their complicity in genocidal crimes of colonisation. He argues that requiring any prosecutions of genocide in Australia to obtain written confirmation from the Attorney-General of a government that itself was founded on genocide is a glaring conflict of interest and flies in the face of international law and the genocide convention. This week Uncle Robbie Thorpe continues his fight, taking the Attorney-General to Federal Court for complicity in genocide and asking whether the constitution protects Aboriginal camps and Aboriginal remains from desecration. Today I want to recognise Uncle Robbie's pursuit of justice for his ancestors, for the earth and for all our children's children. His battles will be remembered as the existential questions of our time, questions that our governments still refuse to confront. Thank you, Uncle Robbie. This always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

Eleanor Bryant

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:13): Eleanor Bryant tragically lost her life earlier this week doing what she always did – putting children first. She was a wife, a mother of two and a proud member of staff of the Macedon Ranges Montessori Pre-School in the neighbouring Macedon electorate. She lost her life protecting children in her care as an out-of-control vehicle entered the kindergarten precinct on Monday afternoon. The outpouring of grief locally is a demonstration of the regard in which she was held. A friend of mine and local Alicia, whose own daughter Marlee has been under Eleanor's care, shared online the following:

[NAME AND QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Eleanor, you made such an impact on Marlee's life. You were her biggest advocate, her game changer, and I would call you her constant supporter. If Marlee grows up to be confident and able to speak freely, it will be because of you. Our hearts are broken. You were one of the kindest, most dedicated people, changing lives for the better.

To Eleanor's children, her husband, her extended family and her friends, I share our deepest, most heartfelt condolences. We have lost a local hero. May you rest in peace.

St Paul's Anglican Grammar School, Warragul

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:15): I want to congratulate students from St Paul's Anglican Grammar School in Warragul for their very successful trip to Tournament of Minds. Two teams took part in the state finals at La Trobe University in September and did exceptionally well. One team was able to progress to the international final in Sydney in November, which was a great achievement. Seven students from St Paul's took on other teams from countries including New Zealand, the United

Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Hong Kong. Competing in the STEM challenge, students were put to the test with a longer 3-hour challenge followed by a far more challenging immediate response test. The team from Warragul secured an honours result, an exceptional and hard-fought result I know they are very proud of. Well done to all the students and their families who supported them.

Trafalgar Golf Club

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:16): I would like to shout-out to the Trafalgar Golf Club, who had their annual pro-am last week. This pro-am was attended by golfers from around the country and around our local area. They do an exceptionally good job for a volunteer-run golf course, and the golf course was in fantastic nick. I had the pleasure of playing on this day. Unfortunately I think I dragged our team down, but a big shout-out to the Trafalgar Golf Club for putting on a spectacular day.

Caroline Springs RSL

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (10:16): The Caroline Springs RSL Remembrance Day commemoration was yet again a well-attended and moving service. Thank you to Caroline Springs RSL president Andy Marshall and of course secretary Ross Wiltshire, the entire executive and all of the volunteers, who made the service so special. Like most community events, it takes a village to bring people together, and this year's service did that on Monday to absolute perfection. The entire community once again came together to remember those that gave the ultimate sacrifice.

The Caroline Springs RSL made the service complete by including various school and community groups from across our electorate. The opening prayer was read by captain Chad Cole from the Salvation Army, the *Prayer for the Fallen* was read by Jessica Reid from Lakeview college, and prayers for the ADF, the poem *We Shall Keep the Faith* and the poem *The Poppy* were all read by students from Gilson College. The prayer for the emergency services was read by Jordan Doidge from Victoria University Secondary College, and the last post was performed beautifully by instrument by Sithuli De Silva from Southern Cross Grammar. The Australian national anthem was sung by Angelica Krstevska, also from Southern Cross Grammar, and she has quite a beautiful voice. Claire Mouser and the local scouts did all of the work behind the scenes to ensure that everything ran smoothly.

Again, a huge thankyou to Caroline Springs RSL. We really appreciate the effort that goes into making these services happen. Lest we forget.

Melton City Council

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:18): I rise today to congratulate the re-election of Melton city councillors Steve Abboushi, Bob Turner, Ashleigh Vandenberg, Kathy Majdlik, Julie Shannon, Lara Carli and Sophie Ramsey. I also extend a warm welcome to the new councillors Brandi Morris, John Verdon and Phillip Zada. I would like to acknowledge Brandi, who has been a member of my staff. While I am saddened to see her leave, I am thrilled to see her serving our community. I trust that all councillors, new and returning, will make addressing our community's needs their top priority.

In particular, I call on the council to finally deliver on the promise of a sound wall for Silverdale estate. As I have noted in this chamber previously, the council initially committed to this project in 2018 but later withdrew their commitment, leaving Silverdale residents frustrated and unprotected from severe noise impacts. I have raised this issue in Parliament multiple times, and I am hopeful that this new council will demonstrate the leadership needed to rectify the situation for the Silverdale community. Having seen legal advice, I believe the council is fortunate not to have faced a class action on this matter already. Considering council's budget for the 2024–25 financial year, with projects having an operating surplus in excess of \$370 million, I urge this new council to act with integrity and deliver the sound wall that the Silverdale residents have been waiting for. I look forward to working with the elected councillors to deliver the needs of the Melton community and to finally deliver on the Silverdale sound wall.

Housing

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:19): Last week I joined the team from Homes Victoria, the local office, and Alchemy Construct to celebrate the start of construction for the Geelong social housing project being delivered through the Victorian government's Big Housing Build. The design of the 54 homes in Geelong includes features like double-glazed windows, making it easier for renters to stay cool in summer and warm in winter. This new housing is also perfectly situated near Geelong city centre, giving residents great access to goods and services they need, as well as being close to public transport. A highlight of this development is the importance of social procurement, providing opportunities to engage local First Nations businesses and trades. We will also see the involvement of apprentices, cadets and trainees. It is providing opportunities for local people to build their skills and work on a building of this size.

This project is just one of hundreds being delivered by the state government as part of the Big Housing Build. To date, the Big Housing Build has delivered an investment of \$194 million with 1931 jobs created in the Greater Geelong local government area. As part of the Big Housing Build and other funding streams, we have completed over 470 new homes. We are also in the process of maintaining and upgrading 1477 homes in the area. There is real excitement across Geelong with the commencement of this build. The Allan Labor government is committed to making the new homes a safe, connected and thriving place for the residents that will live there.

Knox Community Gardens

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:21): I would just like to say a big happy 40th birthday to the Knox Community Gardens. It was wonderful to be out there recently with the volunteer team as part of a huge open day for our community in Knox. They have been in our community providing fantastic plots with the best views anywhere this side of the Yarra, and I want to say thank you to each and every one of them.

Templeton Primary School

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:21): We have just officially opened the new buildings at Templeton Primary School, a wonderful school in the heart of our community in Wantirna. Thank you to Rodney McKinlay the principal, to the leadership team, to all of the families, the staff and the students for all your patience. We have now delivered what has affectionately become known as the 'white house' – a double-story, new senior learning building. They are absolutely some of the best facilities that we have opened since I was elected as the member for Bayswater in 2018. I am very proud to have secured this funding commitment and to now see kids using the facilities they absolutely deserve.

Boronia West Primary School

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:22): We have also officially opened the new facilities at Boronia West Primary School, with over \$4 million, back in 2020, delivered to make sure that the students and staff and all the families have the facilities they absolutely deserve at this school in the very heart of Boronia, with again some of the very best views. I tell you what, this place is amazing. The school is amazing. They have the facilities that they deserve – bright, modern, accessible buildings. Thank you so much to the principal Penelope Harris and to the entire team.

Angliss Hospital

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:22): Of course I am really looking forward to works continuing, which are underway, at the Angliss Hospital for more beds, more surgery suites and better facilities and amenities for staff and locals.

Country Fire Authority Lara brigade

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:23): On Saturday I was honoured to attend the annual Lara fire station dinner. The Lara fire brigade has been keeping the Lara community safe for decades. Their volunteer members work tirelessly, and this dinner was a great way to celebrate the work of the whole team and to honour some very dedicated members with special awards. Congratulations to Nik Milanovic, Jerome Perrot and Joy Thorup-Anderson, who received their five-year certificate; Aaron Bedson, who received a 10-year service medal; Leigh Barclay, Rob Brandwood, Doug Wilson and Captain Roger Buckle, who all received their 30-year service medal; Graeme Toll, who received the 35-year service medal; Rosemary and Gary Bascomb and Libby Bate, who received the 50-year life member medal; and Ian Board, who received the 55-year life member medal. We heard some remarkable figures: Captain Roger Buckle has responded to 3652 incidents as a firefighter; Leigh Barclay has responded to 645 incidents; Graeme Toll has responded to 1003 incidents; and in just five years of service, Joy Thorup-Anderson has responded to 100 incidents and Nik Milanovic has responded to 113.

Ahead of this year's fire season, 40 members of the Lara fire brigade have completed their summer preparedness training, and I know that if we do have a bushfire or a grassfire in the coming months, we will have a dedicated and well-trained team ready to respond. I thank these members and the entire brigade for their bravery and unwavering commitment that exemplifies the very best of community spirit.

Forest Street Primary School

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:24): I was delighted to recently visit Forest Street Primary School in Wendouree to celebrate the opening of the \$6.3 million upgrade to block A, which is known as the foundation, 1 and 2 and admin wing. The building has new classrooms, new admin space and a beautiful new library that is flooded with light. It is a wonderful school community, and I know that the school prides itself on providing a friendly and caring community. You see that every time you visit the school. These new spaces provide opportunities for innovative teaching and learning as well as an opportunity for outdoor play, which we know is so important. The leadership of Jillian Burt as principal, Lisa and the whole team of teachers creates an environment where kids want to come to school. They want to learn. Even the night that I was there they were going to have a sleepover, showing how dedicated the teachers are to making sure that the beautiful kids who go to Forest Street Primary have a fantastic time at school every day.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (10:25): I rise to speak on the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, motorcyclists, children and the elderly, who deserve the full focus of our government, particularly as their safety outcomes have not kept pace with other road users. Victoria's roads are a national disgrace, and there is no other way to put it. The government was forced to fill about 220,000 potholes last year, which is one pothole for every 100 metres of state-managed road. But I do not need to tell Victorians about this. They know how bad our roads are because they drive on them every single day. I was shocked to learn that it has been reported that despite Victoria's roads needing 1.25 million pothole repairs over the past five years and, despite 64 per cent of Victorian motorists saying potholes and poor road conditions are their biggest road safety concern and despite Victoria's roads being a national embarrassment, the Allan Labor government's solution to our crumbling roads was to slash repair works by a staggering 95 per cent last financial year. You heard me right: the government slashed road repairs by 95 per cent. At a time when the government should be heavily investing to fix our crumbling roads, their solution is to slash road repairs by 95 per cent and slash road resurfacing funding from \$201.4 million to \$37.6 million. It just does not make sense.

That is not all they are doing. In a mad dash to sell anything and everything so that they can cover up their financial mismanagement the Allan Labor government is preparing to sell off its own government-owned road repairer. Victoria is broke, and our roads and our cars are paying the price. As has been reported, the Allan Labor government is preparing to sell off government-owned road repairer SprayLine Road Services as it seeks every cent it can find to fix its ever-growing financial mess. Labor have already sold off the VicRoads licensing and registration division, the land titles office and even the Port of Melbourne, yet now they are looking to sell the final piece of the puzzle – the publicly owned road maintenance firm, the last line of government-managed road repair. As I said, it is the last remaining government-owned road maintenance firm and they are selling it off. The Allan Labor government has not made clear to Victorians what is very simple: how does selling off the government's road repairer fix Victorian roads? Once SprayLine Road Services is gone, where will that leave Victoria when it comes to maintaining essential infrastructure like roads, highways and bridges? Instead of quick and desperate cash grabs because of their financial mismanagement we need some clear answers on how this decision will actually benefit Victorian road users in the years to come.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

One of our local schools that has been strong in its advocacy to me on road safety is the wonderful Donvale Christian College, which is a fantastic school in my electorate. In fact there are some students here from there today. There is a student in the audience, Nathan in year 9 from DCC, who has raised the issue of Tindals Road; that is one I have heard about time and time again. These are road issues that are affecting not just road users who are drivers but also people who are students. I have had year 6s from DCC also write to me talking about the need for road improvement in our electorate as well as across Victoria.

In my final minutes: I have spent a lot of time in this place advocating for roads to be fixed in my electorate. One I have raised and I will raise again today is the issue of the dangerous intersection of Marbert Court and Kangaroo Ground-Warrandyte Road. Back in 2020 my predecessor Ryan Smith raised safety concerns about this intersection after many residents highlighted the risks posed by its design. They feared it would only be a matter of time before tragedy would strike, and tragically, on 12 May this year their worst fears were realised. A motorcyclist lost his life and another was left fighting for his life in hospital after a horrific crash at this intersection. I am calling on the minister to fix this intersection, despite her previous response to me when I raised this in Parliament. Someone has died at this intersection, and I will not stop until this deadly intersection is fixed, alongside Five Ways intersection in Warrandyte South.

Electoral Matters Committee

Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2022 Victorian State Election

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (10:30): I am pleased to have the opportunity to continue on from a previous sitting week and make a contribution on the report by the Electoral Matters Committee on the conduct of the 2022 Victorian state election. As I mentioned in a previous sitting week, the report goes to many significant and important matters of the election in terms of an overview, the election timelines, the equipping of the commission with various staff and the management of candidates and campaigners.

In my previous contribution on these matters I made the point around the importance of what has now become the lion's share of voting being conducted by pre-poll. Understanding the context of the report and the findings that relate to the behaviour that we saw right across the state and matters related to such behaviour, certainly for me as a local member running for what was a third time, and from what I can see in the report and from other contributions and conversations across the house, there is no doubt that the election was by far the most hotly contested – and that is saying something, because they are always hotly contested – in terms of behaviour from a whole range of people who, frankly, should have known better.

What chapter 5 in the report looks at is the registering of campaigners. I reference finding 9, recommendation 11 and recommendation 12, which go to the effective management of poor behaviour of candidates and/or campaigners and look to have both an enforcement regime and an education regime but also in a practical sense an opportunity for some sort of registration and some sort of code of conduct. Without that, my sense – and I dare say this is shared quite widely across this house and the other place – is that matters will only, as we move forward in time, get worse.

What the report does is outline a range of recommendations, and I referenced those in my previous contribution, to make sure that there is the process for the ability for a local community to come and cast their votes in what is a safe manner and in a place where they are free from intimidation, any sort of threats, and frankly, in many instances, the bit of a circus that revolves around local polling booths, particularly at pre-poll. The report certainly goes into these matters in some detail, and I make the observation and put on record my thanks to all members that worked on this report. Critically, what we now of course need to do is take these recommendations forward and to look at what options we have to ensure that, at the heart of all of this work, people's democratic rights are protected and people, both candidates and campaigners, have an opportunity to put forward values, views and positions of respective parties in a fair and reasonable manner.

The report provides a range of opportunities and recommendations to be able to do this. It is certainly my view that these matters need to be very closely looked at and will be very closely looked at by the government, because what we need to do is keep ensuring, as I mentioned earlier, that people's opportunity to vote in free and fair elections is always maintained in a safe and proper manner. I will leave my remarks there.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:35): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the committee report, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2023–24 budget estimates, and in particular point 9.5.3, 'Renewable energy generation: Transmission infrastructure and stakeholder engagement'. Renewable energy, as we know, is coming to the regions because Melbourne needs renewable energy. We all need renewable energy, but it seems like regional Victoria is the one who is going to pay the price at every turn.

A battery energy storage system, otherwise known as BESS, is set down for Dederang in the Ovens Valley, just outside of beautiful Mount Beauty and in that pristine, productive valley with the snow-capped mountains of Bogong and Falls Creek surrounding it. It really is a lovely community and environment to live in, and that is why people have come to live there. Many years ago there was a hydro scheme put through, now run by AGL, to generate electricity, and it was very successful. Way back then – I am going to say the 1960s or 1950s – this community accepted the high-voltage powerlines and the substation all in the name of progress. They accepted them, and they have done their bit; they have done the heavy lifting. But now they are being asked – well, actually being told – that there will be this BESS, battery energy storage system, placed at Dederang. As I say, they have been told more than asked.

Mint Renewables – a shelf company and one of those companies that are here today, gone tomorrow – are looking to industrialise the farming land for this BESS system. 140 containers will be sitting out in the paddock. They will hum, they will vibrate and they will change the landscape of Dederang. The government regulations talk about consulting communities. Well, Mint have not consulted. They have basically thumbed their nose at this community. Yes, they have ticked the box. If you read a report, it will say they have consulted, but they have not. In my all my years of regional living, which is most of them, I have never seen a more disrespectful or arrogant approach to consultation with the community. I think we have got to move away from consultation just that is ticking a box and saying 'We've done it' rather than actually doing it.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Tim McCURDY: As the member for Lowan says, it is being consultold, and this is what will happen here. We had the situation with Meadow Creek, which I have spoken about in this place, that is now in the hands of the planning minister. But for the people of Dederang this is just going to be another example of the heavy roller being rolled over them rather than genuine consultation. It is a quiet community with a beautiful outlook and a magnificent place to raise a family. But as I say, Melbourne thinks they know better. The Allan Labor government for Melbourne need the power. They refuse to look at things like nuclear, offsets with gas or hydrogen projects in some of our spots, and again, all Victorians have to follow this lead.

Of course we all want renewables. Do not for a moment think that we do not want renewables. But you have got to go to communities and talk to the communities that want renewables, because there are plenty out there. They have got poor rainfall, they have got average soil types and they would love that opportunity to have renewable projects, but they do not have high-voltage lines going through their property. They tend to put these renewable projects along the high-voltage lines as opposed to building the infrastructure to where these renewable energy projects should go.

John and Sharon McEvoy will sit on their verandah if this project gets up and overlook 140 shipping containers that are humming out in the paddock, and I think that is quite distressful for them and the community around them. Land values will take a dive – we know that. The real estate agents in the region said that is already happening now. I met a young mum with two young kids who is trying to sell a property just around the corner from where this BESS is going to go and who the real estate agent says has not got a hope to try and get anyone to even look at the property.

It is really quite unfair that communities like Dederang do not have a say. Their future should not be defined by the fact that they live with high-voltage powerlines through their place. As I say, they have done the heavy lifting over the years, and there are so many communities around Victoria and Australia where these projects could and should go and would be welcomed. I think we need to get the planning process better in Victoria so that plans are put in place and people know where these projects will go. People will then migrate, relocate or move to it or move away from it rather than ending up in a spot and all of a sudden you find the next door neighbour is going to do a project like this and you have no say in it. The planning process says that, even to have a Colorbond shed out in our regions, you need to make sure that it blends into the landscape, but putting 500 hectares of solar panels, glass and steel next door is out of their hands. That is quite disappointing.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:40): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute on the report of the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. As is always appropriate, I pay credit to the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee, which is very ably chaired by the member for Bellarine with the member for Shepparton as deputy chair. I pay credit to the many people involved in this report: as always to the secretariat but in the context of this place to the members for Kew, Pascoe Vale, Narracan, Tarneit and Glen Waverley, who were involved in this incredibly important inquiry.

It is appropriate also for me to recognise, having spent some time reading this report, the numbers of people who made submissions. There are some people I know relatively well who have made some submissions and appeared as witnesses, and there are a vast number of people whose names I do not know. I reflect on that expression that people are touched by the road toll. Perhaps many of the people who made a submission have indeed been touched by the road toll, so this was an important report. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to reflect on some of those findings. This is an opportunity as well to thank our emergency services, who are often also traumatised by their experience of bearing

the brunt of the work that they do but I know are focused with a laser-like approach to making sure we can stay safe.

The incredibly important issue of road safety and road use is timely in the context of some of the tragedies especially over the last few weeks. But this particularly looked at the road-related fatalities and injuries amongst cyclists, pedestrians and motorcyclists, groups that are disproportionately affected by road trauma. The committee has some critical insights into how we can enhance road safety for those groups and outlines some specific risks that they face. One of the key findings of the report is that, while vulnerable road users make up a relatively small percentage of total road traffic, they are over-represented in injury and fatality statistics. This was something that was, if I am frank and honest with myself, a bit of a surprise to me, the starkness of the statistics. For example, pedestrians and cyclists account for 30 per cent of road fatalities in Victoria, but they only represent 12 per cent of road users. This disparity is a stark reminder that these individuals are at heightened risk, and I have known people who have been impacted in a tragic way.

I do want to pay credit to Dr Ben Rossiter from Victoria Walks. Victoria Walks has extraordinarily wholesome social media if you do get a chance to have a look at it. It does motivate me often to go out and find some places to enjoy time with my Irish setters and family. But the other work that Dr Rossiter and Victoria Walks have done, which has been really important, is in elevating the need for us to be safe when walking and how actually having more people walking does bring us all so much more together as a community but does ensure that we are much safer.

I also want to thank Glenn Weir the Assistant Commissioner, Road Policing Command, at Victoria Police, who was one of the experts who gave evidence at the inquiry. He noted the growing trend of vulnerable road users, requiring a paradigm shift in how we think about road safety. It is no longer sufficient to simply focus on the actions of drivers alone. We must also recognise the interaction between all road users and the unique risks faced by pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. Assistant Commissioner Weir's statement underscores a critical point that the focus of road safety initiatives must expand beyond traditional measures, and I think that that was really important to hear.

There are some recommendations that are important, and one of them is improved infrastructure. I know the Minister for Transport Infrastructure at the table has been out to my electorate recently, where we have made some significant and huge improvements to road safety as part of the Big Build. We often talk about the Big Build and the importance of the projects, but the corner of Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road and Sladen Stret is now a very safe intersection. It replaced a big and dangerous roundabout. We have public education campaigns and of course targeted campaigns to raise awareness of the risks faced by vulnerable users and stronger enforcement – again, an opportunity to thank the police. I see a lot of police in my area who are making sure that people are doing the right thing, and I am really grateful. Some are in uniform and many are not, and they are certainly not so much behind the counter as in their cars out in the community. And of course there is vehicle design. Again, I am grateful to the committee, and I am grateful to the many people who made representations on behalf of their organisations.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:46): I rise to speak on the report of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee published in October this year titled *2024–25 Budget Estimates*. I thank the committee for their work, and I especially want to acknowledge my Greens colleague from the other place Aiv Puglielli for his excellent minority report.

Today I would like to comment on the section of this report titled 'School upgrades and maintenance'. All students in Victoria should have access to a high-quality, genuinely free, safe and well-maintained local public school, but right now it is not the experience of many Victorians, including those in my own electorate. The unfortunate reality is that here in Victoria, the so-called Education State, our public

schools are the third-lowest funded schools in the country. At the same time, Victorian private schools are currently receiving more public money than they require and are funded to 102.9 per cent of the schooling resource standard. This equates to almost \$150 million of public funds per year going to oversubsidise private schools. The mind boggles at this blatant inequality and particularly given that teachers in Victoria are among the lowest paid in the country. It certainly is an issue of inequality. Public schools educate the majority of young people in our state, including the vast majority of students who experience disadvantage or disability, but the government seems happy to leave many of these students in deteriorating and sometimes actively unsafe physical learning environments in the form of ageing and neglected school buildings.

This committee report recommends that the Victorian School Building Authority publish regular reports on the results and findings of the rolling facilities evaluation program. It also recommends that the Department of Education develop performance measures in the budget papers to monitor the condition of school buildings and other infrastructure assessed through the RFE program. I support these recommendations, but as the evidence from my own electorate clearly demonstrates, they will not solve the problem of chronic underfunding.

In my electorate of Brunswick we are lucky to have a number of grand old buildings serving as our public schools. Some are well over 100 years old. Each is unique. But these old buildings take a lot of work and, importantly, a lot of money to maintain. One example I am thinking of is Brunswick East Primary School, which was established in 1893. Since I was first elected in 2019 they have been raising the issue of their deteriorating roof with me. It was in dire need of expensive repairs then, and I flagged this with the government at the time, but the problem was ignored, and it is not surprising that five years later it has only become worse. I am told the roof is collapsing in parts of the building upstairs, there was a major water leak and three of the upstairs classrooms have had no lights for 12 months. Paint is peeling everywhere from rising damp, and when there is heavy rain there are leaks everywhere. I understand architects came out to the school months ago to put together a plan, but after a whole day at the school they were overwhelmed by everything that needed to be done, including replacing all of the windows. The school is in a financial deficit and cannot afford to cover any of the works itself, and this deficit is made worse by the fact that enrolment is declining due to the terrible state of the school building. There is even a no-go zone in the kitchen area upstairs due to the risk of falling debris.

Meanwhile down the road Brunswick North Primary School is similarly overdue for an upgrade and is not able to maintain its crumbling heritage-listed buildings on the base level budgets it is given. It would be wise for the government to consider that this school in particular will serve as a catchment for many people who will move into the new dense housing that is being built in the area, and they expect their enrolment numbers will increase as a result.

As we infill our cities with high-density housing, it is crucial that our government support and adequately resource essential community infrastructure, including public schools, and ensure that these school buildings are maintained to the safe and secure standard that we want for each of our own children. Frankly, it infuriates me to think about the neglect of these wonderful public schools in my electorate, only two of which I have named here today, and the safety risks that students and staff are expected to put up with, especially when nearby private schools have so much cash they are putting in ballrooms, polo pavilions and Olympic-sized swimming pools. It is long past time that the Victorian state government properly funded its public schools so that all students can have a safe, free and world-class education.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Inquiry into Vaping and Tobacco Controls

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (10:50): I wish to speak on the vaping and tobacco controls report on the inquiry by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which was published just over eight weeks ago. Just over eight weeks ago the committee completed its inquiry, and I am glad to see that

we have got related legislation before the Parliament this week. I want to focus not on that aspect of the inquiry but rather on the side of vaping and what was found by the committee.

Vaping, we read, is increasing in Victoria. Unfortunately there are over 500,000 people in Victoria over the age of 14 who are regular or irregular users of vapes, but we know that people under the age of 14 use them as well. As part of the inquiry the committee took evidence in Shepparton. We had multiple schools attend the hearing, who gave evidence of the number of students who are vaping at school, and it was quite concerning. There were private and government schools there, and some schools had invested in vaping detection equipment at the cost of some tens of thousands of dollars to try and deal with the students vaping at school. The schools reported that students that were vaping were as young as 10. Students themselves came and gave evidence and reported that vaping was becoming less cool for older students and was seen as something that the younger students did, such as grades 4, 5 and 6, which is horrifying. Certainly, anecdotally, I have seen that on a visit to a local school where we were discussing school toilets. We thought the toilets were empty, and we had been in there for a while talking about upgrades and then noticed that one of the cubicles had three pairs of feet in it, and the girls were busy there. Vaping is a problem in schools, so I am glad that we have got some evidence and some recommendations here to help us address that. Certainly there is already work underway, and I want to pay credit to VicHealth and the great work they are doing with resources and education to try and prevent and stop people from vaping.

The health impacts are not the only thing. We also have issues around the storage and disposal of illegal vapes that are seized or e-cigarettes. As part of the committee's work we visited Border Force and Victoria Police. We saw how vapes are smuggled into the country and the means and the desperate lengths that these people go to to get these horrible things into our country. We saw for the police the difficulty or the work that is created for them, having to firstly store the vapes and then organise for their disposal, because they are not a simple thing to dispose of. They pose a risk to our environment, and when they are coming in in such numbers, we do not want to damage our community's environment through inappropriate disposal. Something that the report calls out is the need to coordinate with the federal government to have a federal approach. This is an issue that all states in Australia are facing, so simple measures such as shared procurement of disposal partners I believe is eminently sensible and something that should continue to be pursued.

In chapter 6 we also see the options for helping with prevention and cessation activities. I really believe that co-design is the way to go with different target groups who are taking up vaping. Youth I have spoken about as one; we are also seeing an increase in new Australians who are taking up vaping, and I would like to see adult men – young men – targeted as well and for them themselves to come up with the most effective strategies to stop young men taking it up or keeping it up.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:55): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notices of motion, government business, today and ask that they remain on the notice paper.

Bills

Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (10:57): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and

Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Bill 2024:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Bill 2024 (Bill).

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

Overview

The Bill empowers the Yoorrook Justice Commission (Commission) to make the following types of Yoorrook Justice Commission record orders (record orders) over records of First Peoples' evidence provided to the Commission:

1. A Yoorrook Justice Commission record closure order (closure order) to prevent public inspection of the record for 99 years once the Commission is wound down (clause 4, new section 52B).
2. A Yoorrook Justice Commission record restriction order (restriction order) to make the record available for limited public inspection on the terms and conditions specified by the Commission for 99 years once the Commission is wound down (clause 4, new section 52C).

A record order will also have the effect of making the relevant record exempt from the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) (clause 6) for 99 years. As such, a person will not be able to gain access to a record which is subject to a record order via a Freedom of Information request.

The Bill enables the Commission to protect the confidentiality of First Peoples' evidence in line with Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) principles.

IDS is an international movement which promotes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to own, control, access and possess data that derive from them, or which pertain to their members, knowledge systems, customs, resources or territories.

The Bill also makes technical amendments to the *Inquiries Act 2014* (Inquiries Act) to clarify how records produced by Royal Commissions, Boards of Inquiry and Formal Reviews should be treated after those inquiries are wound down.

Human rights issues

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

1. The amendments contained in the Bill to clarify how records produced by Royal Commissions, Boards of Inquiry and Formal Reviews should be treated after those inquiries are wound down do not engage any Charter rights as they are minor and technical in nature.
2. The reforms in the Bill which empower the Commission to issue record orders engage the following Charter rights.

Recognition and equality before the law

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has a right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination.

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination.

Discrimination, for the purpose of section 8 of the Charter means discrimination within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Equal Opportunity Act), on the basis of one or more attributes set out in section 6 of that Act. The relevant attribute engaged by the Bill is discrimination on the basis of race.

The Commission will be empowered to make a record order over First Peoples' evidence (see clause 4, new sections 52B and 52C). This means that First Peoples' records may be afforded greater protections from public access than records provided by non-First Peoples. As such, the Bill permits differential treatment for First Peoples and non-First Peoples.

Under section 8(4) of the Charter, measures taken for the purpose of assisting or advancing persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination. These measures are named in the Charter's Explanatory Memorandum as 'special measures'.

Section 12(1) of the Equal Opportunity Act provides that a person may take a special measure for the purpose of promoting or realising substantive equality for members of a group with a particular attribute. Conduct

which constitutes a special measure under the Equal Opportunity Act is not considered discrimination under that Act.

Equally, when s 8(4) of the Charter is satisfied, there is no incompatibility with the right to recognition and equality before the law, because there is no discrimination under the Charter.

I consider the Commission's power to issue record orders to be a special measure as per section 8(4) of the Charter for the following reasons:

- First Peoples are a historically disadvantaged group in Victorian society due to discrimination.
- The intention of the measure is to advance the rights of First Peoples by promoting IDS by giving First Peoples' control over access to and use of their data.
- The measure is reasonably likely to advance the rights of First Peoples by ensuring that the Commission can protect the confidentiality of, and restrict access to and secondary use of, First Peoples' evidence provided to the Commission.
- The reforms address a clear need as there is no guarantee under the current legislative framework governing the treatment of Royal Commission records that records of First Peoples' evidence will be kept confidential once the Commission is wound down.
- The reforms are proportionate to their objective as the Commission's power may only be used over records provided by First Peoples who are natural persons. As such, reports produced by the Commission and testimony from government ministers and representatives will still be available for public access.

I am satisfied that the record order reforms contained in the Bill are a special measure under section 8(4) of the Charter. As such, the Bill is consistent with the right of recognition and equality before the law.

Freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.

The right to freedom of expression includes a positive right to access information held by the government. The Bill engages the right to freedom of expression by enabling the Commission to issue record orders to prevent or restrict public access to government records, including preventing freedom of information requests (clause 6).

Section 15(3)(a) of the Charter provides that the right to freedom of expression may be subject to lawful restrictions which are reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputation of other persons.

The Commission's power to restrict access to public information is lawful as it is precisely and appropriately prescribed in the Bill.

These lawful restrictions are reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of other persons as:

- They enable the Commission to protect the confidentiality of First Peoples' evidence and uphold First Peoples' stated preferences as to how their record should be treated once the Commission is wound down.
- Record orders can only be made over records provided by natural persons who are First Peoples (see clause 4 new section 52A). This ensures that other significant documents including reports produced by the Commission and evidence provided by government ministers and organisations will remain publicly accessible. This balanced approach ensures the protection of First Peoples confidential information while still enabling the Commission to establish an official record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria, as per its Letters Patent.

As such, I consider that to the extent that there is a limitation on the right to freedom of expression, the limitation is reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputation of other persons.

Privacy and reputation (section 13 of the Charter)

Section 13 of the Charter states that a person has the right –

- a) not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with; and
- b) not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked.

Under the current legislative framework in the Inquiries Act, records of Royal Commissions which have concluded may be publicly accessible depending on:

- whether an order is made by the Minister for Government Services or the Keeper of Public Records under the *Public Records Act 1973* to prevent public inspection of the relevant record; or

- whether an FOI decision maker within government determines that the record is an exempt document under Part IV of the FOI Act.

The Bill enhances the right to privacy by empowering the Commission to make orders which ensure that First Peoples' records are prevented or restricted from public access, thereby preventing arbitrary disclosure and use of First Peoples' private and sensitive personal information. The Commission will make these orders on the basis of consultation with First Peoples who have provided the relevant evidence to the Commission.

This approach aligns with IDS principles by providing First Peoples with agency regarding the control and access of their records, rather than leaving the confidentiality of records to the discretion of government. Such protections are especially important where First Peoples stories involve traumatic experiences of discrimination or abuse.

Conclusion

Having considered all relevant factors and for the reasons outlined above, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Jobs and Industry
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Minister for Women

Second reading

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (10:57): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land on which this Parliament stands, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People of the Kulin Nations. I pay my respects to their Elders and ancestors; Elders from all Victorian First Peoples, and any Elders and other Aboriginal people who join us here today. Since time immemorial, First Peoples have practiced their laws, customs and languages, and nurtured Country through their spiritual, material and economic connections to land, water and resources. Victoria's First Peoples maintain that their sovereignty has never been ceded.

Reforms in response to recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission

The Yoorrook Justice Commission is a historic process – the first truth-telling inquiry of its kind in Australian history. Since its establishment, a fundamental principle of the inquiry has been that First Peoples must be able to engage with the truth-telling process on their own, self-determined terms. When providing evidence to the Commission, First Peoples have been asked to express their choices about how the information they provide is to be treated by the Commission. The Commission has subsequently called for legislative change so that those choices are upheld by the State of Victoria once the Commission ends.

Today, the Government is proud to support the Commission's commitment to First Peoples by introducing this Bill, which will extend First Peoples' control over their own stories and evidence shared with the Commission beyond the end of the Commission's term, in line with Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) principles.

IDS is an international, Indigenous-led movement seeking to remedy government methods of holding Indigenous peoples' records and assert the sovereignty of First Peoples over their own information. The Commission has articulated IDS as the 'right of Indigenous Peoples to own, control, access and possess data that derive from them, and which pertain to their members, knowledge systems, customs, resources, or territories.'

Reforms in support of IDS principles are aligned with the Government's commitment to First Peoples' self-determination.

The Bill responds to two recommendations from the Commission for legislative reform to uphold First Peoples' choices about how evidence they provide to the Commission should be treated once the Commission ends. Specifically, the Bill implements recommendation 2 of the *Yoorrook with Purpose* report (2022), as well as recommendation 45 of the *Yoorrook for Justice* report (2023) insofar as it relates to First Peoples' evidence provided to the Commission.

Currently, Royal Commissions are required to transfer records to the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) upon their conclusion. DPC is then required to transfer the records to the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).

These records are then subject to public access unless an order is made under the *Public Records Act 1973* (Public Records Act) or an exemption applies under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act). This means that access to and use of these records is a matter for government decision-making and discretion, not First Peoples' choices.

The Inquiries Amendment (Yoorrook Justice Commission Records and Other Matters) Bill 2024 remedies this. The reforms are narrow in scope, applying only to records of First Peoples' evidence provided to the Yoorrook Justice Commission.

The Bill enables the Commission to uphold First Peoples' choices relating to the post-inquiry treatment of their evidence by:

- amending the *Inquiries Act 2014* (Inquiries Act) to empower the Commission to make record orders to close or restrict access to specified records for 99 years after the Commission concludes, and to provide that the FOI Act does not apply to such records for the same period;
- amending the Public Records Act to require the Keeper of Public Records to restrict and/or provide access to specified records in accordance with the Commission's record orders.

The Commission may also include additional access instructions in a record order to reflect First Peoples' wishes as to how their evidence should be handled once they have passed away. For example, authors or records may tell the Commission that they want members of their immediate family, extended family or community have access to records of their evidence when they die. The Commission can reflect these wishes in additional access instructions, which PROV will then need to uphold.

The Bill also includes technical amendments to the Inquiries Act so that the requirement to transfer records to PROV as soon as practicable after their receipt is expressed as being subject to the standards issued by the Keeper under the Public Records Act. This amendment updates the legislation to align with current practice when distinguishing between permanent and temporary records.

The Bill has been informed by extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Commission, the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, PROV, the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner and government departments. The Commission consulted with First Peoples who provided evidence to ensure that the Bill represents their wishes in accordance with IDS principles.

The Bill enables the Commission to fulfil a key obligation under its Letters Patent, to uphold 'the sovereignty of First Peoples over their knowledge and stories by consulting with them on how the information they provide should be treated and ensuring adequate information and data protection'.

It ensures that First Peoples' engagement with this historic process is truly on their terms, and it recognises that First Peoples are the rightful decision-makers over the future access and use of their personal evidence.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:57): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 27 November.

Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Insert the following New Division to follow clause 27 –

'Division 3 – Licensing

27A Fit and proper person

In section 16(2)(b) of the **Meat Industry Act 1993** omit “, or an associate of the person”.

2. Clause 30, page 17, lines 17 to 21, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

3. Clause 30, page 17, line 22, omit “(e)” and insert “(d)”.
4. Clause 30, page 17, line 26, omit “(f)” and insert “(e)”.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (10:58): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

In doing so I will just have a few brief remarks as to why the government is supporting these amendments. Ensuring the suitability of seafood safety licensees protects public health, industry reputation and the sustainability of other seafood businesses. The inclusion of the fit and proper person assessment into the Seafood Safety Act 2003 was driven by the policy intent to, firstly, strengthen the ability of PrimeSafe to ensure the suitability of those who hold seafood licences and protect the integrity of the industry; and secondly, to provide consistency between the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Seafood Safety Act, which are both administered by PrimeSafe. The removal of proposed section 14(3)(d) in the bill, regarding consideration of the business associations of associates, will address concerns about freedom of association. Removal of the corresponding existing clause in the Meat Industry Act will support the policy intent of consistency between the legislation, and it will not adversely impact PrimeSafe’s consideration of licensees’ suitability.

We are comfortable that the other proposed new sections 14(3)(a), (b) and (c), in clause 30 of the bill, do provide sufficient powers to enable PrimeSafe to remove unsuitable seafood licensees and keep them out of the industry, as PrimeSafe already relies upon similar clauses to do so for meat industry licensees under the Meat Industry Act. With those few words, the government is supporting these amendments.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (11:00): I rise today to support these amendments; they are amendments that the Liberals and Nationals put forward in the upper house. I would like to acknowledge the good work of the minister and her office in trying to work through a sensible outcome that would ensure that the licensing requirements meet the needs of the sector while ensuring that we do not cast the net too widely so that associates of business associates have to be deemed of good repute for a seafood licence to be approved or in consideration of suspension of a commercial seafood licence. This is something that is very, very important. It is unusual to have the additional element of an assessment of a fit and proper person to include an assessment of whether business associates’ associates are of good repute. Given that there is some question over what that line might be – for whether someone is of good repute or not of good repute – it is very, very important. It is not consistent with the interpretation of standard practice in legislation around a fit and proper person test. I will note that there are some regulations associated with legislation which include a fit and proper person test, which do have reference to an assessment of associates being of good repute. However, I am pleased that we could all agree that associates of business associates needing to be of good repute was far too much. It is certainly a bar that the Labor Party themselves do not hold up for their own business associates, and it is something we should never hold at a higher level for others than we do for ourselves. We should all seek to be fair in how we apply legislation.

The amendment will take two elements into account. One, it will remove the reference to associates of business associates needing to be of good repute in order to be issued a seafood licence or in consideration of a suspension of a seafood licence. These amendments are also mirrored in the Meat Industry Act 1993. This will ensure consistency between the seafood industry and the meat industry. I understand that this is where the aspects around good repute and an assessment of associates of business associates were lifted, and therefore it is consistent to have those two aspects of licences to be similar in how they operate. It should make for a more practical interpretation of those aspects of licensing going forward.

I would also like to note one particular aspect on which we did ask a question of the government in the upper house, and that was in relation to the definition of ‘relevant position’, which is at page 19 of the bill, where it states:

relevant position, in relation to a seafood business, means –

...

- (b) any other person associated or connected with the ownership, administration or management of the business or its operations ...

We did seek clarity around whether this would apply to a skipper, for example, or a crew member, such as a deckhand, of a seafood operation, given that the skipper would have management of the operation of a boat when they are going out to harvest fish. There was clarity given in the response – and I see the Minister for Agriculture is nodding her head – that that would only be deemed applicable if the licensee was the skipper of that boat. I think that will provide a good point of reference for any opportunity where there is consideration by the department or the authorised body or if there is an appeal through VCAT or other processes. It is on the parliamentary record that there is not an intent that crew members and skippers will be captured by the aspects of the legislation that relate to the fit and proper person test, as we are amending the bill today.

We know that there are a lot of fabulous businesses in our beachside communities, our oceanside communities, that have a very important job. Their job is to make sure we have fish and beautiful seafood on our table. It is something we all enjoy, particularly in the lead-up to Christmas. I encourage all Victorians to ensure that they buy Victorian-harvested seafood and support our fishermen and women and make sure that they have a very big spread of lovely seafood.

I cannot help but say that even though my electorate of Lowan has many geographical areas, it does not contain a seaside landscape. However, we do have yabbies, so I might include them in my comments for today, because we will certainly have some yabbies on our Christmas table.

Again, I am very appreciative that there has been a level of goodwill which is rarely seen in the Parliament in that this was an aspect of an amendment that the Liberals and Nationals flagged during our contributions to the debate. It was something that the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee actually picked up on as well in their considerations. I am pleased that our amendment put forward in the upper house was not opposed, and it is very pleasing that it appears that it will also be supported. We should see more of this, because there are very, very good brains in all corners of the upper and lower houses. No matter what party we represent, we have something to contribute and we are engaged with stakeholders, and I am very proud that I have been able to stand up for our stakeholders and deliver some very important amendments for the seafood and the meat industry. I commend the amendments to the house.

Motion agreed to.

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

Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:

That this bill be now read a second time.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (11:07): I am pleased to be able to rise today to speak on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. I can say at the outset that the opposition will not be opposing this bill. It is a bill which deals superficially with a number of fairly basic changes, but what the bill really reveals is the absence of any meaningful agenda from this tired, old, rotten and corrupt government to deal with the challenges that our state faces. It is a particular concern to us in

the opposition because we have called on the government to address these issues, and repeatedly the government does not do that.

Let us look at the proposed changes to the Docklands Act 1991, which is a good place to start because Docklands is symbolic in many ways of the housing crisis and the home ownership affordability crisis that Victorians face today. With Victorians struggling to afford to buy a home in what is the highest taxed state in the country, Docklands is a good place to start, I would suggest. The government is overseeing a decline in the number of units that are being approved and developed in this state at the very time we need more supply into the system. This year alone we are likely to see the government, if it is lucky, track a little over 50,000 homes, which will complete a decline since 2021 in the approvals and completions of dwelling units, to take an example. This is contrary to what we are seeing in New South Wales and Queensland, where we are seeing approvals and completions actually tick up. This year we will see, on average, Victorians pay around \$2200 in property taxes per person in this state by way of revenue raised. That is an enormous burden to put on the Victorian people. We also see that in Victoria property taxes contribute around 45 per cent of the cost of a new build. For the median-priced home in Victoria, Victorians can expect to see around \$430,000 to \$440,000 on average simply going to meet the taxes that this government is imposing – the highest in the country. That is certainly according to the Urban Development Institute of Australia, a respected source on this type of matter.

Is it any surprise that Victorians are paying the highest taxes? Last year the Allan Labor government imposed what it called a pandemic levy across payroll and land tax and property, which would have seen it raise, at the time, a forecast \$8.6 billion.

But we now know with today's news it is on track to raise another nearly \$600 million, which will see just the levy added last year alone impose on households, taxpayers and businesses right across Victoria over \$9 billion in extra taxes from last year's budget over the four-year forward estimates period. I mean, how much does this government think that Victorian households and businesses can cop to make up for the financial incompetence, financial delinquency and financial vandalism of this corrupt government? I say 'corrupt' because it has distorted basic decision-making and due diligence in this state and it is a sad spectacle to watch, but we are fighting on behalf of the Victorian people.

When we look at this poor record of housing delivery under the Allan Labor government, let us look at what it did a few weeks ago. Desperate to respond to repeated and intensifying calls for an answer to the housing crisis that was supposed to be addressed when it delivered its housing statement last year in September, which was nothing more than a 30-odd page brochure of some colour pictures with no detail in it, what did we see? We saw the Premier come out and engage in a communications and media blitz. It was impressive in the sense of how much chutzpah can you expect from a Premier who has no actual substance to deliver but a media strategy. I want to say to all Victorians who will be watching this debate: it was a vacuous media strategy devoid of any substance. It was facile, it was superficial and it was non-responsive to what the industry is calling for and what Victorians are calling for.

I just want to go down and address the key parts of the housing statement, if we can call it that, that the Premier engaged in a few weeks ago. I begin with this: it was an admission of failure, of abject failure, that the government under Premier Jacinta Allan has failed to meet any of its targets that it set for itself last year – 800,000 homes in 10 years, 80,000 homes a year abandoned abjectly and in a humiliating fashion, and it would not have escaped anybody.

But let us then go through the series of announcements that the Premier made. We saw an announcement around activity centres, a combination of 10 activity centres where it would allow up to 20 storeys in the core of those activity centres and, in the broader catchment zones, six-storey buildings. I will come back to those height limits in a moment. Then it announced transport activity centres, which would see much higher buildings, so called. Let us look at these height limits, so called. They talk about 12 storey, 20 storey and six storey. A couple of things to note for our viewers – those limits are fluid. They can be set aside. They are not set in stone. If a developer comes along and engages

in a sweet deal with the government about funding the very things the Allan Labor government should be funding, this government has made clear, through a combination of value capture and also what I would call a de facto inclusionary zoning policy, they will give the developer whatever the developer is prepared to pay on behalf of the Victorian government. To viewers of this debate and Victorians more generally: do not believe anything this government says about height limits.

It is also important to understand just how farcical the announcement over the activity centres is, not just the 10 activity centres but the transport hubs that the government announced. Why it is so farcical is that the government had to admit a few days afterwards that it is not likely to settle on its better apartment design guidelines for another two years at the earliest. The concerns of planners and urban designers that we are going to end up with apartments that are too small, too dark and unfit for young families and young Victorians will bear true and will come to pass. These buildings will only deal –

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this is a statute law repeals bill, a very narrow piece of legislation. To my point of order, the Leader of the Opposition started with the hook of the Docklands Act repeal part of the legislation and then expanded that argument well past the matters that are contained in the bill to talk about broad housing policy.

John PESUTTO: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, as the lead speaker I do have a wide berth, and it does involve housing; Docklands is a location for housing.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): On the point of order, being the lead speaker, I am going to allow some range. I think this will be a wideranging debate. I will listen intently to see if we can keep to the bill, but I think this allows for others to have debate as well, as part of the debate today.

John PESUTTO: That will have to go in *Rulings from the Chair*, Acting Speaker. Well done. Docklands is a classic example of why this farce of a housing policy, so called, really symbolises the failure of policy on behalf of the government. If you take Docklands and areas like it, the government makes an announcement about these massive towers but there are no better apartment design guidelines which will deal with not just built form like setbacks and heights but minimum room sizes for bedrooms and other rooms and balconies, or street widening – there is nothing in there for that. There is nothing in there for neighbourhood character and livability – and I emphasise that point, livability, which I know Victorians right across Melbourne and our state are very concerned about. There is no money for infrastructure. This is a government that is nickel and diming its planning policy. Let us break this down and call it for what it is. The government does not have what I would call the intellectual bandwidth, but not just that, it does not have the financial bandwidth to actually develop and outline a vision for the whole state. It cannot do that for a range of reasons, chief among which is the fact it does not have the money – it has run out of money for it – but it actually does not have a vision for the whole state. So what it says is, ‘Well, we’ve got public transport modes in and around metropolitan Melbourne, so –

Natalie Suleyman: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I know you are listening intently, but this is the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. Again, the Leader of the Opposition has strayed right out from what is before the house, and I ask you – that is the point of order; I have made it very clear – to ask the opposition leader again to stick to the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024, which is before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): On the point of order, I ask the Leader of the Opposition with his remarks to bring them back to the bill at hand to make that distinct –

John PESUTTO: Don’t worry, I will make sure every single –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Order! I am just ruling on the point of order, if I can have the time to do that. If you can bring it back to the bill at hand, that would be helpful.

John PESUTTO: The Docklands Act 1991 is the basis on which I am addressing the future of Docklands, and I would argue that the Docklands Act is relevant to Docklands. That being the case, I

would say that the housing issues that I am talking about are directly relevant to the residents and families and businesses that are situated in Docklands governed by the act which is amended by this Statute Law Repeals Bill. Docklands is a good example, as I have said, of this. We have got apartments and units that are too expensive to build in Victoria for young families and young Victorians, and Docklands exemplifies that. The proportion of young people and young families who live in Docklands is very low by comparison. When we are developing planning policies, we need to have in mind that the state government's responsibilities include a range of things, not least of which is that it needs to manage our finances well enough so that there is capacity to invest in the infrastructure that will support the livability and neighbourhood character of these places. So we need to have a state government that meets its responsibilities so that it does not have to impose punitive taxes to the point where developers of multistorey apartments can only deliver them for people who can afford to buy two-bedroom, three-bedroom and above apartments at a price point of at least \$1.2 million. If you are looking at apartments in the inner and middle-ring suburbs of Melbourne – and I would include Docklands as an inner suburb – that are pricing two- and three-bedroom apartments and those larger than that at \$1.2 million and higher, then you are not answering the challenge of housing affordability for young Victorians and young Victorian families, and that is the problem here.

We have got a government that has left Victoria broke, so whether we are seeing houses built and units built in Docklands or anywhere else in Victoria, it is too expensive to build those homes. We have a government that is not only not doing anything to reduce the costs of building apartments in Docklands and everywhere else but actually not supporting that with the infrastructure that is needed.

We saw in the first tranche of announcements that were part of that media blitz on 20-storey towers and potentially 50-storey towers in transport hubs there was no effort by the Premier to address taxation and the costs of construction and certainly no effort by the Premier to address the problems that continue today with CFMEU coverage over large-scale apartment construction and design. We know the CFMEU is driving up costs in this state, and we see the corruption that we have campaigned on repeatedly over the last year and a half going completely unaddressed by this government and by this Premier, who is too weak to act and too unprincipled to act because this government is corrupt – I say corrupt.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has again strayed a long way from the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Thank you for the succinct point of order. I do ask the Leader of the Opposition to come back to closely debating the bill at hand.

John PESUTTO: I just want to move to the next stage, because this is very relevant to residents and potential residents of Docklands, the off-the-plan stamp duty concession. This was announced in a very knee-jerk manner by the Premier. The questions we have been asking are: why was it limited to 12 months? Who was the Premier actually trying to help here? How can you get more housing supply, which is we understand to be prompted by this concession, which only reinstates for 12 months the concession they removed in 2017? How does this expedite the delivery of housing supply if you limit it to 12 months? Any of these types of projects take at least two to three years at the minimum once you have got through the building and permit application processes. How much stock is actually going to be delivered here that was not already? We will be asking questions about this, about who the Premier spoke to and what she was trying to address by limiting this announcement to 12 months only. It will not do anything to actually assist young Victorians and young Victorian families. Yes, it will assist some people. Foreign buyers, for example, who want to come in and purchase property in Melbourne and in Victoria will benefit from this, and we do not necessarily cavil with that. Why should somebody get a \$300,000 or in some cases a \$1 million concession as a result of this but be denied that if they want to buy a freestanding house in Tarneit or Kalkallo or Greenvale? Why would you do that? Why would you discriminate? If your purpose is to put young Victorians and young families into homes of their choice, then you would not limit this to 12 months, but that is in fact what the government has done.

I will move to the third tranche that the Premier addressed in her media blitz just to demonstrate how farcical all of this is. The universal developer charge was an announcement the Premier made to say, ‘We’re going to get developers now to fund things like schools and hospitals and roads.’ Our first reaction to that was, ‘Isn’t that the job of the state government to deliver schools for Victorian households and communities? Isn’t it the job of the Victorian government working with its authorities and local government to deliver local roads?’ Yes, we understand and have always accepted that developers will contribute to that, but this is an example of what I spoke about before, where you have a government that is financially incompetent, engages in economic vandalism and does not leave any capacity in its budget –

Nina Taylor: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the purpose of this bill is to repeal certain redundant or spent provisions in Victorian legislation. I cannot see how what we have been listening to for the last 20 minutes or so has any relation to the central tenets of the legislation that we are debating. You cannot just pluck one word out and say, ‘It’s relevant.’ It has to fit the intent of the bill.

Nathan Lambert: Further to the point of order, I think there is a longstanding convention, as I understand it, that a speaker can speak widely within the portfolio area of the legislation, but none of the acts that we have here in front of us in this bill are in the housing or planning portfolios. If the Leader of the Opposition wishes to speak with respect to the Docklands Act, he should draw his remarks back to the precinct’s portfolio.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I do believe we have strayed slightly from this, Leader of the Opposition. I think that you need to show a link, Leader of the Opposition. You need to come back to the bill at hand to ensure that this debate does not become too wideranging.

John PESUTTO: I know that the universal developer charge is relevant to Docklands because this is the complaint that you get from a lot of businesses and residents in the Docklands precinct – that none of this was planned for, because the state government abdicated its responsibilities and did not invest in the infrastructure that it should have invested in. I also wish to address this –

James Newbury: What’s happening with that wheel at the Docklands?

John PESUTTO: The wheel? It is a bit like the state government: going nowhere – and if it is, it is going around in circles. The other thing I would say about Docklands is that it is bearing a lot of the burden of government failure. That takes me to the fourth tranche of the government’s announcement that the Premier made that they would look at the growth corridors, which was simply a rather pathetic response to what we had announced. Now, this is relevant to areas like Docklands, which is governed by the Docklands Act, because it puts more pressure on it. What we are seeing is the government said it would release more PSPs, precinct structure plans, in the growth corridors, but it did not in fact do that. What it said is that it will release further PSPs in the future, and it only announced three more – Cardinia Creek part 2, Kororoit part 2 and Northern Freight – but it had in its fine print that it will not actually release those PSPs, if we understand it correctly, until on or before 30 June 2025, so we will see nothing more coming –

Nina Taylor: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, with respect, I believe that the Leader of the Opposition is defying your ruling. I would ask, out of respect for the whole chamber, that he be pulled back to the central tenets of the bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I would like to rule on the point of order. I have said several times now that I feel this is becoming a very wideranging debate, which I have allowed because you are the lead speaker for this bill and subsequent members may like to talk to that as well, but I need to direct you back to linking this to the bill that is at hand.

John PESUTTO: I am actually going to leave the Docklands in a moment, but I would just say the precinct structure plan announcement, because it is a failure, puts more pressure on Docklands and areas like Docklands, because there is no support for infrastructure out there and none of those precinct

structure plans are coming online. What that means is if you are looking at boosting supply, which the government says it is doing, it is going to be areas like Docklands, areas like Bayside and areas like Boroondara and Glen Iris who are all going to bear an unfair burden, which could be borne more fairly and equitably if as a government you were allocating your resources fairly across the state with a vision for the entire state, which is lacking under this government. I will finish on this point by saying to all those who will read and watch this debate that under this government you get no voice and you get no choice, and these illustrations that I have offered bear that out.

I just want to talk briefly on the Road Safety Act 1986 amendments. This is a particular concern for us and we know for Victorians right across the state. We have seen the area of road maintenance be slashed savagely by 95 per cent. We saw the amount of funding drop last year from \$201 million the year prior to just \$37 million in 2023–24. What are you hoping to achieve across a state like ours with a road network like ours with \$37 million only allocated for maintenance of roads? We saw the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety speak quite eloquently on this to make the point that we are only going to see 422,000 square metres maintained, as opposed to 9 million square metres the previous year and 11 million square metres the year before that.

If we look at what is happening, we are on a steep decline. We are feeling it this year, and it is going to get worse because it is something that, in terms of the road network, if you are not maintaining it the cost of actually catching up later is all the greater. We are seeing a government that is absolutely abdicating its responsibilities to maintain our road network. It is an example of a government that does not have, as I said earlier, a vision for the entire state. What it does is it governs for the internal precincts of the tram tracks, and beyond that it neglects the growth corridors. If you live in Melbourne's west or Melbourne's north or the south-east in particular or the regions, you will miss out.

I make the point about why this is so important. The government's own population projections show that in the northern metropolitan precincts of Melbourne between 2021–22 and 2036 you will see around 450,000 people move into those areas. In the western region you will see 300,000 people in that period of time. In the south-east, those two areas combined, you will see over 350,000 people. Yet in the inner suburbs of Melbourne you will see a fraction of that population growth. What we are on track for is a massive dislocation of resources in our state with a government that cannot see what is coming down the road. With that population growth, you need a housing policy, you need an infrastructure policy and you need a fiscal and budgetary policy that is actually anticipating that growth across our community. But we are not seeing it from this government, and Victorians are going to pay the price for that. One of the big problems with this obviously is that we have an economy that is tanking under this government. I just want to finish on these points –

Nick Staikos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, around relevance, the Leader of the Opposition claims to be speaking on the amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986, which as far as this bill is concerned include repealing sections 95B and 95C. He has spent the last 25 minutes not speaking on this bill, and I ask that you bring him to order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I do ask the Leader of the Opposition to keep tightly now to the bill, please.

John PESUTTO: I did want to explain why under the Road Safety Act we are not seeing the investment in our roads occur. I am entitled to address the background to why that is occurring, and that is because of the financial vandalism and the economic delinquency of the Allan Labor government. It cannot manage money and there is no money for our roads, and there are some data points that I need to refer to that back that assertion up. We have the highest unemployment in the country. We have 4.4 per cent unemployment. If you look at New South Wales and Queensland, they are in the low 3s. We are in the mid 4s for unemployment. New business growth is flatlining in Victoria. We have the highest level of insolvencies, particularly across critical areas –

Natalie Suleyman: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the opposition leader continues to stray from your ruling. This has been on numerous occasions. Again, I ask that you ask the opposition leader to remain on the specific sections of the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Leader of the Opposition, I do need to bring you back to the bill at hand.

Cindy McLeish: On the point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance, Acting Speaker. This is a one-page bill where a number of sections are repealed. The lead speaker has 30 minutes to speak on that. I seek your guidance as to what is in and what is out because I am very aware that government speakers are going to be looking eagerly at what they are going to be able to speak to. Could you please advise the house on how that is to be done.

Colin Brooks: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, I take it that you are aware that, on the issue that has just been raised, this bill refers to a number of pieces of legislation that are affected by these provisions. The points of order that have been taken have been taken when the lead speaker from the opposition has stepped outside of those particular pieces of legislation.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I have ruled on a couple of points of order on this point – that we do need to stick to the bill that is at hand. I understand this is not as engaging a debate as some other bills that have been here and it is quite wideranging in the topics that are able to be debated. I know further speakers may like to also talk to those topics, but I do say to the Leader of the Opposition that he had strayed slightly there.

John PESUTTO: I have said what I wanted to say on road maintenance. In the 1½ minutes I have got left, I just want to talk about two things, including the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012 amendments. It is important to bear in mind that we have seen under that legislative regime the number of active rental bonds collapse. We have had the biggest collapse in 25 years in active rental bonds, and what that is telling us in Victoria is that there are fewer places to rent because there are fewer places available, because it is too expensive to build housing supply in this state. That needs to be fixed. I say to everybody who is wanting to acquire a home – and we know that today between 70 and 80 per cent still want to buy their own home, but even if you cannot buy a home or you do not want to buy home, if you want to rent, understand that under this Labor government, under Premier Jacinta Allan, your rents are higher because of the economic mismanagement and financial vandalism of this Labor government.

I did want to talk just very briefly about the Marine (Drug Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988. I just wanted to make a point here that we have seen in the Federal Court in recent weeks a dispute about –

A member interjected.

John PESUTTO: That's all right. I'm surviving; don't worry about that. I'm okay; don't worry about me.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I just draw the house's attention to the protocols of sub judice.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Thank you, Minister. I think we are out of time.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, I wish to move, by leave, an extension of time for 30 minutes for the Leader of the Opposition.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): No, I do not think that leave will be granted.

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (11:37): A good ruling, Acting Chair. Before I come to the very narrow provisions that are outlined in this bill – and I will stick to those – the Leader of the Opposition did

raise a few matters there that I think are worth responding to directly, which I think I would be entitled to do. The first thing is just a quick remark that it was quite bizarre to see a leader of the opposition come in and speak on a statute law repeals bill and have only a small number of his team come in to listen to that. It was quite surreal.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the minister was at pains repeatedly to take the previous speaker up on relevance. I mean, this is an appalling abuse considering the fact that he tried to hold us all up to some standard. Now I would ask that the minister be held to the standard that he has asked us to uphold.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I will repeat, as I have said before, that this does need to continue to stay close to the bill. Even though we have seen wideranging topics, I would ask the minister to stick to the bill.

Colin BROOKS: I will stick to rebutting some points that were made by the Leader of the Opposition, which I think I am entitled to do in a debate in this place.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, the minister at the table wants to rebut points of order that were I think upheld by you. Can he rebut them?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Thank you, member for Eildon. Some points of order were allowed in that they asked the Leader of the Opposition to come back to a tightly held debate around the bill. I will be asking each member to do the same.

Cindy McLeish: Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, can the minister clarify whether he is responding to those points that were ruled out of order or not?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): That is not a point of order.

Colin BROOKS: The Leader of the Opposition spoke about Docklands, and I think he demonstrated that he has a lack of understanding of what is happening with Docklands.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, immediately after taking a ruling, the minister has abused the ruling and has used it as an opportunity to sledge the opposition rather than talk to this clearly important bill that requires the minister to speak closely to it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): The point of order has been raised about relevance. The Leader of Opposition had talked about Docklands, and that is what the Minister for Creative Industries is doing.

Colin BROOKS: The Docklands precinct is one of the most successful residential precincts in Victoria. It is seeing extraordinarily high residential growth demand. We are seeing many young families move into Docklands, as opposed to the view that was put by a previous speaker that young families are not buying into that area – in fact they are. Docklands has seen some \$15 billion worth of private investment to see residential and many other community facilities built in that precinct. We have got about 10,000 homes already built in Docklands, with about 7500 homes to come over the life of the development of that precinct. Something I think people often overlook is that Docklands, while it is a mature precinct, still has some significant residential growth to play out: nine hectares of parks and open space, the relatively new library, the primary school and of course the recent redevelopment of the Docklands Stadium in partnership with the AFL. It is a great precinct for people to live in, and therefore, contrary to the view that was put earlier, we have seen strong residential development come through there.

Developers in the area are pushing ahead with big developments down there: 675 new homes completed in September 2024 at GFM's build-to-rent apartments at 685 Latrobe Street; AsheMorgan's 925 build-to-rent apartments; and just last week the Premier was down with the Minister for Planning at Docklands, announcing the go-ahead for the Elysium Fields development stage 1, which is 700 homes. Contrary to the view that was put earlier in the debate about the lack of

residential development here in Victoria, Docklands is a shining example. Of course I remind those opposite that their sort of anti-Victorian doom-and-gloom picture is not borne out by the facts. Victoria in fact –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this constant sledging does the minister no service when he has just spent some half an hour attacking the opposition on relevance.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): Thank you for the point of order. I do not believe this point of order is relevant to the bill..

Colin BROOKS: The fact is that Victoria is commencing and approving more dwellings than any other state in the country, and that is because of the policies that the Allan Labor government have put in place. We have seen, contrary again to the views that have been put by those opposite, this government announcing a whole raft of further housing initiatives to make sure we are pulling every lever to deliver more homes.

I will move now, after rebutting the nonsense put by the lead speaker of the opposition, onto the aspect of this bill that deals with the Filming Approval Act 2014, which is item 3 in the legislation. I just want to give a shout-out to VicScreen here, which operates under the relevant act. It is delivering a four-year \$191 million screen strategy based on top of the wonderful skill sets that exist in Victoria in our creative sector and screen sector and also off the back of the \$46 million expansion of Docklands Studios. The legislative framework is important, but it is also important off the back of the skill sets that we have got the right infrastructure in place and the right incentives for the screen sector to go ahead. We have seen 29,000 jobs created out of that strategy and just over a billion dollars worth of economic impact to Victoria. It is not a sector that Victorians see a lot of up-front and close, but I will tell you that sector is booming at the moment. I was down at Docklands Studios last week, having a look around the studios down there – just teeming with people working on the sets, working behind the scenes – and meeting with some of the people in the production sector.

War Machine is a movie that is being filmed at Docklands Studios I think as we speak but was previously in Bright filming in the High Country and again at the RAAF base at Laverton. It is an incredible movie investment, American dollars flowing into our jobs here in Victoria – \$73 million worth of economic activity and some 2100 jobs during the life of that production. Then I also had the chance at the same time in the other part of the Docklands Studios to see the filming of *All Her Fault*, which is an eight-part series starring Sarah Snook. Again, it is a great investment in Victoria, and you could see the car parks down there at Docklands Studios packed with unit trucks, production trucks, cars and people. Another movie that has wrapped up but will be released at Christmas that was produced here, again at Docklands, is the Robbie Williams movie *Better Man*, which will come out and again is showcasing the skill sets of people who work in the screen sector here in Victoria.

I think it is important to reflect on the fact that whilst we have to make sure that legislation is kept up to speed and we have the relevant adjustments to legislation that we see in this bill, you also have to make sure you have the funding coming in behind that and make sure you have the strategies in place and the people in place to deliver the very best outcomes for Victoria. I think what we have seen in terms of the Docklands precinct that is mentioned in this bill as part of a housing strategy precinct and the measures that we put in place as a government to boost housing supply is what sees that housing growth being the highest of any state or territory, and then the success we have seen in terms of our screen industry off the back of good legislation in place, a good strategy, good people and significant government investment to drive in behind that means that we see prosperity in Victoria both in terms of precincts like Docklands and in terms of the screen strategy. So I commend this bill to the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (11:47): I rise to speak on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024, and what an exciting piece of legislation this is today. Gee, there is a lot in here, the one-pager has led the day. It is very, very exciting, and I am sure that points of order will continue and perhaps be the most

entertaining part of the debate this afternoon. However, I do not want to anticipate what the incredible contributions will be on this side of the chamber and also of those opposite.

This is really a repeal bill, as it states in its title. It is looking at repealing a number of sections amongst various pieces of legislation, and I would like to do a deep dive in some of these aspects of legislation, because it is important in this place that we understand that legislation helps to guide and direct decision-making in this state. The decisions that we have seen in some aspects of the Allan Labor government have left a lot to be desired, particularly for those Victorians who live outside of Melbourne in rural and regional Victoria. So often we hear that decisions are made by people in Melbourne for the people in Melbourne with no understanding of and no insight into what it means to live, work, do business and study in rural and regional Victoria. One of the clearest aspects of that has to be when you look at the Road Safety Act 1986 and the state of our roads in regional Victoria.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Emma KEALY: Behind me I hear the member for South-West Coast, who is my neighbour to the south. We are on a unity ticket when it comes to the appalling state of Victoria's roads in far western Victoria. It is an absolute disgrace, where you do not drive on the left side of the road, you drive on what is left of the road; where we have to pay our regos and we have to show that our cars are roadworthy, but we have roads which are not carworthy. We see from the Allan Labor government time and time again spin and nonsense when it comes to announcing big road blitzes. It is always this time of the year, always just a rejig, maybe a change of the date of the media release that goes out but no additional money that comes through, or if money is announced and it is boldly heralded that 'We're going to fix all of Victoria's roads,' it does not happen. The money is actually held up, and this is something that is fascinating to speak to local civil engineers about who tender for those rare roadworks in rural and regional Victoria. What they say is they might have won a tender two years ago for a certain piece of work, but by the time the money flows – and as I said, this can be two years later, as in the example given to me just a couple of weeks ago – that pothole is not just in one small section of the works that they tendered for, it now extends right down the road.

This explains what so many Victorians experience every single day, which is when they drive along they think, 'You beauty, we've got some slow-down signs, a few roadworks. We've got maybe a little bit going on. Perhaps they're going to fix this road.' And then they finish halfway through a pothole. It just drives people crazy. It has finally given me an insight into how badly Labor manage our roads, and it is Victorians that are paying the price.

Our road networks are so important in rural and regional Victoria because they are the only way to get to work. They are the only way to take your kids to school. They are the only way to go to football or netball training or maybe out to Mount Arapiles – not to go rock climbing, because we are not allowed to do that anymore. We can go and have a look at some invisible rock art and where some stone was chipped away to be used as tools and taken to another site. This is what is happening in rural and regional Victoria. After 10 years of Labor we have got the worst roads. We know that because as soon as people head over into South Australia, which my electorate abuts, they know when they come back home and when they come back into Victoria they get a rattling awakening. It is the alarm clock of Victoria's roads that says, 'Welcome home to the pothole state.' We have got more potholes than you could ever, ever imagine, and it is Victorians who know that when they arrive here. It is tourists who come here and see it. It is truck drivers, and we need to value our truck drivers because without truckies Australia stops.

I will make mention that I went to a fabulous truck show in Horsham a week ago. I saw one of the best trucks you will ever see in your life. It was a Mack bicentennial edition. There were only 16 of them made. The Captain Cook was the one that was there. Richard Wilken did an enormous amount of work in coordinating the Horsham truck show. I think he went above and beyond in acquiring one of the most impressive trucking vehicles that has been made in Australia and put on the roads of Australia. He actually got this truck as a special thing to bring to the Horsham truck show. Now, that is above

and beyond. To Richard and all of the crew at the Horsham Motor Sports Club, to the committee and the volunteers who helped out and to the 100 people, I would say, who brought their trucks to the truck show, thank you so much. Thank you so much for putting on such an impressive event for our region. But most importantly, thank you to our truckies who drive on our terrible roads every day. It is their workplace; it is dangerous. They not only have to put up with dangerous roads but they have to put up with dangerous drivers as well. I thank them for their work and for putting up with Victorian roads.

I can guarantee things will get better. They are going to get better in two years time when we are in government and we have an opportunity to actually give the support that VicRoads needs and that Regional Roads Victoria or whoever the Labor government sell it off to needs – because we do not know who they are going to sell it to get a bit of money to tip into that budget black hole that Labor have created by building a tiny, tiny little train line in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. It is a tiny little train line.

Members interjecting.

Emma KEALY: I hear the questions from the bleachers over on the other side. I do not know whether we will have those same little squawks in a couple of years time from the other side. I think they are getting concerned. I hear from the other side quite regularly about the builders and the blockers. Well, I tell you what, Labor are pretty good at building taxes. They are pretty good at building debt. They are pretty good at blocking housing. They are pretty good at blocking roadwork going on and making sure that that does not go ahead. I will tell you what I really look forward to blocking and that is a number of the people from the Labor backbenches from coming back to this place after October 2026.

Natalie Suleyman: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this has been a wideranging debate, but the speaker knows too well that she has now strayed way, way away from the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. We are hearing all sorts of things that have no relation to what is before the house, and I ask you to ask that the speaker continues to remain steadfast with the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Alison Marchant): I will ask the member to come back to the bill, please.

Emma KEALY: Let us look at an element of this bill, and that is the repeal of an element of the Road Safety Act, which is exactly what I have been speaking about. Labor have cut the road asset management budget so that now it is 16 per cent below what it was in 2020. Labor will also reduce the area resurfaced or rehabilitated statewide by 75 per cent next year compared to just two years ago. We know that Labor cannot manage money, they cannot manage our roads, and it is Victorians that are paying the price. It is not just from these statistics, of looking through the budget papers, looking through the KPIs and getting information through questions on notice, that we know Victoria's roads are badly managed; it is something that people are experiencing every day. Ninety-one per cent of roads were rated poor or very poor in a government survey just last year, and yet the road toll is still a terrible, terrible problem.

I did hear earlier today an interview, and it was actually a comment on how we cannot blame drivers for the road toll in every instance. What I would urge the Allan Labor government to consider is that their failure to invest in our road surfaces is putting lives at risk. I heard recently that there was a truck accident, which was a horrific rollover where a large number of stock were killed. It was determined to be caused by a medical incident. That medical incident was the truck went through a pothole and the driver hit his head on the steering wheel and was rendered unconscious. That is not what we should be seeing on our roads and on one of the nation's busiest freeways and highways. In fact it was on the second-busiest highway in the state. I urge the government to consider the amendments in this legislation but also consider what they are going to put in next year's budget. Fix our roads and make them safe.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (11:57): I am very happy to speak on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. I know that it is very easy to mock and trivialise the premise of a statute law bill, and I can see the opposition have gone to great depths to mock and trivialise the premise of this bill. However, there is a fundamental underpinning of democracy, and that is whenever you are transacting legislation you are up-front about it and you transact it through the Parliament. It may not be the most exciting moment of their lives – I get that – nevertheless if we are to value democracy and we are to maintain the confidence of the community that when legislation is varied in any way it will be transacted openly and in an up-front manner in the chamber, then we need to adhere to that. That is an adult and mature thing to do as members of Parliament. I certainly do not come to Parliament every day expecting to have entertainment and for it to be exciting from moment to moment. On the contrary, we have a tremendous responsibility to represent our constituents. On that premise that means we are to deliver changes in a way that adheres to the governance and conventions of Parliament, henceforth why we are adhering to various points of order to ensure that those fundamental tenets of parliamentary processes are adhered to and respected. That is why we put such legislation before the Parliament – sorry, it is not as entertaining as you would like it to be. Nevertheless if we are going to respect the premise of the voters who put us in this place, we need to deliver such parliamentary processes and legislation in a way that respects the Parliament and the democracy which we serve. That is a point I just did want to make for the benefit of the chamber, respectfully.

The purpose of this bill is to repeal – I did hear the word ‘repeal’ before, and I was very pleased to hear that, because that means we are adhering to the premise of the statute before us – certain redundant and spent provisions in Victorian legislation. This ensures that with the vast amount of legislation that accumulates over time we are continually ensuring its relevance and appropriateness and making sure that it is, for instance, not duplicating other provisions that may be present in other pieces of legislation because of the potential impacts that could prevail should that duplication be allowed to continue. There are all sorts of contingencies, which we would all be aware of, as a result of any and every word that is in any piece of legislation. As I was saying before, you might like to think that this may not be the most substantive reform, because these are not substantive reforms as such, but nevertheless they are changes to legislation, and hence we need to honour that.

In terms of legislation introduced and passed, we have been a very busy government, passing 43 bills in the past 12 months and introducing 32 bills in 2024 alone, and we all should I think use some perspective when we are comparing some bills to others. I just think that is important when we are looking at the relevance of debates and discussions in this chamber.

The other point I do want to make before proceeding to other elements of this Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024 is that the Leader of the Opposition, if he wants to make points about his tremendous advocacy on housing, should not sit on the back of a ute defying the Bills Street, Hawthorn, development. He has form. He might want to think about that, because it is on record, and we all know about it. Speaking with a forked tongue in this place has consequences. I just wanted to make that point.

Now I shall resume on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. You will notice that I have repeated that about three times, just as a little reminder of the purpose for which we are here today in this moment. This is a statute law repeal bill, and these sorts of bills are passed as part of Parliament’s regular housekeeping to ensure that legislation across the statute book is accurate, clear, maintained in an orderly manner and accessible to the public – yes, the public, constituents who we represent. This is common practice. It is not only a Victorian thing; it is actually practised in other jurisdictions in Australia and around the world. I will be clear on the point that this bill does not make substantive amendments to how Victorian legislation will apply. That is clear. That does not mean it does not matter and that does not mean that we can mock every single segment of this piece of legislation for the purpose of a jovial moment necessarily without vindicating the purpose for which this legislation has been brought before the chamber.

Indeed current legislation provides that repeal statutes do not, unless there is a contrary intention, affect the operation of other acts. I think that is very important when we are talking about adhering to the central tenets of a particular bill. Section 15(1) of the Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 provides – just to be really clear on this point – that:

Where an Act or a provision of an Act, being an Act or provision that directly amended another Act or a subordinate instrument (whether by the insertion of words or expressions in that Act or subordinate instrument or the substitution of other words or expressions for words or expressions in that Act or subordinate instrument) –

(a) is repealed ...

...

the repeal ... of that Act or provision shall not, unless the contrary intention expressly appears, affect in any way the direct amendments made in the other Act or in the subordinate instrument or the operation or effect of those amendments.

That is just to be crystal clear about the frame in which are operating when we are debating this particular legislation in Parliament today.

I just want to point out an interesting comparator, and this is an example to vindicate the purpose of having these statute law revision bills, although the opposition do not seem to think they are very important. I am just going to give you a good example. In Ireland in the mid-2000s the government there repealed over 3500 statutes. The *Irish Times* noted in 2008 that:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Examples of the acts to be repealed include the last of the penal laws such as legislation prohibiting Catholics from owning certain lands or holding certain positions and a 1537 act of Henry VIII suppressing St Walstan's Monastery in County Kildare and transferring it to the Crown.

Who knew?

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

An 1825 act designed to encourage the surplus population of Ireland to leave the country will also be removed from the statute book.

When we look at that now with current eyes we can see that that is glaringly out of touch and inappropriate in the current era. This is why it is so important for vigilance to be practised when we are looking at all legislation that falls under the Victorian constitution and within the jurisdiction of our state, not to mention that of the country, Australia, and of course globally as well. This is deemed important enough for the Irish. It is important enough for the UK. I think it is important enough for Victoria as well.

I hope that the opposition will take heed of that and recognise that there is an important premise for having these sorts of bill before the house so that any kind of amendments to legislation are not simply dissolving into the air without being properly acknowledged before the Parliament, where they can be appropriately transacted and debated.

I should say, comparing to that interesting example in Ireland, a similar process is undertaken with statute law revision bills, with one such bill introduced earlier this year to, in the words of the explanatory memorandum, make:

... minor amendments to a number of Acts to correct grammatical and typographical errors, to update references and for other similar purposes.

So while repeal bills and revision bills do not make new policy, you would not have known that from the discussion we had from the opposition before. It seems like they did not really understand the premise of a statute law repeal bill, so this is why I am labouring this point. While repeal bills and revision bills do not make new policy and are unlikely to make the front pages, they are important to ensure our statute book is accurate, clear and accessible for the Victorian community. I hope that I

have appropriately transacted and respected the premise of the Statute Law Repeals Bill, because it is important and it is to be respected, as are the processes of Parliament.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:06): I rise to speak on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. This is a statute law repeals bill that repeals redundant or spent provisions across seven Victorian acts in this instance. One of those acts that I will be focusing on is the Road Safety Act 1986. This repeals sections 95B and 95C, which are no longer required. However, I will begin by talking generally about the state of the roads in Victoria, particularly in south-west Victoria. As the member for Lowan, my neighbour to the north of me, has already pointed out, Victorians know when they have reached the border, because they head into South Australia and they quickly send me an email or ring my office and say, ‘Goodness me, the roads are so vastly different. Why can’t Victorian roads be like this?’ Or when visitors come from South Australia and into Victoria, I get similar emails saying, ‘What is going on? The potholes are dangerous. Your roads are appalling. It’s actually quite frightening.’ They are the words I often get sent to me, the word ‘frightening’, the word ‘dangerous’, the word ‘concerning’ about family members.

Why is this? Well, we can see that Labor reduced the resurfacing and rehabilitation funding that they spend on roads in the last financial year by 95 per cent. We know and have known for some time that Fulton Hogan, who had the contract in my part of the world, the alliance that existed for 10 years, have actually gone interstate because there is no work. There have been no government tenders for some time. Now, this is 16 per cent less than the government were spending on their roads in 2020. They can crow and boast about all sorts of ways of fiddling numbers and they can claim they are spending money, but please, please, those on the other side, nobody is fooled by your misinformation, because they drive on these roads every single day and they see what the government’s own report highlighted recently – that 91 per cent of roads were rated poor or very poor in the government’s own survey last year. I am constantly getting told by my constituents the problems they see.

The government took a bucket of money, and out of that bucket of money from the road safety TAC area they spread wire rope barriers right across regional Victoria. They did not fix the roads first. They did not put substantial improvements on the roads, they just fenced them in, and people are having massive problems with this. A constituent of mine Leon Condon, who lives on the Princes Highway between Warrnambool and Portland at Codrington, has a very large trucking company and takes hay to farmers in the north right up to the Wimmera and into the Mallee, across to the Riverina and across to Gippsland. It is a very big service to farmers who need to feed their stock, particularly when we are in critical situations like some of the areas of Victoria and New South Wales are finding themselves in now. This is a gentleman who cannot get his truck off his property onto the Princes Highway without having to go kilometres the wrong way.

When you are running businesses, it is very hard to get a margin. When you are trying to deliver a service for the farmers who have not got the money to pay for lots of high-cost feed, you cannot afford to add on fuel costs and extra kilometres totally unnecessarily because the government did not actually consult with him and put the breaks in the wire rope barriers where they should logically be. In the last six months, Leon Condon tells me, there have been three incidents where people could not see the wire rope barriers, because of sun in their eyes, and one was a significant incident. On the safety that is supposedly being met, I know the government is going to say, ‘Oh well, they could’ve really come to grief; there could’ve been a fatality,’ but I am sorry, there are more accidents there, he tells me, since the wire rope barriers have been put there. That is just one example where the minister could actually send someone from VicRoads and authorise someone to go and have a conversation with the gentleman and come up with a solution that works for both the safety of the road and the farmer being able to run his business.

Another business is Cameron Leske’s business right on the corner of the Princes Highway at Heywood, where recently in foggy conditions a truck ploughed into the business, just missing their house with young children. He is just asking for the government to do an assessment, to be there and actually see it, because when I have been there and seen it, it is quite logical that it would be a concern.

All he wants is some barriers, maybe a bit of bluestone, just something to prevent a truck ploughing into his house. But no, the government did, I imagine, a desktop study and came back to him through me and said, ‘Nup, no provisions to change anything.’ Well hello, there was a really very close, near miss. This is a business that is at risk, and it really would not be hard for the minister to authorise someone to go on a site visit – I have said I would meet them there – and have a discussion about how we can address this. It is the responsibility of the government on road safety.

There is another gentleman who I met recently, who drives trucks. He has been driving trucks all his life. He is, I do not know, about 35, 40 tops. It was the middle of winter when I was talking with him, and he was telling me how bad it is on the roads. He said he is getting jostled so much that he has actually got a back injury and is having to wear a support belt. I think you call them a kidney belt for when you use an excavator or a forklift. He is having to wear one of those. It was the heart of winter when I was speaking to him, and he had thongs on, which is why I started the conversation, because it was way too cold for thongs. He said, ‘My back is so bad from driving my truck on these pothole-ridden roads that I can’t bend over and put my Blundstone boots on, so I have to wear thongs.’ This is a workplace injury caused by the government’s mismanagement of our roads.

There are stories that go on and on and on, and we have got the government crowing about what they are doing. Well, we mention roads in this Parliament and what we hear are the most disingenuous responses about how much the government are doing for our roads. Just last week a press release was put out about how 3 to 5 kilometres is going to be fixed on the Terang-Mortlake Road. Well, let me say: go for a ride on that road. It is way past its use-by date, so it is fantastic that it is having some renovations. However, it is probably just going to be pothole fixing. The reality is there are thousands of kilometres as bad as that road and we are seeing them ignored, from Illowa to Port Fairy, another significant area. The government is hopefully going to fix the Illowa road. Let us hope they do it with some longevity in their mind about it, because we are sick of seeing roads repaired and fall apart within a week or two weeks and then hearing that it is the rain that is to blame, for goodness sake.

Fulton Hogan have headed up to Queensland to fix their roads, and they know, like we know, that monsoonal rains appear in Queensland and that Victoria has had wet seasons for years and years. We farmed in Victoria for 25 years, and we have had really wet years over and over again. It is about making sure the contract has the right specifications and has the right amount of rubble and then tuff on top, or whatever material you are using at the top, and the right camber and making sure you supervise the contractors. That is what Victoria needs to see – the right amounts of resources given to the contractors and the right specifications and then the government taking the time to make sure the job is done properly. That is what is lacking in Victoria – a government that cares.

We have got the Princes Highway between Port Fairy and Portland. People are ringing me and actually talking about arriving in Warrnambool after that journey in tears, and I am not making that up. People are so frightened. You just hit these potholes, because often you cannot see them if it has been raining, and bang – it is such a frightening experience.

You just wait for the next few minutes for the sound because you have done a tyre or a rim. It is just constantly concerning.

The government’s answer is to put up ‘Slow Down’ signs. Well, I am sorry, the people of Victoria pay their taxes. They expect safe roads. They want their children safe. I am terrified when I know my children are driving home to Warrnambool from Melbourne, when they lived down there, or my Warrnambool children are driving to go camping up in the bush somewhere. I am terrified, and it is not unusual for mothers nowadays to ring. I am not an over-the-top mother – my kids would probably say I do not care about them enough – but surely it is reasonable, because we are so frightened, to ring at the start of the journey. I actually often ring in the middle of the journey because I am so worried about their safety on the road.

My children are getting older and they certainly have experience, but it is not even about experience, because on these roads, like I said, when you have had a little bit of rain you cannot see the potholes. On the way to Portland you go around a bend and – bang – you see a massive pothole, and it is natural to swerve. There are double lines at that particular pothole that I have in my mind right now, and we are going to have head-ons. Like the member for Lowan just said, there is the story of a truck driver who hit a pothole and knocked himself unconscious. These are issues that we are absolutely very, very likely to be seeing more and more of. It is a horrendous and frightening experience. On country roads we share the roads with very, very capable truck drivers, who take our products from farm to market. We need to give them the workplace they deserve. We need people to be able to share the road with trucks and do that safely. It is not about compromising the state of the road; it is about fixing the roads properly.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (12:17): I am happy to rise today to make a contribution on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. It is a necessary bill, one that will repeal redundant and spent provisions in Victorian legislation to ensure Victorian legislation remains accurate and up to date. These necessary changes are happening across a wide range of acts. The first of those is the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012, administered by the Department of Government Services in the Minister for Consumer Affairs' portfolio. It was fantastic to have the minister come out to the Clarinda district earlier this year, along with Consumer Affairs Victoria director Nicole Rich and the new renting taskforce officers after they attended inspections for rental properties for the first time.

That was a really exciting day, and it is a really exciting initiative backed by a \$4 million investment from the Allan Labor government. The rental taskforce is using intelligence and market analysis to boost monitoring of rental campaigns, conduct targeted inspections and act on identified breaches. It is great for my local community, because in suburbs like Clayton and Clayton South more than 60 per cent of the properties are rentals, which is really significant to my electorate. It was fantastic to see the enthusiasm of the taskforce team, who were attending rental inspections in Clayton and Clayton South and the surrounding area, checking that rental properties meet the mandatory minimum standards and agents and rental providers are meeting their obligations. As we have heard from the minister, the rental minimum standards in our state include things that most people would reasonably expect in a home, such as a functional kitchen, lockable external doors and being structurally sound and waterproof. I commend the minister for that work and the range of initiatives happening across her portfolio to protect Victorian consumers, and I am also happy to support the change here to the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012.

There are a host of other changes to a wide range of acts, removing redundant or spent provisions. These include amendments to the Docklands Act 1991, administered by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) in the Minister for Precincts' portfolio, the lead speaker on this side. Further, there are changes to the Filming Approval Act 2014, administered by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions in the Minister for Creative Industries' portfolio.

While we are on the subject of creative industries, I would like to congratulate Nic Clark of Nicholas Clark Management, who has been successful in their application to Creative Victoria's Touring Victoria program. Nic's business is a great local business that works in tour development, management and bookings across the state and across the country. It was fantastic to hear about the brilliant creative work taking place with this company, with some amazing performances coming up. The creative arts are alive in Victoria, and I could see that with Nic's passion. I am really happy that Creative Victoria is supporting their work, which is bringing a lot of positive benefits locally to our community and across the state.

Further, this bill includes an amendment to the Greenhouse Gas Geological Sequestration Act 2008, administered by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, DEECA, in the Minister for Energy and Resources' portfolio, as well as an amendment to the Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution and Control) Act 1988, which is administered by departments within the portfolio

responsibilities of both the Minister for Ports and Freight and the Minister for Outdoor Recreation. Again, these are changes that remove redundant or spent provisions to keep this up to date and clear.

We have heard a lot of speakers, including the previous speaker, the member for South-West Coast, talking about the potholes in our roads. I would like to say that we have amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986, administered by DTP in the Minister for Roads and Road Safety's portfolio. It is really important – if I can take some minutes to talk about that – that we have the Road Safety Act up to date and clear, as we know how important the safety and maintenance of our roads are. Over the past few months this is something that has been raised consistently with me and my office.

It is a really important and really challenging time, with repeated flooding and above-average rainfall causing unprecedented damage to our roads, which means that our maintenance program needed to focus on rebuilding damaged roads last year. Simply resurfacing these roads would not have prevented further degradation. We have felt that locally – as we drive through our electorate, we know that – so I am really happy that we are entering an extended period of warmer and dryer conditions, which is what we need for most of the work to be done. That will be happening between now and May, ensuring repairs last. Again, I am very glad to see the rolling out of the major road maintenance blitz to rebuild, repair and resurface roads right across Victoria, including in my electorate of Clarinda. It is very much needed and supported by the largest single-year investment in road maintenance in the state's history.

A host of road workers have begun delivering \$964 million worth of roadworks – the equivalent of \$2.6 million for every day of the year. Over the next several months crews will complete thousands of projects on our network, ranging from road rehab to resurfacing, patching potholes and the maintenance of bridges, traffic lights, signalled roads and infrastructure. There are some major works happening in my electorate on Centre Road, which is really positive. Community feedback on Centre Road has been really strong. I am really happy to see that those works are taking place, improving the conditions of our local road and road safety for all of our road users. It is great to see Centre Road being prioritised, which is based on expert assessment and community feedback, ensuring that upgrades are focused where they are most needed.

In the time remaining I would like to also mention the changes to the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017, administered by the Minister for Water's portfolio. These changes really are wideranging across a host of acts, again aimed at removing redundant or spent provisions that remain on the statute book.

Again, I am happy to support these changes to ensure that Victoria's statutes are up to date and clear and that our legislation is operating effectively to deliver the best outcomes for Victorians, whether that is record health and education funding or the government's massive infrastructure agenda, with level crossing removals, the Metro Tunnel and the Suburban Rail Loop, ensuring that Victorians can get to their homes. They want to live close to their job and also to their loved ones.

It is really important to make sure that our statute book is accurate, clear and accessible for the Victorian community, and that is what we are achieving here with this bill before us today. I commend the bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:26): Acting Speaker Addison, welcome back. I am pleased to rise today to talk on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024, which is repealing a few bills: 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. It has been a wideranging debate today, and thank goodness for that because I have got to try and fill 10 minutes on this. But I will start with the Filming Approval Act, and I will take up from where Minister Brooks, the Minister for Creative Industries, left off. It is good that we are seeing film investment in Victoria. I think that is very, very important for our economy. He made a comment

that it is important to have funding behind legislation we bring in, and I agree. I could not agree more. We had Liam Neeson down in my area at Walhalla.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, *Ice Road 2* they were filming down there. It was actually quite interesting to have someone like Liam Neeson come down there. I did not see one Labor MP turn up, which was a bit of a shame. It would have been nice if the government had turned up. But we had Liam Neeson down there. I do agree with what the Minister for Creative Industries said: when you need funding, you fund it behind your legislation. Unfortunately for Walhalla, they had an international star there but it is a town that does not have a sewer. You would think in 2024 that they would have a sewer, but they do not, and it is something I have brought up with the government on several occasions. You can imagine the whole crew there for this ice truckers film. You have got – I do not know what they are called – all the roadies and all the staff and all the set guys and everything else, and there was no sewer in the town, so they were in portable toilets. How is that for an international reputation? These are the things that we need to fix.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: These are the things that we need to fix, member for Point Cook. If we want to promote Victoria as an international destination for film, or for whatever other reason, we need to invest in these regional areas to boost their economies. It is really quite simple. Unfortunately we tend to get ignored in regional Victoria a little bit. You do not get ignored if you live in Bendigo, Ballarat or Geelong. The government actually favours those areas quite well, but anywhere else in regional Victoria tends to get ignored. I have driven up the Calder Freeway to Bendigo – a beautiful road, but we do not have that down our way. It is just going that way, to Bendigo East. They get good roads; we do not.

The funding behind the legislation is important. Let us talk about the Road Safety Act, because roads at the moment are in a terrible state – nobody can deny that. We have seen and we have heard the amount of funding cuts there have been on roads. I know I am not alone in my electorate – this would be common all over the state.

We heard the member for Gippsland South the other week putting over all the press releases that the government had done – there were about six in a row – saying, ‘We’ve spent X amount on this blitz, that blitz, that blitz, that blitz.’ Honestly, if that is true, if they had spent that amount of money and done that much blitzing, why are our roads in such poor condition? It baffles me. I am new to this place; I am not up with all the press releases from 2020 or whenever they were, but when we look at our roads and 91 per cent are in poor or very poor condition, where has the money gone? It is not going into fixing the potholes; it is going somewhere else.

In my electorate, things are not getting any better. I take on board from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety that some of these roads have been affected by floods. I get that you have road damage from floods, but in my electorate we have not had that much flooding that has affected our roads. We have just had poor maintenance. And because the maintenance has been so poor, now it is going to be more expensive to fix. That is the problem: if you do not look after the roads, if you ignore the problem, the problem becomes bigger and the fix becomes bigger.

We heard from the member for Lowan, who got up before, and she had a very good point about the contractors pricing roads. They get a tender and they price the road, but that tender does not come through for another two years. The problem they have already tendered on, by the time they get there, has multiplied, so they do not fix it properly. The contractors are only going to fix what they priced for. If there were 10 potholes up the road two years ago and now there are 50, they are only going to fix 10, because they are not going to do work they do not get paid for; it is really that simple. No contractor does.

I have road contractors in my area now, A1 Asphaltting, which is a very big employer in my area, in the town of Drouin. He employs 130 people in his civil construction business, and this will give you an idea of how many cuts the government has made. I was talking to him not that long ago, and he said that because of the cuts to road funding it looks like he is going to have to let go of at least 30 people. That is 30 people that will now lose their job with A1 because the government has cut funding so dramatically. It has gone from \$201 million to \$37 million. That is a massive, massive cut in funding, and it is continuing year after year after year. The government has been very neglectful of our roads in regional Victoria and not just regional Victorian roads but major highways as well. If you go down the road from Pakenham East to the Bunyip River in particular, that section of road is a major highway. The number of potholes in there is absolutely ridiculous. We have speed zones changing constantly because of the conditions of the roads – we do not fix the roads now; we just change the speed zone.

I have talked in this Parliament before – and I have to say it again because it frustrates me – about the Thorpdale slip: 70 per cent of Australia’s brushed potatoes come off the hill at Thorpdale. B-doubles come down this hill. The road has got that bad now that the speed is down to 20 kilometres. They may as well make it walking pace. Under this government that road has been needing to be fixed for the last 10 years, but all they have managed to do in 10 years is, every time that road moves down the hill, just get another load of crushed rock and another load of crushed rock. That is all they do. It is very dangerous. I cannot believe that it has not been a priority for this government to fix that, given that Thorpdale is probably one of the most productive areas in Australia for fruit and vegetables. It is not just potatoes that come off that hill; you have got onions – you have got everything else. It is a very high producing area of Victoria.

Jade Benham: Not as big as Mildura.

Wayne FARNHAM: I would not know; I do not go to Mildura.

Jade Benham interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: I will take you up on that.

I know the member for Gippsland South will back me up that Thorpdale is one of the highest producing areas in Victoria for that product. But getting back to the point, that for over a decade this road has not been fixed is pretty shameful. I constantly talk to Regional Roads Victoria about it and they say, ‘We’re monitoring the condition.’ I can tell them the condition of it is that it is stuffed. It is not that hard. You do not have to monitor it. What you actually have to do is get a plan to fix it, and it comes back to what Minister Brooks said: funding behind the announcement. If you are going to make an announcement, you have got to have the funding behind it. You have got to have the funding behind the legislation. As far as our roads go, they say they are fixing the roads and they say they are doing the blitzes, but there is no funding. So the Victorian public do not believe them because they are getting beaten up and down in their cars when they are driving down roads. They are swerving potholes trying to miss them. I think we had a pothole every 100 metres in Victoria. At some point in time this government has got to realise that they need an uplift in funding to fix our roads.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (12:36): I am also standing here to speak in favour of the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. At the outset, I would like to thank and commend the parliamentary counsel and officers and departmental people that have actually had to go through all these pieces of legislation that I will list shortly in order to tidy them up by taking out pieces that no longer apply or things that are out of date or redundant. Looking at this piece of legislation, I think it is pretty clear that there is a lot of work involved. I am not sure if it is rewarding work – in the sense that it does not actually provide legislation that is life changing, that makes a huge contribution to the way people in Victoria go about their business – but it is something that is very, very important and vital to ensure that our legislation is up to date and that we are decluttering pieces of legislation in which there are references that are no longer necessary or no longer apply.

There are seven acts that are being amended or having parts repealed where there are redundant or spent provisions, and they are the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act 2012, Docklands Act 1991, Filming Approval Act 2014, Greenhouse Gas Geological Sequestration Act 2008, Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988, Road Safety Act 1986 and Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017.

As an example of the changes this legislation is going to make, in the case of the Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trading Act one of the provisions way back there was a requirement to put a notice on public display for one month around changes in the act. That was many years ago, so there is really no requirement that a notice needs to be put up on public display for one month when that time has well and truly lapsed. So that is an example of the things that are being repealed or taken out of current legislation in order to tidy it up and make it more concise and clear.

In the last 12 months or so we have as a government been doing a lot of work in terms of introducing legislation that actually does change people's lives and does make things better for Victorians. I think in the last 12 months something like 43 bills have been introduced into this Parliament and have passed. In 2024 alone there have been 32 pieces of legislation, and of course we are not finished yet. We are debating really important legislation this sitting, including the legislation around licensing of tobacco premises, and I know that this will be much welcomed by residents of the Thomastown electorate, where terrible things have been happening in terms of some of the tobacco shops and organised crime.

This, hopefully, will be making sure that people are safe and that we can break up some of these illegal activities and terrible crimes.

In terms of the Road Safety Act 1986 – again, where things have been made redundant – I know there has been a lot of talk on the other side about road maintenance and the need to fix up potholes. I do know there has been quite a bit of that work going on in the Thomastown electorate, particularly in the older, established areas where the roads are very old. Maybe it is just that the other side is not advocating hard enough to ensure that that work is getting done.

There is also other legislation in this list that is being amended or changed or is having pieces repealed. The piece of legislation the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017 was a first for the state Victorian Labor government. We passed that legislation in 2017, and it was the first bill to be co-titled in a traditional owner language. That was a first in terms of legislation titles, so we are very proud of that legislation. It was also a first in that the legislation was looking at treating the Yarra River as one entity rather than what was going on prior to the legislation, and that was where councils pretty well had control over the piece of the Yarra River that was running through their city, meaning that there was a lot of overlap and there were a lot of inconsistencies in the way that the Yarra River was being looked after in terms of the river itself, the health of the river and the biodiversity. Now traditional owners have a big voice in ensuring that the Yarra River is looked after and is there for the long term for all future generations to enjoy.

Sadly, I do not live, and residents of the Thomastown electorate do not live, very close to the Yarra River, but we do have the Merri Creek, and that is also a waterway that is having quite a lot of attention paid to it because, again, we really need to clean up these waterways and make sure that the living things are continuing to thrive and that our environment is clean and can be enjoyed into the future. There is the Merri Creek Management Committee, there is the Friends of Merri Creek and there is also our local Lalor Landcare group, and all of these organisations do incredible work to support, to clean and to ensure that our waterways are at their best.

I would like to give a shout-out to Malcolm Wrest, who was the one that started up the Lalor Landcare organisation. He is incredibly active. Often he gets, for example, the local scout groups, such as the Lalor scouts, out there on planting days, and we have planted hundreds and hundreds of trees. It really is great to see the young scouts out there learning about things growing, how to plant a tree and how

to keep it watered. They are all native plants that are being planted, and we are also getting a little bit of education about the type of foliage that was there way back many, many years ago, and how we want to bring that back to make the area even nicer.

When you look at some parts of the Merri Creek and what it is looking like now, it really has improved and come a long way. There are also, I cannot deny, some sections that do still need a lot of work. There are also some pieces that have been concreted up. There is a lot of congestion in some areas, but it is certainly looking much better than it has in the past. As a government we have supported these programs to make sure the waterways in Victoria are constantly looked at to try to make them better, to try to improve the water quality and to try to attract and bring back the living things that were there but may not be there now because of pollution.

I guess there are a couple of examples of where we see the work that is being done on an environmental level in Victoria as really having some great effects and as really good work – and I notice that the Minister for Environment is in the chamber. There is the growling grass frog, which is a native of the Merri Creek grasslands. I have to say that a number of years ago this frog was endangered, but now that has gone down a level and it is only threatened to be endangered. These are very small incremental changes, but they are changes nonetheless, and that does actually mean that there are more frogs. On that note I will sit down. I commend the bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:46): If anyone takes a point of order on me on anything that I am talking about when you can talk about the growling grass frog, you are all warned. The only thing that is endangered on that side is the member for Point Cook, because I am sure that he will be looking for a new career in 2026.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Yes, but you protected the growling grass frog, Minister. That is obviously why people still vote for you.

I am pleased to rise on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. We get these opportunities once or twice a term – maybe a bit more often than that, sometimes once a year – and despite what might have been said in the Leader of the Opposition's contribution and the many points of order taken, it is a very, very, very broad or very, very narrow bill, whichever way you want to look at it. It does cover a number of bills, and anyone who is speaking on it who considers taking a point of order should think about how they are going to speak on the one page of points that this bill literally is. Not surprisingly, I want to mostly refer to item 6, which repeals section 95B and section 95C of the Road Safety Act 1986. It is pertinent that we are talking about 95B and 95C, because as we heard yesterday in the chamber, under this government road maintenance fell by 95 per cent in the 2023–24 year. That is not my figure. That is nothing that I am suggesting; that is in the Department of Transport and Planning annual report. That was the figure for regional Victoria, which has the vast bulk of the road network, but equally the metropolitan figures were very much similar. That is in a situation where we are already facing an absolute crisis on our roads throughout regional Victoria and indeed throughout metropolitan areas.

I was sitting in here one day a few months ago when the member for Malvern, the member for Rowville, the member for Nepean and the member for Narracan – three out of four are virtually metropolitan MPs, some of them inner-city MPs – raised concerns about potholes. It is not just a regional issue anymore, because this government has abandoned proper maintenance on the roads. They like to talk about what happened 10 years ago, but they do not mention things like the fact that last year's road maintenance output budget was actually less than it was under the former coalition government 10 years ago, which is an extraordinary figure given the growth in the population and the needs in that time. As a result we have got a road network in our state that is in just appalling condition.

I do not really need to convince members opposite or anyone else. Anyone who drives on our roads will see it every day, and as I said, it is not just on country roads. Coming in on the Princes Highway

at Pakenham on the dual-lane freeway parts of the road are breaking up and there are potholes there – on a freeway, which is just an indictment. It is no surprise that there was a survey done for the government last year by the National Transport Research Organisation looking at the state of the roads. It focused on about 8000 kilometres of roads out of the 23,000 kilometres in the state that are state-owned roads and found that 91 per cent of them were in poor or very poor condition.

Surprisingly enough, the government and the minister are challenging that contention, saying ‘That’s not what the survey says.’ I have seen a slide from the National Transport Research Organisation presented to an industry conference that says exactly that. The government says, ‘No, no, no, that’s not what it says.’ I say to the minister and to the department, ‘If that’s not what it says, release the entire report to the public.’ What is the answer I get to that? ‘Ah, it’s very complex, Mr O’Brien. It’s very detailed. It’s a lot of data.’ They will not give it to me. Anyway, I assume we will get it under freedom of information at some stage, probably after a long fight in VCAT, as is usually the case. Nonetheless, we do not necessarily need the survey data to tell us what we already know, and that is that our roads are in an appalling condition. The budget in the current financial year is still 16 per cent less than it was four years ago. We have got ongoing damage to vehicles. In the last couple of years around 2000 people have lodged claims for compensation for damage to their vehicles, and given that there is a threshold for that compensation of around \$1640, I think it is, this year – it is indexed each year – very few if any of those people actually get access to that compensation, notwithstanding that they might be dealing with cracked rims or broken struts or whatever.

The trucking industry in particular – obviously their trucks are on the road all the time – tell me repeatedly that the cost of maintenance and repairs is going through the roof for them. I was with the member for Shepparton last year with a trucking company at Tatura talking about an increase of around 30 per cent each month on the maintenance bill, purely due to the state of the roads. We will also hear from the government on this, ‘Well, that’s because we’ve had floods. It’s been wet, Mr O’Brien. Don’t you understand we had this rain and there were floods in 2022?’ Yes, of course there were floods in 2022; we have had a couple of wet years. But that should not mean that you do not continue to maintain the roads. By all means, no matter what the minister says, there was not 100 per cent, not even 50 per cent, coverage of floods across the roads, particularly in the south-west – and in most of Gippsland we certainly did not have floods to that degree – and the south-west of the state is the most appalling. We just cannot have a situation where the state accepts that, because it has been wet, that road is going to be terrible. The Romans had wet years. The Romans had a lot of wet years. I was doing a little bit of research before.

Steve Dimopoulos: You sound like Danny Pearson.

Danny O’BRIEN: I was thinking a lot that I was sounding just like the member for Essendon, and it is about to get worse. I did this bit of research, and I found that one of the very first roads that was constructed was Via Appia in 312 BC. For the minister at the table – the member for Essendon will know this for sure – Via Appia is still in use today, 2330 years later. It is still in use today. I found on a website called engineeringrome.org that when bicycling down Via Appia its smooth paving stones have worn away into a bumpy and difficult road to travel on. That is terrible. But after 2300 years you might expect that the road has got a bit worse for wear. In Victoria we cannot do it for about two months, let alone 2000 years, before the road is cracking up.

In fact it was relevant to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, because I recently put a question on notice to him about the long-delayed duplication of the Princes Highway between Traralgon and Sale. There is a section there where about half a dozen patches have been put on. When I am talking patches, some of them are over 100 metres long, and this is a brand new road. It was only opened at the start of 2023 and already it has got massive patches on it. This is the response I got from the minister – because I asked him, ‘Who’s paying for this? Is it the taxpayer? Is the Victorian taxpayer having to pay for this, or does the contractor actually have to remediate that as part of the terms of the contract?’

He did not answer my question of course, but he said that technical experts are looking at it and trying to find out what caused this failure of the road and whether any local environmental conditions may have contributed. That particular stretch of road has been a road for over 100 years, so if there were any environmental conditions we should have known what they were and we should have planned for them, but the Romans would have done it better, you would have to say. So in answer to an interjection from before, ‘What have the Romans ever done for us?’, well, they taught us how to do roads better, but under this government we are actually not getting it.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

Danny O’BRIEN: No, I have been working on that for about 15½ minutes, Minister. We asked the question yesterday – in fact, Acting Speaker Addison, you will be disappointed to hear this – about a crew from Ballarat that has had to go 2500 kilometres to Far North Queensland to do work because they simply have not got the work in Victoria. We know that SprayLine, the government’s own agency – which is on the chopping block for sale, by the way – had to go for tenders in South Australia last year. We have got the whole charade of what was Regional Roads Victoria, which was set up in Ballarat and is gone now because no-one cares about the roads anymore in this government. This is a debacle, our roads, but on this bill I have no issues and I look forward to seeing it pass.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (12:56): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. From the outset I will say that it has been a wideranging debate today, and I allowed that when sitting in the chair where you are, Acting Speaker Addison, in making sure that everyone had a thoughtful contribution to this wide bill, which has a lot of changes to different acts. It is what we do in this place here.

We have always in this place some very serious and important legislation that comes to be debated, and as I have said in other debates, it is important that we as a government continue to have modern and fit-for-purpose legislation. What is important in doing that work is making sure that all those finer details are also addressed, and this bill particularly does that. It looks at those finer details of what needs to be changed in acts.

Representing the Bellarine now for a couple of years has been very much a privilege and a responsibility that I take very seriously. I am committed to serving not only those who may have voted for me to be in this place but all those residents in the Bellarine electorate, families and community members, and I do so with dedication. I work incredibly hard, but I also think integrity and transparency are really important in this place, and the electorates put trust in all of us to represent them here in this place. I am mindful of the many voices that I carry into this room.

Across the Bellarine electorate we have seen more people come to the regions to enjoy the lifestyle that the Bellarine offers, being near many coastal towns. We have families raising children. It is a great place to start a family. There are very many small businesses that enjoy the thriving tourism economy. It is a wonderful place, and we have got a wonderful environment as well. In that regard, I stand in this chamber and am reminded of that responsibility to address their concerns, and every constituent does deserve a representative who listens to them, who speaks for them, who fights for them and who can develop policies to improve their lives. One of the core duties that I have had to obviously learn more about is the role in this place of debating legislation that truly reflects the values of this government. It is a pleasure and an honour to be part of that process of making legislation, drafting laws and debating and casting votes here in this place, but it is more than that. It is about doing the hard yards, the hard yakka, all the grunt work behind the scenes to get those things done. That is what the Bellarine electorate certainly expect, and they expect us to get on with the job of governing for the state.

This is a statute law repeals bill. Bills are passed as part of Parliament’s regular housekeeping, and we do ensure that legislation is accurate and clear, and it is to maintain that orderly manner and accessibility for the public to understand, and this is just common practice that we have.

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

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Child protection

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. I have been informed about a 12-year-old Aboriginal boy with autism and with a history of self-harming who has said he has been subjected to abuse. The legal responsibility for this boy's care sits with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. In October he was abandoned at school and is now missing. His current whereabouts are unknown. VACCA has refused to return communications from police, family and other concerned parties. Why is the Premier failing vulnerable children like this 12-year-old Aboriginal boy?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): It is deeply inappropriate to canvass individual matters – deeply inappropriate to canvass individual cases. Particularly with the level of detail that the member for South-West Coast has provided, I would suggest she is not asking the question while keeping the best interests of the child in mind. This is a matter that the Minister for Children will be aware of, and I will take further advice from my minister.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:03): The local MP wrote to the Minister for Children a month ago. She has not responded. This 12-year-old Aboriginal boy is at risk and missing. Why is the Allan Labor government repeatedly failing to protect the children under its care?

Members interjecting.

Roma BRITNELL: No, I think the disgrace is you.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for South-West Coast, that is extremely inappropriate. Members will come to order.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): As I said in my answer to the substantive question, I will follow this matter up not with the member for South-West Coast but with the minister, because it is not appropriate for personal details to be canvassed – particularly of a child – publicly, particularly where it is clear that this is a very vulnerable young Victorian and we need to keep the best interests of the child firmly in our focus. I must say it is deeply disappointing that the member for South-West Coast has raised it in this way when there are more appropriate forums to do so.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It is extremely disappointing that the member has waited a month for a response about this child.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: education

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:05): The Allan Labor government understands that families are struggling with the cost of living. There has been no interest rate rise relief recently. That is why we are delivering help where it is needed right across our state, in our regions, in our suburbs and right across, supporting our Victorian communities. We know you cannot concentrate on an empty stomach. That is why we have delivered 40 million school breakfasts to date –

John Pesutto interjected.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Ben CARROLL: Happy little Vegemite over here, just calm down. I am talking about school breakfasts.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister for Education, through the Chair.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Brighton, you are warned. The Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Nationals and the member for Caulfield will come to order and allow the minister to make his statement without interjections.

Ben CARROLL: We understand the most fundamental building block to success is education. It is what gets us up and drives –

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: Have you finished? Do you do this in the courtroom? We know education is a fundamental building block to success. That is why, with the member for Narre Warren North and the member for Cranbourne, just last week we were out there talking about the Allan Labor government's school saving bonus – \$400 going to school uniforms and textbooks where we know it makes a real difference. With the member for Williamstown we have tripled the funding for the school glasses program. They cut Free Fruit Friday; we are doing 50 million breakfasts by the end of this year. They cut the education maintenance allowance; we are putting more investment in our schools – 2200 upgrades as I speak, right across this state. They cut Reading Recovery; we are doing world's best practice in reading and literacy right across our state. With the hardworking member for Yan Yean, we are seeing what is going on at Wandong Primary School, where we are delivering world-class best practice in the classroom, because under the Allan Labor government, no child and no school community will be left behind.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Narre Warren North is warned.

Suburban Rail Loop

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Premier. The Labor member for Bass tabled a petition signed by residents outraged at:

... the delay of the promised funding of \$5.3M to San Remo Primary School for critical infrastructure improvements.

How will kids at San Remo Primary School in the electorate of Bass benefit from Suburban Rail Loop East?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): I want to thank our outstanding, hardworking member for Bass for being a strong voice, a powerful voice, a passionate voice, a committed voice for her local community.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN: The reason why the member for Bass can bring a petition to this place for this project is because Labor governments have committed to it. The only reason we are talking about a \$5.3 million commitment to the San Remo Primary School is because the member for Bass secured this commitment, and the planning on this project is well underway. Of course this is just one of the 2200 schools that have been built or upgraded by Labor governments, nearly \$17 billion –

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was about San Remo Primary School specifically. Can I ask that you draw the Premier back to the delayed funding commitment to San Remo.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Sunbury is warned. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I will repeat that because I know the Leader of the Opposition gets a little shouty and does not do a lot of listening. I will repeat what I said at the outset of my answer. The only reason we are talking about the \$5.3 million commitment to San Remo Primary School is because of the hard work of the member for Bass, and the planning is underway for this vitally important school upgrade. Of course that is not the only school. Fourteen new schools opened across the state this year, and one of them was in the member for Bass's community at Clyde North – a great school, another one of our 14 new schools that have opened up.

But of course those of us with longer memories will remember a different time. Let us go back to 2016, a year when no schools were opened because no schools had been funded in the pipeline by the previous Liberal government. No schools were opened. We are building and investing in 2200 schools like San Remo Primary School, like the schools in Clyde North, like schools right across the state. That is part of that \$16.9 billion of investment that we are making in school buildings that is not just giving our kids and our teachers great school facilities to learn in; it is supporting 26,000 jobs – 26,000 workers who are getting the benefit of this Labor government's investment in education. And that includes the great community at San Remo.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): The Labor member for Thomastown said in Parliament that in Melbourne's outer suburbs:

... the infrastructure is not there and in fact even if it was funded today, it would take years and years and years to build in order to provide the necessary services for people coming in.

How will the Victorians who live in the electorate of Thomastown benefit from Suburban Rail Loop East?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Nepean is warned.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): I will say I was recently pleased to join the member for Thomastown at a brand new school in her electorate, Edgars Creek Primary School, with the Minister for Planning, and guess what we were announcing? We were making an announcement about not only how we were building more homes but how we were reforming the infrastructure contributions regime to support infrastructure for these communities. I was delighted to see our hardworking, committed, passionate member for Thomastown at that local school.

In anticipation I will say this to the Leader of the Opposition: every young Victorian who wants to study at Monash University will benefit from the Suburban Rail Loop because they will be able to catch the train there. You cannot do that now. Every single young Victorian who wants to study the course of their dreams for the job they want will be able to catch a train thanks to the delivery of the Suburban Rail Loop East.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bentleigh, you are warned.

Ministers statements: community sport

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:14): Today I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's work to make community sport more accessible for all Victorians, addressing cost as a barrier to participation. Our popular Get Active Kids voucher program is now open for its eighth round. Since beginning in 2020 this program has delivered nearly 150,000 vouchers to Victorian families, helping children to participate in sport by covering costs like membership fees, uniforms and equipment. In addition to the \$6 million announced in this year's budget, I recently announced a funding boost of an

additional \$3 million for this round, ensuring that even more families can access these vital \$200 vouchers.

The sporting club grants program is another initiative that helps break down barriers to participation, as well as supporting local sporting clubs. Through this program we have provided clubs with more than 11,000 grants worth more than \$17 million to help purchase uniforms and equipment, to run new inclusive programs and to assist participants to compete in events away from home. This summer we are again investing in safety and inclusion through the VICSWIM Summer Kidz program, which each January offers 16,000 kids access to affordable swimming lessons and essential water safety skills. With further funding from this government VICSWIM is this summer expanding its lessons for children with disabilities and those from multicultural backgrounds, ensuring that more Victorian children have the opportunity to learn to swim safely.

We understand the value of community sport. It strengthens local connections. It promotes healthier, more connected communities across Victoria. This government is committed to removing the barriers to participation so that more Victorians can be active, can be safe and can be engaged in the sports and activities they love.

Probate fees

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:17): My question is to the Premier. The main asset in the estates of most Victorians is the family home, so Labor's hiking of probate fees by up to 650 per cent massively increases an up-front death tax on the family home. Will the Premier now remove the family home from probate duties?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:17): In answering the member for Malvern's question, I reject his characterisation of the changes that the government announced recently regarding probate fees. There was extensive consultation that was undertaken on these probate fees, and part of the reason why was because previously the probate fee rates in this state had been considerably lower than in other states and territories. Also, importantly, they did not cover the costs of hearings in the Supreme Court. In considering that, we went about setting and putting in place a fairer system by abolishing the probate fees for those smaller estates. That is not something I have heard the member for Malvern talk a little bit about, so I will talk a little bit about that. We have abolished probate fees for small estates, keeping those medium-sized estates in line with New South Wales and South Australia.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question was specifically about the Premier's craven death tax on the family home.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the Manager of Opposition Business's point of order is entirely out of order. The Premier was being responsive to the question, and I ask that you rule his point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER: On this occasion the Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: I know I disappoint the opposition when I answer their questions directly. As I was saying – and I am providing this information for the member for Malvern because clearly he is not aware of it, because he has not raised it in any of his comments on this matter – we have abolished those probate fees for smaller estates. We have the medium-sized estates aligned with New South Wales and South Australia, and for a very, very small number of very, very large estates – multimillion-dollar estates – the level of fee is in line with the costs to manage that process. That is why we have made those changes.

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, in relation to the Premier's answer being factual, in fact it is the lowest category of estate which receives the 650 per cent increase.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The Premier has concluded her answer.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:20): Anna Hacker, a director at Pitcher Partners Advisory, has said that Labor's decision to hike probate fees by up to 650 per cent is:

... a backdoor death tax that is placing a financial burden on people who are already stressed and vulnerable when someone has died.

Premier, why is this desperate, cash-strapped Labor government attacking grieving families by implementing an up-front death tax on the family home?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): Again I remind the member for Malvern that he is wrong. His characterisation of the changes is wrong, and I repeat that because, again, perhaps the member for Malvern has either not heard or perhaps not understood the changes that we have made. I repeat: the changes that we have made result in, for a very, very small percentage of Victorians who are working through multimillion-dollar estates, yes, fees that have been put to a point that covers the level of administration for lawyers – for example, like the one the member for Malvern has referred to. These are changes that are consistent in terms of the smallest estates having those fees abolished, medium-sized ones having fees that are consistent with New South Wales and South Australia and those big multimillion-dollar estates having those fees at a level that meets the administration costs that go with these very complex matters, something I would have thought a former Attorney-General may have understood.

Ministers statements: Veterans Card Victoria

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (14:22): I rise today to update the house on how the Veterans Card Victoria is helping veterans with the cost of living. This week thousands of Victorians gathered at Remembrance Day services across the state to remember the courage and sacrifice of our veterans. I want to thank the Shrine of Remembrance and all RSLs across Victoria, whose volunteers work hard to put on events every year.

Victoria is proudly home to over 100,000 veterans, and we owe them our gratitude for their service. Victoria leads the way when it comes to our tailored programs that assist veterans to transition into civilian life and into good, secure jobs. We are the first and only government to offer a veterans card to every single veteran to assist with the cost of living. Since the launch of the veterans card we have seen more than 18,000 veterans sign up. This means veterans are making savings on expenses such as car rego, fishing licences and much, much more.

But we have got much more work to do, and we want every veteran in Victoria to sign up and save. Our veterans have done so much for our state and our country, and they continue to give back to their communities well after service. Whether you have served a day or had a long career in the defence force, in Victoria we are here to help with the cost of living. To all our veterans: the Allan Labor government will continue to honour your service and sacrifice, supporting you in your local communities on cost of living, education and finding a good, secure job – for veterans, for families and for all Victorians.

Abortion law reform

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:23): My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, it is a frightening time right now as we are seeing a resurgence of politicians around the world trying to control women's bodies and trying to ban or restrict abortion and reproductive rights. We are seeing it in the US, but also here in Australia we are seeing right-wing politicians come out of the woodwork in Queensland, in South Australia and federally with the Nationals trying to roll back our reproductive rights. Luckily, here in Victoria we do have the right to safe and legal abortion, but it is frightening to think that could be rolled back if there is a change of government. We could further protect this right, so will the government act and support enshrining the right to abortion in Victoria's constitution?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:24): I want to thank the member for Melbourne for her important question. The member for Melbourne well knows that she and I share the same strong commitment to women’s right to access safe medical and surgical abortions in this state. I also want to assure all Victorian women that, under an Allan Labor government, access to abortion care is assured. It was of course a Labor government that decriminalised abortion back in 2008, and indeed, to add to that, it was back in 2016 that former Minister for Health Jill Hennessy implemented our first ever women’s and sexual health reproductive strategy. Of course we also implemented safe access zones. Here in Victoria we run the nation-leading 1800 My Options service, which provides both confidential telephone and online information and support for women that are seeking information and access to either surgical or medical termination of pregnancy.

Our record here is strong, and I would say to the member for Melbourne that my focus as Minister for Health – and, I might say, very ably joined by the Parliamentary Secretary for Women’s Health – has been on increasing access to abortion care right across our state. As a regional Victorian I have been particularly focused on the need to increase access to abortion care for girls and women in rural and regional Victoria. And while I respect the sentiment expressed by the member for Melbourne, my focus has been on action and on making a real difference to the lives of so many girls and women right across the state.

Emma Kealy interjected.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: If the member for Lowan had been paying any attention at all, she would know that it is this government that has expanded sexual and reproductive health hubs to Horsham, to Ararat and indeed to Melton, areas where we know that access to abortion care has been a challenge. We have also done a great deal of work to improve access through our public hospital network.

Emma Kealy interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Lowan is warned.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I firmly believe, again, that abortion care is health care and it should be readily available across our network of public health services. In conclusion, we have talked a lot about abortion care; I hope the supplementary question asks me about contraception, because I want to say something about that as well.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:28): I thank the minister for her answer, but as we both know, the biggest barrier right now to reproductive rights in Victoria is actually access, because there are still a lot of access barriers in Victoria. Women have the right to abortion, but accessing it actually relies on your postcode. Last month Women’s Health Victoria reported that more than two-thirds of local government areas in Victoria have no surgical abortion providers at all. We know that many publicly funded hospitals in fact do not even provide surgical abortion at all, for various reasons. Will the government act to ensure and require that publicly funded hospitals provide the essential medical service which is surgical abortion?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:29): I can assure the member for Melbourne that the Allan Labor government is already acting, with 20 sexual and reproductive health hubs. Only in recent weeks I announced that endorsed midwives are now able to prescribe the medication necessary for a medical termination. This is going to make a huge difference in rural and regional Victoria. But of course there is more to do to prevent unwanted pregnancies in the first place, and that is why our sexual and reproductive health hubs and our healthcare scholarships are making sure we have got the workforce that is trained and able to provide long-acting reproductive contraception, which we know is very effective and in fact can meet the needs of many more women and girls, particularly those that live in rural and regional Victoria. I will end where I started, which is that only an Allan Labor government can ensure that abortion care is protected here in Victoria.

Ministers statements: public transport fares

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:30): While some in this chamber talk about cost-of-living pressures, it is only the Allan Labor government that is actually putting money back into the pockets of Victorians. I am pleased to advise the house that Victorians have collectively now saved \$100 million since we introduced our regional fare cap last year. Previously someone travelling from Warrnambool to Geelong would have had to fork out as much as \$56.80 for their V/Line ticket and someone travelling from Ballarat to Melbourne would have had to pay up to \$45.60 for their journey, but now these passengers are paying no more than \$10.60. Which member of this place said on 22 March last year that fairer fares would not make a massive difference? It was the member for South-West Coast, and I reckon she might now regret that remark.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will be removed from the chamber without warning. Members on their feet will have the respect that is owed to them when they are on their feet.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, on misleading the house, we have got half the seats we had. And how is the Conduent contract going?

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast was warned yesterday about raising points of order that are not points of order and disrupting the chamber. There is no point of order.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: When I was out at Warrnambool station with a wonderful member for Western Victoria a few weeks ago, the feedback was that these savings have made an extraordinary difference to people's hip pockets and also to the local economy.

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS: I also recall a member of the Nationals saying in that same debate last year:

... I do not think ... I have ever had anyone come to me and say the –
previous –

fares were too expensive.

Well, member for Gippsland South, I am not sure who you were talking to. They mix in some pretty well-heeled circles over there. I assure him that passengers in Gippsland are also feeling the benefits. Our fare cap is a real cost-of-living measure that is helping Victorians every day as they plan their household budgets and get to where they need to go. One hundred million dollars back in the pockets of Victorians is worth celebrating.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! It sounds like the member for Broadmeadows, but I am not sure that it is. But the member for Broadmeadows is warned.

Waste and recycling management

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:33): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. The minister previously introduced legislation establishing Victoria's waste-to-energy scheme. Today she is blocking waste-to-energy projects in her own backyard. Why is the minister dishonestly supporting waste to energy in Parliament and then standing with waste-to-energy opponents in her own electorate?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Pascoe Vale can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Pascoe Vale withdrew from chamber.

Lily D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:34): I am very pleased to answer the question from the honourable member opposite. Can I be really clear that every bit of legislation we introduce in this government we are absolutely proud of, and we stand by it every single day. There is a small fact in that question that shows a misunderstanding of the situation around waste to energy, and that is that any waste-to-energy proposal – because it is in the legislation, which I was very pleased to introduce, and I know my very good friend the Minister for Environment is absolutely delighted to oversee this policy and continue with the good work – needs to go through proper processes in local communities and planning processes. What any good member of Parliament on either side of the chamber ought to do is pay attention to the needs and interests of their communities and advocate on their behalf, as we do and as any member of Parliament does.

There is a role for waste to energy in our circular economy. I will not say any more, because this is the Minister for Environment’s policy, but we are absolutely delighted to ensure that we have a policy around the circular economy that absolutely takes our effort around waste and recycling to a level that has never been seen before in this country. This state continues to lead the way. I am absolutely pleased to always advocate on behalf of my community, but there are proper processes that are available. Communities are entitled to utilise those processes, and decisions will be made after full consultation is exercised and considered. That is as it should be, and that is why our legislation is very clear on the social licence around these issues, around these matters, and the processes are working appropriately as local communities should expect they do.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:36): The minister, along with the Labor member for Yan Yean, has signed the member for Thomastown’s petition blocking a waste-to-energy project in their own backyard. The members for Lara, Bellarine and Geelong all want to block the Lara waste-to-energy project in their backyard. Will the minister support the Lara project, or will she block it?

Lily D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:37): Thank you for the supplementary question. The only blockers in this chamber are those on the other side of this chamber. I would challenge anyone who understands how petitions work in this chamber – people get to sign a petition and petition the Parliament around some grievances or concerns that they may have. They are tabled, and there are processes available for governments –

A member interjected.

Lily D’AMBROSIO: No, I am not the minister. I think you are absolutely confused about which minister is responsible for these matters. There are planning ministers, there are environment ministers and then there are members of Parliament who represent their communities, and petitions are simply that. People are entitled to use petitions. They are tabled in this Parliament, and they are a proper planning process that is available to any community to utilise, to express their views on any project.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister signed the petition.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Lily D’AMBROSIO: As I said, this is a government that does things every single day. The only ones who block are those opposite, and everyone knows that that is an absolute fact.

Ministers statements: cost of living

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): Our government is proud to be providing busy families with the cost-of-living support that they need, particularly at this point in time when those successive interest rate rises are having a real impact on families right across the state. We heard earlier in question time today from the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education about how we have just seen the serving of the 50 millionth school breakfast club meal at schools here in Victoria. While others were cutting Fresh Fruit Friday, we have been investing in school breakfast clubs.

We are investing in our younger learners as well, rolling out free kinder to all of our littlest of learners right across Victoria. It is great for those young Victorians to get a start on their education journey, but it is also saving families a massive \$2500 per child on their kinder enrolments, and this is making a meaningful difference for families. Of course alongside free kinder we are providing more kinder places. We are creating more than 13,000 places across the state in new and expanded kinders, making sure that families have good, strong access to kinders closer to where they live.

I know the member for Northcote – you are getting a few shout-outs today, member for Northcote – knows all about the brand new kinders being delivered in her patch. The member for Bentleigh knows about the \$14 million invested in his community. The member for Kororoit was with the Minister for Children to talk about another very important initiative, and that is the co-location of kinders with schools, helping busy families avoid that dreaded double drop-off. One drop-off for your kids each school morning takes pressure off busy families, alongside our kinder kits, our prep bags and the \$2500 being saved in free kinder. These are the ways we are supporting busy Victorian families.

Constituency questions**Caulfield electorate**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:42): (900) My question is to the Premier. What will the Premier do to make sure Victoria Police have the resources they need to enforce the breaches of anti-hate laws committed against Victoria's Jewish community? In November last year a mob came hunting Jews in Caulfield and subsequently hurled racial abuse, pelted rocks and bottles and forced synagogues to close down on Friday night prayers. A year on, no-one has been arrested or charged, despite the contact being grossly offensive and including acts of racial and religious vilification. In May antisemitic protesters at a peaceful Jewish anti-hate rally in the CBD hurled racial and physical abuse while a disabled Jewish woman in a wheelchair was surrounded and had an Israeli flag stolen and set on fire. Despite this, there have been no arrests and no action taken. In stark contrast to Victorian Jews, other communities seem to be getting the justice they rightfully deserve. Premier, it is time to act now.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:43): (901) My question is for the Minister for Consumer Affairs. In the past couple of weeks housing reforms have been on the agenda for our government with a suite of announcements designed to make sure that Victorians have a place to call home. Included in these announcements were a series of rental reforms designed to make Victoria's rental market fair for everyone. In addition, it was announced that Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria will be starting from the middle of next year alongside VCAT, providing a one-stop shop for all rental disputes, making things fairer and quicker for both landlord and tenant alike. As the member for Laverton and currently a renter myself, I talk to folks out in my electorate quite regularly about all of the challenges facing renters, because they are the things I have experienced as well, which is why I know the reforms that we have announced, including things like banning all remaining forms of no-cause evictions, preventing landlords from making dubious bond claims and banning fees paid by renters through rent-pay apps are not just tinkering around the edges. These are real tangible changes that I know will make a world of difference. My question for the minister is this: how will these reforms benefit renters in my electorate of Laverton?

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:44): (902) My question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. What is the timeline for the new VLocity trains on the north-east line between Albury and Melbourne? While some additional weekend services have recently been made permanent, we urgently need more. Passenger numbers have surged across both the north-east and Seymour train lines, and we are still not even back to pre-COVID levels. The number of seats and carriages are declining under the Allan Labor government, along with the punctuality of services and rolling stock. Every day I hear complaints from passengers who cannot reserve a seat and are left standing or even sitting on the floor for long journeys. Trains are sold out well in advance, and too often passengers are forced to rely on crowded replacement buses, if they are lucky to get a seat at all. Despite nearly double the number of passengers on the north-east V/Line services, this government has yet to ensure locals can travel comfortably and safely. For a decade our community has been calling for improved public transport services, and now even experts warn the Allan Labor government has pushed V/Line to breaking point.

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:45): (903) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. How is the Allan Labor government helping Glen Waverley residents keep their energy bills low with summer approaching? We know that cost-of-living pressures are hitting Victorians hard, and energy bills play a significant part of the stress that many have. Therefore it is incumbent on governments to address this issue to help those who need it most. The SEC will go a long way to addressing some of the structural challenges that we face as a state. Although some may still have denial, climate change is real, and Victoria must make the necessary transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. A government-owned renewable energy company will provide affordable and reliable energy for Victorian households, driving down the prices and protecting our planet. Unlike those opposite, who sold off the SEC, we believe that Victorians deserve services which are for Victorians. We are on the side of Victorians, supporting the switch to all-electric households and, through that, helping Victorians with their power bills. I look forward to the minister's response.

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:46): (904) My question today is to the Minister for Agriculture, and the question my constituents have is: Minister, will you be providing, in the coming months and years, access to commercial firewood cutters and access to well-managed, recyclable, replenishable, sustainable firewood from our state forests? A petition presented today by the constituents of Polwarth has called on you, Minister, to reconsider and look to provide commercial quantities of firewood. I thank Daniel Heinze and others who have organised the petition, who find that many of their customers rely, in this cost-of-living crisis, on affordable, reliable wood for heating, hot water, cooking and other basic services in and around the home. It is an essential service. The cost of energy and the cost of keeping warm is getting harder and harder. Minister, I ask you to look at this.

Tarneit electorate

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:47): (905) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. When will the public consultation open for the new Tarneit West train station? The station is something my community is eagerly anticipating. I know many local constituents are looking forward to sharing their thoughts on this new station. Located at the corner of Leakes and Davis roads, it will be a crucial addition to our local transport network, improving access and convenience for all. As Melbourne's west continues to grow rapidly, particularly in my electorate of Tarneit, this new infrastructure will be crucial in ensuring residents can easily access the city for work and leisure. That is why we promised to build a new station in Tarneit's west that will have 400 commuter car parks and four bus bays, and that is exactly what we are getting on with delivering. The Allan Labor government has consistently invested in transport infrastructure across the state, ensuring our growing

communities can move more easily and efficiently. I am proud to see these developments in my electorate, and I look forward to hearing from the minister.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:48): (906) My question is for the Minister for Housing. 479 brave public housing residents in North Richmond and Flemington are standing up to the government and resisting the demolition of their homes through a class action. They argue that their human rights have not been considered in the decision to demolish their homes. Homes Victoria is forbidden from evicting tenants before the trial is over. Like in Flemington and North Melbourne, public housing residents in Richmond are being pressured by Homes Victoria to sign relocation papers. Given that the decision to demolish their homes applies equally to Richmond as it does to the other public housing towers, will the minister leave Richmond public housing residents in peace until the court case is over?

Bellarine electorate

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (14:49): (907) My question is to the Minister for Veterans. Minister, how is the Allan Labor government supporting the veterans community in the Bellarine electorate? I would like to take this opportunity to thank also the local RSL volunteers across the Bellarine for their Remembrance Day services, which took place on Monday. At the Drysdale service I heard from Owen, a local Bellarine student who had been awarded the Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize this year and recently travelled for the 10-day study tour to historic sites and learn more about our veterans. At the service Owen read his poem dedicated to the names of those missing on the Drysdale cenotaph. This program has been a great experience for students to learn about the service and sacrifice of our veterans, and it is important to have these opportunities. I look forward to hearing from the minister and passing on this information to the electorate.

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:50): (908) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I have been contacted by local residents who have serious concerns regarding the recent works on Arthurs Seat Road, Red Hill, which have caused a level of community outrage. Completed with little to no community consultation, the recent works include additional road signage, steel barriers and a speed reduction that have angered locals who feel the changes impinge on the rural lifestyle they enjoy. Indeed in some cases they believe the changes increase the danger of the road, with glare from barriers, an inability to pull safely off the road and distracting signage. Will the minister assess the impact of these barriers and work with the Red Hill community to remedy these works?

Hastings electorate

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (14:50): (909) My constituency question is to the Minister for Health. What does the Allan Labor government's pain inquiry mean for people, like Ash in my electorate, who are suffering with connective tissue disorder and EDS. Ash came into my office to talk about her journey with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, or EDS, and the absolute horror of living with this syndrome, the nightmare of dealing with getting a diagnosis and the complete helplessness she feels in trying to get any sort of help or support. EDS comes under the wider umbrella of connective tissue disorder. I spoke with Ash about the women's pain survey, and she was very keen to hear about the outcome for people like herself. I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, the member for Northcote, for her work on the pain survey and also for meeting with me and sufferers of EDS to hear their harrowing stories. I encourage anyone suffering from EDS to call their local MP, make a time to meet and let them know about this insidious and little-understood syndrome.

*Rulings from the Chair***Constituency questions**

The SPEAKER (14:51): I have reviewed yesterday's constituency questions. The member for Rowville asked the Minister for Water to make an explanation on a matter, which is an action, and I rule his question out of order.

*Bills***Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:52): From time to time the government needs to deal with bills that are much briefer and lighter than most others, and today we have the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024, which is another bill around tidying things up, specifically around repealing redundant or spent provisions in quite a number of acts. Despite there being a number of acts that are included in this, I am going to keep my comments to two of the seven, being the Road Safety Act 1986 and the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrong) Act 2017. Both have parts that are being repealed.

I want to begin with the Road Safety Act and talk about some of the conditions of the roads and the impacts that is having on people's safety right across the state but certainly across my electorate. I am contacted frequently about endless problems with roads that have fallen into a state of disrepair – about potholes the size of Mini Minors, failing surfaces, popped tyres and busted rims. I hear not just from constituents but from people who travel through my electorate and have experienced all sorts of problems. Sometimes they are accompanied by videos or photos of the damage that has occurred to their cars.

When you speak to the local tyre repairers, you find the true extent of the problems with our road network and the safety that is compromised because of it. If you have got a large pothole and somebody comes around a corner when it is wet or if it is dark and they do not see it and hit it, depending on the size of that vehicle and the type of vehicle it is very easy for that to spin out of control and cause an accident. For motorcyclists, it is even worse because they have less protection not being in a vehicle, and if they hit potholes and flip, it can have some very devastating outcomes.

There is an area on the Healesville-Yarra Glen Road where people complained of a dip and cars became airborne. There was a lot of media attention given to this – I think it was on 3AW – and following that media it was only then that that section of road got repaired. The Whittlesea-Yea Road is just getting more and more potholes in it. The Kangaroo Ground-St Andrews Road, which has been in an appalling state, just a couple of days ago had work commence on it, so we have had one week's worth of work between Wattle Glen Road and Couties Road.

I want to turn for a moment to the Melba Highway, which has been a constant source of grief for many travelling in my electorate – constituents, holiday-makers or truck drivers delivering freight over to Benalla and on to the Hume. For years there has been a 40 kilometre-per-hour sign on this 100 kilometre-an-hour freeway in different spots, but one in particular has been at the corner of Nashs Road. I know that corner very well. For a while it was not signposted that it was dangerous, then it became 40 kilometres an hour. After that the sign went up, and then they did a little bit of a fix but not a complete fix. So we still have this 40 kilometre-an-hour sign there, and people are fed up with it and want to know what is going to happen and when it is finally going to be fixed. I know that it is unsafe because occasionally you see cars that are pulled over and left while someone has to go and seek another means of getting to where they are going so their car can be collected later on.

On the Mansfield-Woods Point Road we have had a traffic light in place at the Howqua Hills for 10 months while the government work out what they are going to do. They have had all this time to

try and work it out. The experts are getting together apparently on what is going to be the best long-term solution, but in the meantime locals and tourists – again, it is a very popular tourism spot and particularly coming up to Christmas will be more so – want to know what is happening. But there is a speed limit at Howqua Inlet. It is 100 kilometres an hour, and there is a section that is 80 kilometres per hour. I understand that locals and the council have been seeking an extension of that speed zone for 1.2 kilometres, and I understand that Department of Transport and Planning have approved the new signage and the extension. All it takes is new signs and for those new signs to be stuck in the ground, but apparently they have got to wait for funding. I would have thought that this would be a bit of a no-brainer and an easy, quick win for the government, because it is not a high cost and it is fairly simple.

At that spot at Howqua Inlet the limit drops from 100 kilometres an hour to 80 and then increases back to 100 before you reach the Howqua Valley Holiday Park. This is important because this is an important tourist destination. We would like to have the 80 kilometre-an-hour speed limit continue past that caravan park up to the Howqua Point Road so it is safe, and it would be great if this was done before Christmas because there are safety factors here. I know that all of the visitors to that holiday park would be very appreciative of that. There is also a trail that is being developed from Howqua Inlet to the Howqua Valley Holiday Park. It will be on the road shoulder, but it would just be so much better should that stretch of road be fixed.

I also want to mention the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017. The Yarra River is of great importance to Melbourne and to Victoria. Strangely, though, if you look at the government website, you would think that the Yarra River started at Warrandyte. In fact it starts a long way before that. It is some 242 kilometres, most of which is in my electorate as it weaves its way from Baw Baw and the Yarra Ranges National Park, goes past the Upper Yarra Reservoir, through the Upper Yarra and the Yarra Valley from Warburton to Launching Place, Woori Yallock, Healesville and the Bend of Islands. There are so many areas in my electorate that rely on the Yarra River, and it is important that it remains as healthy as it can be. This bill that has been introduced brings an overseer role I guess to the Parliament so that it is kept alive and healthy for future generations. The act also recognises the intrinsic connection from the traditional custodians in that area, who have used that as a water source but also as a recreational source for such a long time.

We have a number of caravan parks along that, and I want to mention Warburton Holiday Park and particularly owner David Pratt. The Victorian Caravan Parks Association have recognised him for his work within the caravan park sector and named after him the David Pratt Unsung Hero Award, which was awarded at their annual awards earlier this year. I know David and the amazing work that he and Simon have done at the caravan park in Warburton. It is really quite amazing.

The legislation also establishes the Birrarung Council, and the Birrarung Council is required to report to the government every year. Part 5, section 57 of the legislation says a report must be made on or before 31 October each year after a strategic plan has come into operation under section 38. So each year is this year, and the minister then must within seven sitting days after receiving the report have it tabled in Parliament. I would expect that the Birrarung Council have done their bit. I expect that they got their report to the government on time, but we have not seen this one yet. We have one more sitting week. Unless it is tabled tomorrow, we have one more sitting week for that report to be tabled. I would really like to actually have a look at that.

[NAME/S AWAITING VERIFICATION]

We have wonderful camping grounds at the Upper Yarra Dam and at Doon as well. We have got great reserves at the Maroondah Reservoir for people to enjoy. Warburton itself is such a beautiful spot, and if people have not visited it, I encourage them to do so. There is a wonderful and intensely popular swimming spot just behind the main street, but many, many favour tubes. I know for Heidi, Lola and Ivy, one of their favourite pastimes is getting in a tube, going downstream, jumping out, running back up and doing it again. Many, many children in the area take much joy in the river at Warburton, and I

cannot stress the importance of the river being used not just environmentally but also recreationally, because I know that the traditional custodians use that too to recreate. Spadonis Reserve just out of Yarra Glen is quite a historical spot. There are billabongs, there is a reserve there and it is a great launch place for canoes, as is a spot in Launching Place as well. There are so many great things on the Yarra River, and I really would love to see the work and effort to maintain that river continue.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (15:02): I too rise as the last speaker from the government side, I potentially believe, to support the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024. Of course since being elected to government in 2014, this Victorian Labor government has been one of the most active in Victoria's history. Whether it is landmark legislation, investment or policy reforms to deliver real outcomes across jobs, education, transport, health and wellbeing, community sport, environmental and climate action, social justice reforms, housing reforms or cost-of-living relief, the fact is we have been proudly working every single day as the Victorian government to deliver on the things that people in Victoria need.

In terms of legislation introduced and passed, we have been a very busy government indeed, passing 43 bills in the last 12 months alone, and we have introduced 32 bills in 2024 alone. But as the amount of legislation grows of course so too does the necessity to ensure the statute book remains accurate. With our statute book dating back to 1856 with the building and opening of this very Parliament, it is essential we continually review and seek to modernise our laws to ensure they remain relevant for contemporary settings. This is a statute law repeal bill, which repeals bills as part of the Parliament's regular housekeeping to ensure that legislation across the statute books, as I said, is accurate and clear and accessible to the public. There are a number of minor technical amendments that are made through this statute bill, including amendments to 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 of course the Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrnong) Act 2017.

It is the reforms to the Yarra River protection act that I would like to focus my attention on in my contribution today. The bill will repeal part 8 of the Yarra River protection act, which only contains one provision and inserts part 3AAA into the Planning and Environment Act 1987, dealing with the Yarra River land protection. With the single provision now in place or having commenced, it is now spent and no longer necessary. As I indicated in my inaugural speech, I am absolutely committed to doing everything I can to help protect and preserve our environment to secure sustainability outcomes and open space, particularly through our waterways and creeks in the inner city, for many years to come. As set out in our landmark *Yarra River Action Plan*, led by then Minister Richard Wynne, Lisa Neville and Minister D'Ambrosio of course, who is still here today, when it comes to the Yarra River, as stated within the plan:

We have rowed on it, drunk it, dammed it, washed in it, ignored it, sewered into it, gazed at it, drowned in it, swum it, built factories and cities because of it.

The Yarra River is Melbourne's major river, and it has also been called many names in the past: to the Wurundjeri it is Birrarung; to the colonials it was everything from Freshwater to Batman's, Yarrow Yarrow to the Yarra Yarra. And today we just call it of course the Yarra.

Whatever name you give our river, this much is certain: we definitely need it. It provides 70 per cent of our city's drinking water and is also home to the largest container port in Australia. Beyond that, being such an important waterway for Melbourne, it is also an important waterway to many of the creeks and waterways through the north-western suburbs of Melbourne, including through my own electorate Moonee Ponds Creek, Merri Creek, Edgars Creek, Westbreen Creek and Merlynston Creek. The Moonee Ponds Creek goes into the Yarra at Ron Barassi Senior Park, just below CityLink and below the Bolte Bridge, with the Westbreen Creek being a tributary of the Moonee Ponds Creek. The Merri Creek goes into the Yarra just above Dights Falls, with both the Edgars and Merlynston creeks also being tributaries of the Merri Creek. That is why preserving and protecting the Yarra is so important, because if we protect the Yarra we also enhance our local creeks and waterways, as I said,

through our local communities. The traditional owners of the land for at least 60,000 years, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, proudly provided the custodianship originally through what we now recognise to be Merri-bek, including Moonee Ponds Creek and Merri Creek, and my electorate, which is really made up of the suburbs in between those two creeks.

To provide a bit of history and context on these creeks, I would like to just cite throughout my contribution some of the research from a former member for Pascoe Vale Kelvin Thomson, who spoke on the history of the Moonee Ponds Creek in particular at the Moonee Valley library on 19 September as part of a historical talk. The Moonee Ponds Creek meanders its way through Westmeadows, Tullamarine, Broadmeadows, Gowanbrae, Glenroy, Strathmore Heights, Strathmore Park, Pascoe Vale, Essendon, Brunswick West, Moonee Ponds, Ascot Vale, Flemington, Parkville and North Melbourne before joining the Yarra River, as I said, down in Docklands. The Port Phillip area was first settled by Europeans in 1835, and the first land sales in the area of Strathmore at Moonee Ponds Creek were made from 1843 and 1845 onwards. The origins of the creek have evolved of course over many years as development has taken place throughout the entire corridor in terms of housing and industrial and commercial space. That has had a big impact ecologically and sustainability-wise on the creek over many, many years.

In 1963 and 1966 the Moonee Ponds Creek flooded homes in Parker Street and Avoca Crescent in Pascoe Vale. The Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, the predecessor to Melbourne Water, decided to address the increasing frequency and severity of flooding caused by urban development and loss of flood plain capacity by reconstructing the Moonee Ponds Creek as an urban drain instead to evacuate stormwater as quickly as possible, resulting in the concrete drain that we now have. In 1969 and 1970 the Victorian government then built the Tullamarine Freeway, now CityLink, from Flemington to the new Tullamarine airport. It largely did follow the valley of the Moonee Ponds Creek, this being the line of least resistance compared with buying up and demolishing many, many homes. As you drive, for those who may not be familiar with the area, onto CityLink towards the airport off Flemington Road, where that famous icon of Jeff's is still lingering above, you will see the creek to your left as you drive up, and it is really that concrete drain of the 1970s down in that portion.

I pay tribute to Kelvin Thomson; his late father Allan Thomson, who was a true local pioneer of environmental activism throughout his many years; Kelvin's brother Lex Thomson; and many others from across the community who during that time advocated so strongly to protect and preserve the Moonee Ponds Creek, and they still do to this very day, having prevented it from being entirely concreted all the way up, further up north, following quite a lot of advocacy at the time. After he became state member for Pascoe Vale in 1988, Kelvin went on to be the founder and established the Moonee Ponds Creek community group, which has very much since grown and evolved to become the vibrant group that it remains today.

And today as the current member for Pascoe Vale I am absolutely honoured to be building on these decades of local work to continue improving the Moonee Ponds Creek corridor. On 19 May 2023 the member for Broadmeadows and I planted the first of 43,000 plants as part of the sensational Reimagining Your Moonee Ponds Creek project. It is a \$10.2 million project, which includes a \$5 million contribution from the Victorian Labor government, which will transform around a 500-metre section of the concrete-lined creek between Strathmore and Oak Park and Pascoe Vale into a more natural and enjoyable public space. The project is due for completion later this year and will remove many of those concrete walls along both sides of the creek, which were originally poured way back in 1977, to be replaced with more natural and appealing rock work. It will cover the concrete base of the channel with rock work to create a meandering creek with low flows and give it a more natural look and feel. There will be the creation of new shared paths and a new bridge, the construction of a pond and terracing of the Oak Park Reserve. These renaturalisation works will result in a more appealing creek-side environment, where people can interact with nature in a cooler and healthier environment. It will provide improved water flows and waterway health by slowing water flows,

improve biodiversity and habitat for native species outcomes and of course activate a lot of the open space as well.

On 24 September, just recently as well, it was great to have joined the Minister for Water, Minister Shing, from the other place to inspect works on this game-changing project. It was sensational to also celebrate a further \$5 million contribution that is going to be now tipped in and added by the Albanese Labor government to continue stage 2 of this project all the way down to Lebanon Reserve further down into Strathmore and also of course to benefit many residents of my electorate.

It is also from a planning perspective that I am really pleased to report on further protections we have been introducing since 2022 when it comes to the Moonee Ponds Creek. Through the *Waterways of the West* Moonee Ponds Creek corridor environs and landscape overlay that the Minister for Planning and Environment has been part of, as of 16 September 2022 a permit is now required for works along certain sections of the entire creek corridor. That includes having to obtain a permit basically for constructing or building any form of construction within a 30-metre setback from the waterway or for any building that is of a height of 6 metres above ground level. If there is a change to the ground level of the soil of around 600 millimetres, that will trigger the need for a permit as well, and proposed fences higher than 1.8 metres would also trigger the need.

I would also like to commend our friends at the Merri Creek and Edgars Creek ‘friends of’ groups. They are doing fantastic work. We announced over \$605,000 of investment towards upgrading both Merri Creek and Edgars Creek earlier this year through the Green Links program, which Harriet Shing launched at Coburg Lake with my good friends the member for Preston and the member for Northcote. We really did have a great meeting last sitting week with quite a few of the creek representatives from our community, including Bernadette Thomas from Merri Creek Management Committee, and the Minister for Water and Minister for Environment, amongst others, to talk about how we can continue working on improving the health, wellbeing, biodiversity, social, community and recreational outcomes for these very important lungs and arteries of our community. It is on that note that I commend the bill to the house.

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (15:12): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Melissa Horne:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:13): Acting Speaker O’Keeffe, I am delighted to see you in the chair. It is always a pleasure to see a happy, smiling face up there, which we quite often do. Let us start on the Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024. Victoria has experienced over 110 tobacco-related firebombings in the last two years, with many related to organised crime and crime gangs fighting for control of the lucrative illicit tobacco trade in a turf war. I want to state from the outset that we will not be opposing this bill, and I will go on to say that every other state in Australia has introduced some form of licensing scheme – all except Victoria. We have lagged behind for many, many years, and it is time. It is beyond time. As I say, we are the only state to not have a licensing scheme, and the irony of this is that the Victorian government through Better Regulation Victoria back in 2021 commissioned a report that I think was handed down in 2022 that suggested a licensing scheme would be the first thing that needs to happen. This report was hidden; it was never released. It is quite disappointing that it has taken us this long, from when that report was

handed down in 2022, to be where we are here today. Obviously in 2024 we are saying that is two years it has taken, and in that time 110 or more tobacco-related fires have occurred. We are just shooting the starting gun today, really – just kickstarting the process. And when I say ‘kickstarting’ it is because by the looks of the bill we have got some concerns around the timing of the bill, and I will go into that a bit later.

If it is going to be 2026 before it comes into operation in its fullness, that is quite a concern because, as I say, if 110 tobacco or related shops have burnt in the last 18 months to two years, can we expect to see that happening again over the next 18 months until everything is in place? I certainly hope not, and I am sure the government hopes it does not either, but that is all the more reason why we need to act quickly to get this legislation up and going and boots on the ground, so to speak.

Ever since Victoria’s illicit tobacco turf war flared up, certainly there has been that increase in firebombings – two a week on average; we had two this week and we had two last week. With sustained pressure from certainly the industry stakeholders, this tired government needed the spark to get off their hands and start to address this problem. We introduced a private members bill last sitting week, and that did not get up, as we all know. But certainly I would like to think that the pressure from the coalition and all Victorians has assisted to make sure the Premier honoured her commitment, which she made on ABC radio back in March, that Labor would introduce legislation for the licensing scheme by the end of this year. Hallelujah, we are here. That is what every Victorian has wanted to see for the last two to three years.

The Allan Labor government has certainly managed to address some of the issues that we put in our bill and that we wanted to see in this bill, and I am pleased to see some of those things. I will go into it a bit more in a moment. But certainly the Better Regulation Victoria report was the start back a couple of years ago, and even the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) held an inquiry into illicit tobacco on the back of a Liberals and Nationals motion to make sure that, again, we could get legs to get this bill up.

I am pleased to see the bill finally hit the chamber. There is not a lot of time involved in terms of giving us an understanding or the due two weeks that normally happens, and that is mainly to consult with stakeholders. Stakeholders have been very prominent and outspoken privately and in the media about their concerns about the tobacco wars and that a licensing scheme would fix this. I do not want to preempt what those on the other side will say, but I certainly hope that they do not stand up and say, ‘We won’t be wasting a moment. We’ll be getting on and fixing the illicit tobacco wars,’ because we have wasted two years already, or two and a half years, and it could be another 18 months before it is all in place. So we are talking the best part of four years or more before this is all up and going. Let us hope that nobody on the other side thinks that they can say, ‘We won’t be wasting a moment,’ because there has already been too much time wasted and 110 shops have burnt during that time.

The bill is 138 pages that we have managed to get through and try to come to terms with and understand everything that is in it. As I say, it talks about:

If a provision of this Act does not come into operation before 1 July 2026, it comes into operation on that day.

History would suggest that this government will use all the time it has to make sure it works its way through. There are obviously authorised officers that need to come into play; they will need to be employed and organised. But there is no reason why this cannot come in much sooner than that. Victoria Police could start to enforce and certainly we could start to reduce the firebombings as early as the middle of next year rather than waiting the full 18 months to make sure this comes in. As I say, it will take them time to line up their ducks, but certainly by the time this calendar year is finished that process will be up and going, and I cannot see why we need to be waiting until 2026, because in that time more shops will burn and more livelihoods will be at stake.

The Liberals and Nationals have pursued a strong media line on this issue, and obviously as I mentioned, we hope the Tobacco Amendment (Stamping Out Fire Bombings) Bill 2024 that we

introduced put a focus on this aspect. The matter has been in the media now for a couple of weeks through our introduction and now the introduction of this bill, but it really is important that we get to the pointy end, because the government would surely have to be starting to get embarrassed now by the number of tobacco shops that are burning and nothing has been done, even though there have been commitments that it would get done. But now we are finally getting there.

At this moment I would like to move an amendment. 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 further consultation with affected stakeholders on when the licensing scheme should come into effect.’

That is what I am talking about: this delay between now – what are we in, November 2024 – and the possibility that it will not be fully enacted until July 2026. Those on the other side can rightfully say it could happen before that. I understand that, but history suggests that will not be the case or if it is it will only be weeks or months before that, rather than getting it fully up and operational. 110 shops – as I say, that is 110 livelihoods. There are probably 220 neighbours of those shops – one on each side – whether you are a hairdresser or a cafe or something on the other side of each of those tobacconists. There are a lot of livelihoods at stake, and that has been the focus for the Liberals and Nationals – trying to make sure that we stop these turf wars – because as we know, it is only Victoria that is seeing two shops burn a week. I will go into a bit more of that detail as we move forward.

We know that Victorians have certainly lost confidence in this government, and they do not trust that they have the ability to act in a timely manner because they have shown time in and time out that it takes forever to get this stuff on the ground. Here is proof – 2½ years after they said it was needed, we are finally getting it started. When you get all excited and think we are off and running, you actually find –

Belinda Wilson interjected.

Tim McCURDY: It takes you a lot more time than everybody else, it seems. Other states have been doing this for many years, and it is funny that in other states they are not burning their tobacconist shops to the ground. There will be lots of reasons from the other side, I am sure, as to why it takes so long.

Danny O’Brien: COVID.

Tim McCURDY: Well, there is COVID. Of course there is COVID.

Danny O’Brien: We had a pandemic, don’t you know?

Tim McCURDY: Yes, and we had floods too. We had floods – that would also slow down the transport.

Danny O’Brien: Bushfires.

Tim McCURDY: And bushfires – thank you, yes, bushfires.

Danny O’Brien: Bird flu.

Tim McCURDY: Yes, and then there was Jeff Kennett too.

Danny O’Brien: Yes, and that would be mostly his fault.

Tim McCURDY: Yes, because that would have slowed the process down as well. But anyway, here we are. We cannot look a gift horse in the mouth. Let us make sure that we get this bill right and stop what we are trying to stop. Obviously we want to stop all forms of illicit tobacco, on both sides of the chamber. I get all that. Certainly my electorate knows all too well about illicit tobacco – the town of Myrtleford and the chop-chop that was going on many years ago. It was rife in the region. I think it is fair to say that some of those growers up there are responsible for where we are today in

terms of the tobacco industry. But having said that, it is important that we move forward with this, because it is now organised crime that is the problem more than old mate who is selling a couple of packs of smokes out the back of the shop for a couple of bucks and not giving the excise to the government. I will talk about the excise a little bit later.

In terms of detail in the bill, the purpose of the bill is to amend the Tobacco Act 1987 to establish a licensing scheme for tobacco wholesalers and retailers, to repeal provisions relating to e-cigarettes and specialist tobacconists, to provide for forfeiture of prohibited products and to make other related amendments to the Confiscation Act 1997, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 and the Spent Convictions Act 2021. As I said earlier, Victoria is the only state in Australia without a form of tobacco licensing for wholesalers and retailers. Further to this, the current regulation places the burden of enforcement of the Tobacco Act 1987 on local government and Department of Health bodies, which are simply not qualified to deal with it and certainly do not have the resources or the understanding to be able to manage this current illicit tobacco crisis.

Acting Speaker O’Keefe, you will understand as a regional MP yourself and you would probably have had tobacco fires in Shepparton or the region like I have in Wangaratta. What happened recently – when I say recently, it was a couple of years ago – the Rural City of Wangaratta decided to clamp down on illicit tobacco. They did the surveillance and they did all the work to make sure that they were going to stamp out illicit tobacco in Wangaratta. They spent \$25,000 and took this to court. The people who were selling the illicit tobacco got a slap on the wrist and were back selling the next day. So the Rural City of Wangaratta said, ‘Well, you can stick that up your jumper. We’re not interested in doing that again. We’ve spent a lot of money and a lot of time to try and resolve this problem, and they get a slap on the wrist and they’re back out trading again the next day.’ You can see with stories like that, and we have heard many other stories, that local governments have just put their hands in the air and said, ‘Well, it might be our responsibility but we’re going to stay hands-off on this because it’s just not working.’ That is why we need this bill: to start to clarify a bit more about where it lies and who the authorities are.

The Victorian Liberals and Nationals have been at the forefront, as I say. Over the past 12 months we have seen various motions in Parliament as well a successful referral of illicit tobacco to the PAEC inquiry, which I spoke about; the release of the Better Regulation Victoria report into tobacco regulation, or the Cronin report; and the introduction of the Tobacco Amendment (Stamping Out Fire Bombings) Bill 2024. So we have been active, and it is important that both sides of this chamber want to make sure that we get the end result that we want, and obviously that is stamping out illicit tobacco. But at the end of the day we need to stop these firebombings because this is getting out of control. Certainly the Minister for Police at the table at the moment knows only too well the resources that are required to attend to those firebombings. They are resources we do not have, and if we could stop that it would free up police resources which would be used elsewhere.

The provisions of the bill will be implemented no doubt at a snail’s pace if it goes through by 2026, but I would like to think it can happen a bit quicker. Stage 1 will be implemented before the end of this calendar year, which is only a month away. So that is the primary clauses 1 to 3, which deal with the usual housekeeping of legislation, including the purpose, various commencement principles and the principal act – the Tobacco Act 1987. In the bill’s current form, which says 1 July 2026, the provisions of the bill will commence in 2026 if not proclaimed otherwise, although the government has indicated a two-stage process with some sections coming into operation before 2025 and others between 2025 and 2026. I do think it is outrageous that we have waited so long to get to where we are today and that we need to wait, if this is the case, to get through to 2026. It needs to be resolved and we need to start the process now. We need action happening as early as the start of next year. I understand it takes time, but at the end of the day we must make that start to try and stamp out these firebombings.

Part 2 deals with the establishment of the licensing scheme. Clause 5 inserts new definitions into the act with the key definitions being ‘illicit tobacco’, ‘protected information’ and ‘regulator’. These

outline the regulator as being the secretary of the department, which is a normal process, administering part 3AA through the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Illicit tobacco is defined clearly and protected information enables Victoria Police a greater ability to contribute to the approval process without compromising officers, witnesses or operational integrity.

Clause 6 inserts new section 3G – which is not 3G the way we think about it with Telstra – which defines associates and other close relations that may act upon a person's ability to meet the fit and proper person test. Again, that is something that we have been calling upon. The fit and proper person test is integral to making sure that this bill will actually succeed in achieving what we are trying to achieve with these gangs and organised crime. That is what we need to do – make sure we have got the fit and proper person test – so I am certainly pleased to see that part in there.

Clause 8 inserts part 3AA into the principal act outlining the licensing of wholesale and retail tobacco outlets. This includes outlining who is eligible to apply for a tobacco licence and the content of that licence. The regulator will be authorised to compel additional documents and require criminal background checks of any applicants in order to assess their suitability to hold a licence. Again, that is a great step forward.

Division 2 deals with applications for a variation of a licence and includes who may apply for a variation, including the Chief Commissioner of Police and the proposed transferee of the licence, and the various requirements and documentation required. What that basically means is that when there are any changes to the running of a tobacco shop or the licensee of a tobacco shop – whether they are changing the name from 'Mrs Brown' to 'Mr Brown' or they are changing from 'this address' to 'another address' – it all still has to go through the same process again to make sure it does not slip through the cracks. We find that a tobacco shop can start in one place and be all above board, and before long that licence can change hands and all of a sudden we are back to where we are now.

Division 4 is really important. It relates to the cancellation and suspension of a licence. The regulator or the Chief Commissioner of Police or the owner of a tobacco premises or a mortgagee of a tobacco premises may all apply for a licence to be suspended or cancelled. I think that puts a lot of teeth into this bill, that there are various people or opportunities to apply for a suspension or a cancellation. Again, I say they are the regulator, the Chief Commissioner of Police, the owner of a tobacco premises or the mortgagee of a tobacco premises. That cuts across a lot of sectors to make sure that if there are things that are going a little bit wayward there are opportunities to stamp them out.

It also outlines the process for objecting to requests to cancel or suspend a licence in the case of an illicit tobacco offence. The regulator may suspend a licence with immediate effect for a period not exceeding 90 days but certainly must give notice to a licensee in writing. Again, there are opportunities there. If things are not going the way things have been planned, either the Chief Commissioner of Police or the regulator can certainly come in and make sure they can clean this up once and for all. Between what happens in legislation and then what actually happens in real time on the ground sometimes there is a variation, and we might not necessarily have to alter the rules, but the rules are in place for the Chief Commissioner of Police or the regulator to make some decisions to make sure that we can achieve that end goal, which is what we are trying to do. They include considering any conviction from the last five years or any non-spent conviction exceeding this period. They apply to associates of a person applying for a licence as well.

Division 7 deals with the requirement for a statement of reasons for the granting or not of an application and the processes and the involvement of various parties. Division 8 enables a decision made by the regulator to be reviewed internally, and such a request must be made within 28 days of the decision being made by the regulator. All those steps are in place. For applications that request a review of a decision based on the advice of the Chief Commissioner of Police, VCAT is required to appoint a special counsel to represent the applicant in the context of protected information. In this case the barrister or special counsel may only represent the applicant to the extent that the interests relate to the protected information.

There are a couple more divisions that I think are important. Division 9 deals with the handling of protected information at VCAT. Division 10 relates to licence renewals. Division 11 deals with the disqualification of an applicant for a period of up to five years, and the regulator must inform, in writing, the person being disqualified and the chief commissioner of their decision to do so. Finally, on these divisions, division 12 deals with general administrative matters, including the requirements for the regulator to keep a register of licensed tobacco suppliers and details required under the legislation and regulation, and also outlines the requirement for a licensee to notify the regulator of any other changes within 14 days of that.

I want to touch on offences and enforcement, the regulator and the licensing inspectors. New part 3AAB deals with enforcement of licensing and the related offences. Division 1 introduces the regulator and outlines their functions and powers. It also outlines the information that must be collected and kept by the regulator. Division 2 deals with the licensing inspectors and outlines that they must be appointed by the regulator and must be sufficiently happy that they are skilled and qualified in that area. Naturally this includes any training that needs to be undertaken to perform their duties. Further, new section 35F outlines the functions and powers of inspectors, including bringing proceedings for offences and other powers in order to fulfil their functions.

If I now touch on some of those fines and penalties, for a person who carries on a tobacco supply business and is in the possession of illicit tobacco, it is 120 penalty units, which is a \$23,000 fine. That is significant. If old mate has got a tobacco shop and he is in possession of illicit tobacco, that is a \$23,000 slap. Obviously if it is a body corporate that goes up to \$118,000, and I think that is fair and reasonable. If they are in possession of a commercial quantity, for an individual that goes up to \$165,000 and \$827,000 for a body corporate, so things just got serious, you know, if you have got a commercial quantity – although I do want to add that ‘commercial quantity’ is still in dispute at the moment, because the bill does not say and in the briefing the government was unclear about what a commercial quantity is. My understanding is in New South Wales a commercial quantity is 100 grams of tobacco and in the Commonwealth a commercial quantity is 5 kilograms. So until we work out what that commercial quantity is – and I am sure that will come through as time goes on – it is a bit unclear at this stage.

Other fines – we have talked about being in possession, and now we are saying if a person tries to sell or supply illicit tobacco, well, again, it starts at \$23,000 up to \$118,000. But if a person intentionally or recklessly sells or otherwise supplies a commercial amount of illicit tobacco, this is where it gets real. We are talking about where a lot of these fire bombings are happening now. This is a commercial amount and they are selling it; that is the target audience we are really trying to hit in this case. It is 1800 penalty units, which is a \$354,000 fine, or imprisonment up to 15 years. That is for an individual. A body corporate is a \$1.7 million fine – serious fines, and so they should be. They should be serious fines. It is a serious issue, and it is causing a lot of distress in our communities and in plenty of livelihoods. So the tools are there to actually not just give them a slap on the wrist with a wet lettuce. These are serious fines, and I am pleased to see they are serious. Selling tobacco without a licence – that starts at \$165,000 for individuals and goes up to \$827,000 if you are selling tobacco without a licence. I think it is fair to say that if you are in the industry of selling tobacco, you would want to think seriously about getting a licence, because the profits are going to dwindle very quickly if you start getting fines of \$165,000 and up to \$800,000.

Now, as I say, on this bill we are two years late, let us be honest. We are behind the other states: Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and others. We are two years behind. We need to make up that ground, and we will not make up the ground if we take another 18 months to implement and enforce all this. We need to get boots on the ground, and that is why the reasoned amendment is about making sure this happens before 1 July 2025 rather than waiting until 1 July 2026. I think with the process we are at today there is no genuine reason why we cannot have that process up and going. As I say, if there is a time delay in getting the authorised agents in place and trained, well, so be it, but at the end of the day we can still have the rules in place and VicPol will be in a position to then go

from there, and that is what I think we need to see. When we look at the countless hours that VicPol are spending now, let alone the threats and the disturbance to communities and neighbours and the stress that occurs, VicPol are spending a lot of time on these tobacco wars at the moment.

We are going to see a bill introduced on a Tuesday and go to the guillotine on Thursday – so three days to take carriage through this house rather than the normal 14 days so all the stakeholders get an opportunity here to understand what is involved. If we are going to rush it through in three days, let us keep that rush going. Let us not stop. Let us keep the rush going and make sure it is fully enacted by 1 July next year, rather than saying now that we have pushed it through Parliament we are going to sit on our hands, let a few more tobacco shops burn over the next 18 months, and then we will have something going. ‘We’ve told the community we will do it, so that’s enough’ – well, that is not enough. We have actually got to get it through and get it going, because the three days is quite disrespectful of Parliament – to say we are going to introduce it on a Tuesday and have it all wrapped up on a Thursday – and certainly disrespectful to Victorians, who should, and rightly so, have the opportunity to make comment over that period so we all get to see what is in the bill. Certainly the stakeholders deserve better, I think. The stakeholders deserve to be able to have sufficient time to have input in this bill over the two weeks. But anyway, that is not the case. As I say, if we are going to rush it through in three days time, let us keep that rush going to make sure that we all end up where we need to be sooner rather than later.

Search and seizure laws, as I say, are a positive step. The fact that VicPol is involved is a significant step. However, I will say that even as recently as last week, the Minister for Police, who is at the table, suggested that VicPol would not be assisting here. I do not know whether there are discussions going on there or not, but the bill clearly says that VicPol will be involved. Maybe there is a bit of a dispute going on at the moment, member for Gippsland South. Maybe that dispute is playing out a little bit. Anyway, the minister was adamant that the police will not be taking carriage of this, but it suggests in the legislation that that is not quite the way it is going to be.

The fines are appropriate. I see the fines and the jail are appropriate. I think the numbers are a good start, making sure that we are taking this seriously, really throwing the book at those who are doing this firebombing, because the illicit tobacco turf war has got to stop. But we cannot wait 18 to 19 months for this to happen. That would be four years from go to whoa, and that is just way too long. If you ask the communities that have got a tobacco shop in their community, they would be saying that is just way too long.

Obviously with a fit and proper person test and the new licence I am certainly hopeful this will solve the problems. The Liberals and Nationals have been calling for this for some time – we are not talking weeks and months; we are talking years – and so has the community. It is not just us. The community is saying this has to stop and it has to stop now, and that is why we implore the government to move with our amendment to make sure that we have it all fully operational by 1 July 2025.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (15:43): Acting Speaker O’Keeffe, it is lovely to see you in the chair. It gives me great pleasure to speak to the Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024. This is an incredibly important bill which will address the growing scourge of illegal tobacco and the criminality surrounding this nefarious industry, for want of a better term.

The community has rightfully been very, very concerned regarding illicit tobacco and the prevalence of tobacco businesses suspected of involvement in its distribution. We have seen reports of businesses being firebombed, leaving devastating impacts not just to those businesses but to neighbouring traders, to nearby residents and the wider community. I am very fortunate to say the district of Monbulk to date has not experienced any of these attacks, but I know the neighbouring town of Seville experienced one in February earlier this year. People have been really concerned by these heinous acts, and understandably so.

Parents are concerned. They are seeing children become addicted to vapes. Teachers are concerned because they are seeing it as well. This bill is critical in helping to stamp out truly reprehensible behaviour. The Premier announced back in March that we would tackle this issue, and I am really pleased that we are doing so now. The clear commitment that was made earlier this year has made this move quickly and brought this bill into this chamber this year, and I think that is a wonderful thing. I thank the Minister as well for all the work going on there in her office to get us to this point.

This bill has been informed by the recommendations of the Public Accounts and Estimates inquiry into vaping and tobacco controls, which was completed in August. I would like to thank PAEC, in particular their marvellous chair, for their comprehensive work in this area, which has led to what I can only describe as a fairly hefty and very comprehensive bill. It not only addresses the systemic reform needed to introduce a licensing scheme, but it also contains the harshest penalties in the country for breaching these.

I would like to come back to PAEC a little bit later, but first I just want to talk about some of the technicalities in this bill – what it will actually do. It is going to amend the Tobacco Act 1987 to, firstly, establish a retailer and wholesaler tobacco licensing scheme. Secondly, it is going to strengthen offences, enforcement and compliance provisions for tobacco products. Thirdly, it will make consequential amendments to reflect the Commonwealth’s ban on the retail sale of non-therapeutic vaping goods. It is also going to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 to remove regulatory barriers to enforcement and allow for inspectors and licensing inspectors to possess nicotine in the performance of their functions or exercising relevant powers. It is going to make consequential amendments to the Spent Convictions Act 2021 to permit information about a person’s criminal record to be provided to the regulator of the licensing scheme, and it will make amendments to the Confiscation Act 1997 to ensure that illicit tobacco convictions and vaping goods convictions are subject to the confiscation regime set out in that act.

This bill is not some kind of afterthought. This is a comprehensive bill. It is going to address this issue, and the work is absolutely well and truly underway. I am very pleased to have heard the member for Ovens Valley, who I have a lot of time for. I was pleased to hear that the opposition will not be opposing this bill, and that is wonderful. However, there is a reasoned amendment, which will have the perverse outcome of delaying this even further, and yet we are hearing that urgency is required. So I do say it is wonderful the bill is not being opposed but it is a little bit baffling that the reasoned amendment states:

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 further consultation with affected stakeholders on when the licensing scheme should come into effect.’

We want this in by the end of the year. We have another sitting week to go, and we are working hard to ensure that the first stage commences by the end of this year. We are in November now, so this reasoned amendment is not a great idea, may I say, because over there on that side they are talking about timing. This would actually delay it further, so we will put that one aside.

The first stage, which comes into effect by the end of this year, will establish the licensing scheme. It will allow the regulator to appoint and train licensing inspectors, because without these elements in place it cannot work. We cannot put the cart before the horse. We have got to set up the framework in order for the next part to come through. So this first stage is going to allow licence applications to be made and determined in advance of the requirement for businesses to hold a licence. We cannot turn around and simply say to businesses ‘You need to have a licence in the next few months’ without actually having the scheme set up first. We have to build the house before we can move people into it.

In the first stage we are also going to amend the existing offences and powers in the Tobacco Act and repeal the e-cigarette and specialist tobacconist provisions. These penalties are going to come into effect. This is incredibly important. The second stage will be in early 2026. That will introduce the licensing offences and the enforcement powers of licensing inspectors, enabling penalties to be applied

to tobacco suppliers operating without a licence. Once again, we have got to set the system up before we can start penalising people for not being part of a system. There has to be time involved, and most of those licensees will be small businesses. We cannot put that impost on them to just quickly turn this around in a matter of a few months, so it does take time to set it up and we have to give a reasonable time to businesses to be able to apply for and receive their licence. So I think it is really important to just look at that time frame. One of the reasons why we have said by early 2026 is it will be fully operational and in effect.

I have actually had a licence myself, not to sell tobacco obviously but to sell alcohol, and there is work involved in running a licensing scheme. I had two liquor licences – one was for sale and the other for supply – in my two different businesses, and there is a lot of work involved, so fingers cannot be clicked and licensing schemes put into effect overnight.

I did want to speak about another issue though. Probably one of the real concerns that we all have is looking at the criminality that has emerged that we have seen across the state. Many, many people are concerned. There are people who have been witness to or involved somehow, directly or indirectly, with firebombings of tobacco stores. We have seen it on the news and some people have seen it in their communities, and it has been horrendous to watch. There is another element too, and that is parents and teachers who are watching children take up vaping at increasingly younger ages, who are addicted to nicotine in primary school, let alone in secondary school. This is a real cause for concern.

My daughter two years ago, when we were sat in the car, said ‘Mum, I’ve got a friend who is addicted to vapes.’ I said, ‘Really? She’s addicted to vapes?’ She was 13. I said, ‘That’s really awful. How is she getting them?’ My daughter said, ‘She orders them online, Mum. A box of about 48 turns up at her house.’ I said, ‘What? Are you sure?’ I was thinking maybe there was a little bit of extra mayo being put on the bread there. So my daughter said, ‘When we get home, I’ll show you.’ We went home and she showed me her phone and said, ‘This is the website that she buys her vapes from.’ I said, ‘Show me this.’ And she went, ‘This is how you do it. You click on there.’ The first thing that comes up says, ‘Are you 18 or older?’, and if you click ‘No’ it says ‘Come back later.’ So then she said, ‘So you just go back in, Mum, and you click “Yes”, and when you click “Yes” there are all these multicoloured vapes you can buy.’ It looks like the colours of the rainbow, all fruity flavours, and that just arrives at your house on your doorstep three days later. That is how frightening it has been, so the regulations of this bill are so important to me as a parent and to parents I know.

In that regard this is critical as well, because these people who are supplying children with nicotine products one way or another need to be hauled over the coals, they need to be held accountable and they need to be fined. That is why, as the member for Ovens Valley pointed out, the fines we are going to be dishing out through this bill are wonderful to see because they are absolutely going to deter the criminality that we are seeing, which is impacting the health of Victorians and, more concerningly even, the health of our youngest Victorians. It is an abomination to see what has been happening.

So I am incredibly delighted to be the first from our side here today speaking on this bill. I thank the members of PAEC. I did say I wanted to speak a little bit more, and I will make this comment about PAEC, because I believe the member for Ovens Valley – and he has left the chamber, so I am afraid he cannot confirm or not – said that part of the work the coalition had done was referring it to PAEC. Well, how about turning up to PAEC to actually be there for the hearings when it came to this? Because I believe it was only Mrs McArthur who turned up a couple of times, and others were absent. So when there was excellent testimony being given by police, by teachers and by young people themselves, those opposite were not there. That is really unfortunate because the work that PAEC did was thorough and comprehensive, and we have them and the minister to thank for this exceptional bill, which I commend to the house.

Danny O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:53): Acting Speaker O’Keeffe, lovely to see you in the chair to hear me speak on the Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing

Scheme) Bill 2024 and to immediately refute anyone who has not sat on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for 10 years on what goes on at PAEC.

Anthony Carbines interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am due for long service leave. I might have to talk to my union about that, Minister. The member suggested that those opposite her did not turn up to the PAEC hearings. I was there listening to police, I was there listening to VicHealth and various others. I did not manage to get to Shepparton, sadly – because it is a beautiful city, isn't it, Acting Speaker O'Keeffe – because that and one of the other hearings were in fact scheduled at the same time as cabinet and shadow cabinet meetings. So there are reasons that we cannot always get to all the things that we want to, but as the Minister for Police at the table knows very well, when it comes to PAEC I am like the cockroach that will not go away and continues to turn up, as I will be doing again for five days next week. I will be doing it again for five days next week, and the minister will be happy that it is not him at the table this time, but I will be terrorising his department and his chief commissioner and various others, and no doubt on this issue as well, because whilst we are certainly not opposing this legislation, having moved our own legislation last week waiting for the delay, this legislation has been a long, long time coming.

I remember dealing with a constituent who was concerned about the issue of illegal cigarettes and the like and writing to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure now, who I think was the Minister for Consumer Affairs at the time, Minister Pearson, and asking what had happened to the Better Regulation Victoria report, which was done two and a bit years ago now. The government had that report, did not respond to it and did not release it publicly, and it recommended of course at the time that the government introduce a regulation scheme.

It is a bit rich for the government this week to say, 'This is really urgent; we've got to introduce it tomorrow.' Yes, we agree it is really urgent, but the government has had more than two years to know about this. The firebombings started in March 2023. The Premier announced in March this year that they would do something, yet here we are with two weeks to go at the end of the year and finally the government is doing something and saying to the Parliament, 'We're not going to give you time to read the 138 pages in this bill; we want to rush it through this week.' I think the opposition, far from being the blockers that the government likes to claim we are, are being extremely reasonable in making sure that this legislation goes through this week to ensure that the Victorian community is protected, because the government has not been doing its job. It has taken so long to respond to this issue, and for it now to come forward and say, 'Don't worry about it, trust us, here are 138 pages and some of the detail we'll work out later,' is symptomatic of this chaotic government, to be honest.

Nonetheless, it is a step in the right direction, and from what opportunity we have had to read the bill and also from the bill briefing it does broadly touch on the issues that we think need to be touched on and need to be introduced. The licensing scheme is obviously the key thing, because it then gives the authorities, in particular the proposed new agency or regulator within the Department of Justice and Community Safety and the police, the ability to actually regulate and therefore to shut down those who are doing this illegally. The addendum to that, and this is where the minister at the table and his crew come in, is that when there is in fact actual criminal activity – illegal cigarettes importation, organised crime involvement, and we know that obviously there is organised crime involvement in this – then that is where the police will come in as well.

But we need to get this happening, and that is why I support the member for Ovens Valley's reasoned amendment, because it is a reasonable amendment. It is a reasonable amendment to say, 'You can't rush this in in two weeks and then say you're actually not going to have it fully operational until 1 July 2026.' One does wonder what it is within the bureaucracy or within the cabinet or within the government, whatever the issue is, that it is going to take that long to get this whole thing up and going. And to answer the member for Monbulk's question, our reasoned amendment does not delay this in any way, shape or form if the government sticks to 1 July 2026, because we would have the government work it out over the next week, if it chose to, in a quick consultation with the community

and the stakeholders, and would actually be able to ensure that they can bring a date forward that is workable. If not, at the very worst we would bring it back in the first week of the sitting next year in February. It is not going to change when this is going to be introduced on the current arrangements. The member for Ovens Valley raised that issue very well.

One of the other two issues that I was concerned about is that we do not yet know what the cost of registration will be. We need to ensure that the legitimate businesses – whether they are mum-and-dad corner stores, whether they are smaller businesses, whether they are the big supermarket chains or whether they are pubs and clubs that are selling cigarettes – are not adversely affected by this as well. This needs to be particularly focused on the criminal element, and likewise that is why we need to know what the cost of registration is going to be. Is it 500 bucks? Is it 5000 bucks? I am concerned about that. I am also concerned, as the member for Ovens Valley highlighted, that we do not yet even know things like what the definition is of a commercial quantity of illicit tobacco for the very big fines that are being introduced in this. I think it again highlights the chaotic nature of what this government is doing in not knowing the answer to all these questions, and there are questions with that. We look at the moment at cost recovery. We would expect that that is going to be the case here, but we are seeing way over cost recovery with the government on probate fees. But I am looking at the clock. I am very happy to support this legislation. I will support the member for Ovens Valley's reasoned amendment, and I hope that it will be successful.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Housing

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Footscray proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters.

Katie HALL (Footscray) (16:01): I am delighted to move this matter of public importance, because there is no more important matter for the people of Victoria than the dignity of a home. I am enormously proud of the data that Victoria is leading the nation in home approvals and building new homes, and of course we are leading the nation with the strongest protection for renters. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Housing and as the representative for an electorate with a very high proportion of renters and a very high proportion of younger people living in my community in Melbourne's inner west, this is crucial. This goes to our values as Labor people. I think about our commitment as a government to a housing-first approach to policy, because you cannot find a job and you cannot sort out your healthcare needs or your education needs if you do not have access to stable or affordable housing. We know that more homes mean more opportunities – more opportunities to live in the places where you want to live or where you aspire for your children to live or your grandchildren to live. We are delivering more homes where they are needed most as part of our \$6.3 billion investment in social housing.

I would like to acknowledge the former member for Richmond Richard Wynne, who spent most of his working life trying to support vulnerable people in his community to have access to social housing. The former minister Wynne worked tirelessly. He even worked on Fridays, unlike the current member for Richmond. It never would have occurred to him to go into the public housing towers, as the current member for Richmond does, and frighten people and spread misinformation and disinformation around our renewal of social housing in Victoria, which again speaks to our values as Labor people. We are getting on with it. We are getting on with the job of delivering more homes for more Victorians right across Victoria, despite the opposition from those opposite and their friends in the Greens.

I had the misfortune of being in the chamber earlier today when I heard the Leader of the Opposition speak about housing. In his wideranging contribution to the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024, he was speaking about, without a skerrick of irony, the lack of infrastructure in places like Docklands. He was

critical of the lack of infrastructure. He seems to have forgotten that it was his good friend Jeff Kennett who allowed developers to go into Docklands and build whatever they wanted without the City of Melbourne's involvement. It was also his good friend the member for Bulleen who approved the Joseph Road development in my electorate of Footscray. That was approved without any developer contributions. Minister Wynne had to take the developers to court to retrospectively get them to pay contributions so the council could build roads.

Whilst we believe in building more homes, we also believe in doing it properly – that there is a right way to build housing and there is a right way to build communities. The suite of reforms introduced and announced by the Minister for Planning, the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Precincts demonstrates this government's commitment to building great connected communities and building more housing where it is needed and where it is wanted, because in our great city of Melbourne and great state of Victoria we know that we have fantastic infrastructure. We are opening some more fantastic infrastructure just next year, with the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel, and we know that there are good locations with access to infrastructure, to schools, to roads, to public transport and to hospitals in places and communities where people want to live.

It saddens me that for people in my own community of the inner west – and people have lived there for generations – younger people now cannot afford to live in the electorate of Footscray, like their parents or their grandparents. But we are doing something about that with the announcement of our activity centres across Melbourne. Again, this goes to our values. There is nothing more fundamental than the dignity of a safe and secure, warm home, and that is something that the Allan Labor government is getting on and doing. We have constructed 10,000 new homes, which are already underway or complete. More than 5000 households have moved in or are getting ready to move in to brand new homes, and we are on track to deliver 13,300 new homes right across Victoria through the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund. This is about building, not blocking, the homes that people want to live in in the places that they want to live.

Can you imagine standing on the back of a ute in your community and opposing housing for vulnerable people? That is what the Leader of the Opposition did, and it is shameful. But we got on with the job of building new homes in Bills Street in Hawthorn – 206 social and affordable homes there, providing warm, safe and dry homes for more Victorians and jobs for more than 800 people. It is not just in Hawthorn, it is all over Melbourne where we are building this housing.

I note that the member for Brighton is in here at the moment. I was appalled in 2018 when he committed to closing down housing for rough sleepers at 226 South Road in Brighton and to selling the site. I do not know how the member for Brighton sleeps at night knowing that he was fighting against vulnerable people having a roof over their head and opposing 84 townhouses on the former Xavier College campus, just 350 metres from a train station. There is not just one train station in Brighton; I think there are three. Then he organised an angry mob to come and protest the announcement of Brighton as the location of a new train and tram zone.

James Newbury interjected.

Katie HALL: The member for Brighton can bellow all he likes, but he is on the record opposing social housing and affordable housing for vulnerable people in his community. But there are some people on the Liberal Party side who are not opposed to reform. Mr Mulholland in the other place has said that he believes it is his duty as a millennial MP to do what he can in assisting his generation to achieve the great Australian dream of home ownership:

I believe it is immoral that large sections of our inner cities, flush with good transport, schools, health care and other infrastructure, remain almost flat, with obsolete overlays denying young Victorians a chance to buy their first home where they want to live.

I commend him for saying that. It is sensible policy reform, but of course those opposite are not interested in sensible or detailed policy reform, just blocking, blocking, blocking with their mates from the Greens. Their friend the member for Richmond – their preferences got her elected – when she was

the mayor of Yarra council was the chief blocker of social housing and opposed social and affordable housing in Collingwood in 2021, and her Greens colleagues opposed a six-storey apartment block in Fitzroy North earlier this year. They are always getting in the way of building more homes; it is always ‘Not in my backyard’.

I think the Premier and this government can be proud that we are going to fight for younger generations, for millennials, who want to own their own home, and they should be allowed to own their own home in a suburb that they have a connection to community with. But that will not happen if those opposite, heaven forbid, ever have the great honour of being in government again, because they will put the brakes on, just in the same way as they tried to stop the Metro Tunnel from proceeding, they tried to stop the West Gate Tunnel from proceeding and they want to block the Suburban Rail Loop. They have no imagination, hope or aspiration for the great state of Victoria or for the people who want to live here and contribute to our city and our state.

I was very proud that, as part of the planning reforms that we have announced in our commitment to the renters and the aspiring home owners of the inner west, we launched the ‘Pick my park’ project in Footscray at Hansen Reserve. We are building more homes and making renting fair for the more than 50 per cent of people in the suburb of Footscray who rent, but they also need access to great public open space. The ‘Pick my park’ project was launched at Hansen Reserve in West Footscray, and I was absolutely delighted to be speaking with locals there about the kind of open space we want in my community in Melbourne’s inner west: quality, safe, accessible, usable park spaces that can be even better. These are the sorts of reforms by a government that is invested in community building and high-quality urban design – as we have done with our apartment design standards. We want confidence in the market. We want confidence in our communities. Part of our package of reforms is to make sure that the communities that we are building and that we are investing in remain livable.

One of the most exciting things I think for people in my community as part of these reforms has actually been our reforms to the building sector. I have supported a range of constituents, whether it be Pam Mulready of Seddon with her terrible experience with Extension Factory or the residents of the Shangri-La apartment building in West Footscray, for whom for too long the quality has been poor. Creating a new watchdog to bring together for the first time all aspects of quality control, regulation, insurance and dispute resolution will help return confidence to the market, especially in a community like Footscray, where people are happy to live in apartments as long as they are well built because we are connected to transport. Just like the member for Brighton’s electorate, I have a very busy transport hub in Footscray. I have a world-class hospital that is being built. We are getting trucks off local roads, because that is what we do as a government. We build and we invest in the infrastructure that will create great communities, and I am very proud of the government’s commitment to building more homes for more Victorians.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:16): The government has brought a matter of public importance to this house today on perhaps their biggest policy failure as a government, other than of course their perhaps criminal economic vandalism through the life of their government. But it is in the lack of capacity in providing homes to the community where they have failed so badly. And they have done it today – today of all days – a day when Victorians have been seen to vote against this government. We have seen it. We have seen it in polling today. The ‘runner-up Premier’, the polls say today. The Premier has now become the runner-up leader of this Parliament, and when it comes to policy and when it comes to housing, we know why, because the housing policies the Premier has announced – she has staked her leadership on it in recent weeks – are the great reset. The Premier took a great reset by announcing, ‘Throw it all in on policy.’ And it has been proven to be a scam – a total scam. Do you know why? Because the policy on housing is about one thing: the Premier’s population growth.

The Premier keeps saying, ‘We’re going to double the size of this city to at least the size of London.’ Has anybody ever asked a Victorian whether they want to see Melbourne at least double to the size of London? Nobody has been asked. There is no mandate, so this hollow set of policy announcements is

nothing more than a fraud, a scam. The Premier talks about building housing for people's children, but it is about housing new population growth – that is what this policy is about – and in doing so turning Melbourne into a mega city. Did anyone ask this state whether they want a mega city? Did anyone ask? No, of course they did not. The Premier has swanned around, driven into Melbourne from Bendigo – from 150 kilometres away – to make her announcements, and those announcements will wreck this city. Melburnians know it; of course they know it. You have got a Premier who lives 150 kilometres away, who swans on into town and says, 'I've got a series of policies that are going to wreck your suburbs.' Is there any wonder that all around the city you are starting to see big groups of people come together and rise up and say, 'We don't want our city wrecked. We don't want to see the livability of our state destroyed.' We were the most livable city in the world, and now the government has a plan to wreck it by turning certain suburbs into mega suburbs.

The Premier likes to play political games and pick the suburbs she does not like. Of course that is what has happened. We all know what has happened. The Premier cannot even see these suburbs with a pair of binoculars from where she lives. She could not even see the city with a pair of binoculars and has picked suburbs she does not like and said, 'You know what, we're going to wreck them.' These are established, long-term suburbs where the community has spent hundreds of years, built these beautiful suburbs around them, and the Premier has said, 'We're going to put big skyscrapers in them, and you know what, community, you have to suck it up.' That is what this policy is: a scam to fit the population growth that the Labor government has targeted, both state and federal, into our suburbs.

What has happened as a result? Victorians have turned on the Premier. I am 100 per cent sure that when the Premier said, 'We're going to put everything into this announcement,' it was to do one thing: to turn around the polls. I do not think the Premier has any goal in her mind other than trying to turn the polls around for herself, so that is what these policy announcements were about. Today the Premier woke up with the faint hope that there would be some glimmer that the Premier's reset, her big policy announcements, would pay a dividend, and Victorians have said no. Not only have they said no; they have made the Premier the runner-up. How embarrassing for the Premier. You can feel it in this chamber and you can feel it as you move around this building. The other side of the chamber know it. They are now looking at the boss and saying, 'Oh no, something is wrong here,' and there is something wrong. The Premier does not get Melbourne. That is the problem – the Premier does not get Melbourne, and that is what you can see in these policy announcements.

These policy announcements were an attack on the city. There is no other way to see it. The Premier will say, 'If you stand up against what we are announcing, somehow there is something wrong with you.' I have said it before and I will say it again: I would rather stand up and protect my community than be the Premier who wrecks it. That is what this Premier is doing. She has already announced that she will allow the wrecking of 25 suburbs through her major activity centre announcement, and the coalition has said strongly that where the community does not want it of course it should not be forced upon them. There are some communities that do, and they absolutely should be welcome to it. But when you see inappropriate skyscrapers being forced on communities that have none, purely because the Premier does not like the suburb, seriously, is there any wonder that Victorians have turned on the Premier?

We have been called a number of times recently into communities by community-led groups who have organised forums about what is being proposed in their area. This is not the Liberal Party organising opposition to the government's announcements. These are groups in Box Hill, Niddrie and Essendon where the communities have turned out in their hundreds to say, 'What is this government doing?' What I have said to those communities is that, firstly, your local member has not stood up for you. In fact your local members are gaslighting you, because they are saying in this chamber, 'You want what the government is foisting upon you,' which is just not true. The members are gaslighting their communities and coming into this chamber and saying it is supported. We know it is not supported, because it is inappropriate. When the government talks about housing and community support, we know that is not true, and there are a number of other community events in coming weeks.

I know that in my own community on Sunday there will be a community walk. It will be a very big community walk, I suspect. But that community walk is not just people from Bayside. There are people from the Deputy Premier's community who are coming across, there are people from Box Hill, there are people from all over Melbourne who are coming to say, 'You know what? We cannot have a government who is attacking our communities.' That is what is at the core of the Premier's announcement.

What is going to become more clear to Victorians is that it is not just an attack, it is an attack based on a scam, because this is solely about population growth – nothing more. But the Premier has not asked Victorians if they support that growth; no-one has. Do we want to be the size of London? Has anyone asked? Of course they have not, and the Premier certainly does not have a mandate for it. So what you will see is Victorians continuing to turn against the government. Their members have not worked it out yet. They have not fully worked it out. You could see when the polls came in that something was not quite right, but they are always behind the curve. They have not yet worked out that Victorians have turned on the government, but even more so they have turned on the Premier. They have turned on the Premier. They do not trust the Premier. That is why the Premier is a runner-up. The Premier is a runner-up. To think – and how embarrassing – the Premier put everything into the housing announcement. It was going to be the great white hope, the saviour, of this Premier's premiership. It was going to be the saving of the Premier's premiership. Yet what happened? It sank like a stone. That is because Victorians have figured out two things: number one, the housing policy is based on a scam – it is all about population growth; and secondly, it is an attack on Melbourne from a Premier who lives 150 kilometres away.

Though we do not talk about it – and the government certainly has stopped talking about it – this follows the commitment by the former Premier to building 80,000 homes a year. I will tell you how incompetent the Labor government is. Since announcing the commitment to building 80,000 homes, the number of homes built this year will go down on the previous year. Only a Labor government could announce an increase in home builds and actually cause it to go down. You have to be a special kind of stupid to get it to go down. The former Premier announced the commitment to building 80,000 homes, and we will see it go down. That is why Victorians have no confidence in the Premier's plan. That is why industry has no confidence in the Premier's plan. What is terribly sad – and the coalition has and will have policies in this space and knows very well – is we do not want to see this industry fail, we want to see it succeed. What we know is as a result of a former Minister for Planning we saw the highest number of builds in this state's history – the highest. So set aside all the words; the highest number of builds we have seen in this state's history was because of former planning minister Matthew Guy. That is a fact.

Matthew Guy interjected.

James NEWBURY: He is a legend, he says. It is a fact, so we have credibility in terms of supplying housing.

Housing minister Wynne – I mean, seriously, that guy slept. He was the Joe Biden of this Parliament – good old sleepy Richard.

This government has monumentally failed on housing. There is no question that this government has failed on housing in terms of the former Premier's commitment, the commitment he made on the way out to try and show that he stood for something. His commitment – what a failure that has been. Housing has gone down. And now it is the Premier who has thrown everything into her housing commitments. Victorians have worked it out. It is based on a scam – this is about population growth. But nobody has been asked if we want to be a city the size of London, and the Premier certainly does not have a mandate. Secondly, it is an attack on suburbs the Premier does not like from 150 kilometres away. The Premier does not even have to live in the city she is wrecking. By the time it is wrecked, she is going to be out on a pension, one of the very few out on a pension – what a disgrace that is – having wrecked this city. This Premier has failed.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (16:31): It is a pleasure to rise today to make a contribution on the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Footscray:

Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters.

I am so proud to be a member of this government, which is committed to investing in housing for all Victorians. Unlike those opposite, we are delivering more homes for Victorians. Our \$6.3 billion investment in housing is providing homes for Victorians in the places where they are needed most. Across the state there are more than 10,000 new homes underway or completed, and in fact we are on track to deliver more than 13,300 new homes. This is not by accident. It is happening because our government believes in more homes right across the state, including in Brighton. Thanks to our investments in the Victorian Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund, that is exactly what is happening.

The electorate of Lara and the wider Geelong region are certainly benefiting from this investment. Under the Big Housing Build 408 new homes have been completed and 28 new homes are underway across the Greater Geelong LGA. One of those projects is the Ormond Road project in East Geelong, where I know the member for Geelong has long been advocating for upgrades to the ageing public housing units. This incredible project will see 18 existing homes replaced with 54 modern energy-efficient homes, including homes that are accessible for people of all abilities. But we also recognise the need to maintain the current housing stock that we have, and since May 2020 an investment of \$20 million has provided or is in the process of providing crucial maintenance and upgrades across 1367 homes within the Greater Geelong region.

Delivering over 13,000 homes as part of the Big Housing Build would not be possible without assistance from the wonderful registered housing providers that we have across the state. The Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-operative is one of these. They have been delivering property management and housing services since 1983 and have been a registered housing provider in the Greater Geelong region since 2009. Homes Victoria has partnered with them to provide social housing in our region. The co-op currently manages 61 properties. They are managed by their tenant members, who take an active role in the management of homes and running the co-op. Members are involved in decision-making, taking responsibility for housing and general living conditions.

The benefits of housing co-operations, like the ones we have in the northern suburbs of Geelong, are numerous. Some of the key advantages that we see in our community include an increase in safety and stability for residents. Residents also develop a sense of community and a sense of agency for themselves. They are empowered to play a role in their co-op. This in turn upskills their members, who can bring their skills into the community and the broader workforce. Last year the member for Geelong and I joined the Minister for Housing for the opening of three new social homes in Camellia Crescent in Norlane.

Chris Couzens: Amazing homes too.

Ella GEORGE: Incredible homes. These homes are beautiful standalone units, which meet the livable housing silver level design guidelines and include double-glazed windows, double insulation, solar panels and solar hot water. These new properties enabled existing co-op tenant members to move into suitably sized homes that better fit their needs when previously they were living in larger homes. In turn, this freed up the larger homes for families who were in need of housing.

Community housing, like the homes managed by Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-op, is such an important part of the thousands of social homes provided by the state government.

I want to touch on a local constituent who resides in a property managed by the Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-op. I met Margaret last year, and as we got to speaking she mentioned that she loves living in her home. Margaret was previously living in a home managed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and due to an issue with her neighbour her family had to leave. This resulted in Margaret having to couch surf and stay with friends. Margaret was informed about the

work of the co-op and arranged a meeting with them. Since becoming a tenant, she says she has not looked back. Margaret said that although her home may be owned by the government and managed by the co-op, it feels like her home, and she says that sense of security is everything to her. It means sanity, not having to look over her shoulder all the time wondering if her house will be sold on her. She says that being part of the Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-op community is just that, a community. They hold functions at the co-op office, like Christmas parties at the end of the year, which help form a closer connection than just that of neighbours. Margaret said that it is truly their own community within the community.

In addition to this, Margaret mentioned how much she has learned since being part of the co-op. She says that she now has more of an understanding of just how hard it is for people in situations like she found herself in trying to get into housing. She said that she is empowered – empowered to open her mouth and to stand up for herself and for her community. She believes her time with the Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-op has made her feel more knowledgeable and also more secure in her environment. I want to thank Margaret for sharing her experiences with me and giving me permission to share this with the Parliament. Margaret's story is an incredible example of the power of housing cooperatives and community housing, because we know when it comes to housing there is no one-size-fits-all approach. For some people, community housing can be a life-changing and empowering experience, and these are exactly the results we see in our communities when we have a government that understands that everyone deserves a safe, secure and modern place to call home.

I am often asked about the issues that are impacting residents in the electorate of Lara. It is easy to answer because overwhelmingly housing is the issue that is most frequently raised with me and my office. The northern suburbs of Geelong, and in particular 3214, the suburbs of Norlane and Corio, have one of the highest rates of social housing, and these suburbs have high rates of tenants renting their homes. According to ABS data from 2021, 45.4 per cent of the population of the 3214 postcode rent their homes as opposed to 28.5 per cent across the rest of the state. According to socio-economic indexes for the area, these suburbs are ranked as the first and eighth most disadvantaged suburbs in Victoria. It is only our government that is doing something to address this. It is only the Allan Labor government that is building more homes to address disadvantage across Victoria.

Not only are we building more homes for more Victorian families, we are protecting renters' rights with a series of reforms aimed at closing loopholes that drive up the cost of living for renters. These reforms will give renters certainty over their leases and living standards and help to resolve tenancy disputes faster. Labor has implemented more than 130 rental reforms to restore fairness and respect for renters everywhere. Earlier this year we announced that even more will be done and introduced to the Parliament over the coming months. These include: we will stop landlords making dubious bond claims without evidence; we will ban no-fault evictions so that you cannot be kicked out of your home for no reason; we will ban the extra fees that get charged when you pay your own rent, including on rent tech apps; we will ban charging for background check fees for rental applications, because applying for a rental should be free; we will cap the cost of breaking a lease so that no renter pays an eye-watering amount in compensation; and we will ensure that if you need an extra key or fob for your apartment, you will get one.

These reforms build on many years of work from the state Labor government to protect renters, including establishing Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, creating a portable bond scheme and establishing the renting taskforce to crack down on dodgy landlords and agents. In Victoria we are leading the nation when it comes to renters' rights, and on this side of the house we are so proud to do so.

As a relatively young person in this place, I probably have a better understanding than most of just how hard it can be to enter the property market and purchase a home. But when we build more homes in Victoria, when we approve more homes in Victoria, we are making it easier for each and every young person to get their own start in owning a home. And when we support renters we are supporting young people who are overwhelmingly renters themselves. More homes mean more opportunities for

young people to be close to universities and TAFEs, to be close to jobs and to be close to their families and friends in the places where they grew up.

It is only under a Labor government that Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters. Only under a Labor government do we see real investment and real action in housing. On this side of the house we are busy building, not blocking. We are delivering more homes for more Victorians where they want to live. Members on this side know that these investments in housing mean more opportunities to live closer to things that Victorians need – reliable public transport, secure jobs, world-class health care and great public schools – closer to friends and families and closer to the communities where young people have grown up. That is why I am so pleased to speak in support of this matter of public importance.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:41): I rise to make a contribution on the matter of public importance today from the member for Footscray:

Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters.

I start off my contribution by saying that self-praise is actually no praise. I go to the proverb or definition of self-praise:

Praise of oneself is inherently worthless or dubious, as one cannot be objective of one's own work or accomplishments.

That stands out very, very clearly from the member for Footscray's motion and the contributions of all those on the other side, that self-praise is no praise. Also:

Praising oneself reveals one's arrogance or selfishness, which in turn lowers other's opinion of one.

Both of those proverbs very much fit this issue that is before the house at the moment. The Labor government are saying they are number one in approving and building new homes, when we have had a number of housing statements, the main one being about 800,000 houses over 10 years – 80,000 a year – which has never been achieved and has never even looked like being achieved. How can they say they are number one for approving and building new homes?

They also say they are number one for supporting renters. If you look at rental availability, it is actually decreasing. I have been out talking to real estate agents in my electorate in the last couple of weeks about what is happening to their rental books and what is happening with the availability of rental properties with the tax changes that have happened here in Victoria and the regulations that have changed around renters' rights versus landlords' rights, and they are saying that their books are shrinking.

I live in a cross-border community, and the real estate agents have a cross-border issue with having two sets of rules – one for our side and one for the New South Wales side – but that is not the issue for the debate today. But what they are saying in Echuca is that all the inquiries about the purchase of properties for rentals are for Moama. No-one wants to invest in Echuca. No-one wants to invest in Victoria, because they are going to get a land tax bill. Everyone is complaining about the land tax bills, and that is driving people out of owning rental properties here in Victoria.

We have the self-praise of this government that they are somehow number one for supporting renters, but they are actually driving landlords out of the sector, and it is landlords that provide the rental properties for people to rent and live in. Renters need to understand that it is the Allan Labor government that is making it harder for them to get a rental and is making it more expensive for them to get a rental, because the landlords have to pass their costs on. They have to pass on the land tax increases. So the government saying they are number one is just so disingenuous. It is about self-praise. There is no praise. As I said, it is about arrogance and it is about selfishness. They just cannot comprehend that the decisions they are making are actually making it harder for renters in Victoria and harder for people to buy a home.

If you look at the UDIA statistics around the cost of a new home and the state-based taxes and charges that go into the cost of a new home, their last report said 42 per cent of a new house and land package is actually state government charges and taxes – 42 per cent. If you think of a young family saving up to get the deposit, scraping together the money, making the sacrifices over time to get that deposit together, going to the bank, effectively mortgaging their life to get the loan to buy a house and they find out that 42 per cent of that money they are paying out is actually state government taxes and charges, they would be appalled. If they actually got a statement that set out, of the \$600,000, \$800,000 house and land package they are buying, 42 per cent is state taxes and charges, people would be horrified, but that is what those on the other side of the house are doing.

We did have 55 new and increased taxes here in Victoria. We have now got 56, because there is a death tax that has been added to those 55 new taxes and charges. We have all heard the saying about lawyers being ambulance chasers. The Allan government is actually a hearse chaser. They are chasing the hearse to the cemetery to charge death taxes. We have got the Allan Labor government being a hearse chaser. You die, you pay. You pay taxes all your life. You pay exorbitant taxes under the current government. You pay the tax if you are an employer; you pay the WorkCover tax increases. If you are a large employer, you pay the mental health levy, which is going into a black hole, and mental health services have not actually improved in Victoria for the billion dollars a year they are raising. You pay your land tax. If you and your brothers and sisters own a holiday house you share, you are now paying

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Peter WALSH: Through the Chair. The Speaker may own a holiday house with her brothers and sisters, and she is now paying land tax on that. And a lot of people have to sell those houses because they just cannot afford the land tax to keep them. You are seeing a whole generational change in what is happening because of the land tax that has come into this state.

You had the windfall gains tax introduced – supposedly a windfall, but all that does is actually add \$20,000 to \$30,000 to the price of a block of land. It is not a windfall for anyone, and what you see particularly in country areas is that people are no longer doing the subdivisions and no longer selling that land, because it is going to cost them too much in tax to do that. We are actually seeing a reduction in the supply of land. Again, to say that the Allan Labor government is number one for approving and building new homes is a falsehood. I have spoken about it in the Parliament here before.

Amendment C117 is the big planning amendment on the west of Echuca – 5000 lots. It took seven years to get that approved, and it was not because of local government. It was not local government at all. Everyone blames local government. Those on the other side want to take the powers away from local government because they believe they can do it better somehow. It was not local government that was that was holding that up. It was the state bureaucracy. It was the old Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. It is the new Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). It is whatever department you call it. It has a new name, but it is the same faces. It is the same people that sit behind those desks that are blockers. They are absolute blockers. For anyone on the other side that wants to listen, it is your departments, it is your bureaucrats that are the blockers when it comes to housing supply here in Victoria.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Peter WALSH: Sorry, Speaker. I am very passionate about this issue because I want to make sure that there is development in regional Victoria, and it is DEECA now that is the blocker. It is the regulations and the rules and the inane way they go about them that mean for a developer they have got the holding cost of that property. For those that bought the land in Echuca West, it was seven years, seven years of interest, seven years of all the holding charges. They finally turned the first sod, but what has happened? DEECA have come back and want to renegotiate some of the rules around that particular land. As I said, for the Allan government and for the member for Footscray to actually move

that they believe they are number one for approving and building new homes is an absolute falsehood. Self-praise is no praise. They should hang their heads in shame.

The fanfare around the housing strategy is around 80,000 houses each year for 10 years. It has not been achieved and will never be achieved under this government. To have 54,000 built in the first year and something like 60,000 going to be built in the second year is a long way away from 80,000 per year. If the cumulative shortfall is 30,000 houses a year, that is 300,000 houses that will not be built over the next 10 years in this housing strategy.

To say that the Allan government is number one for renters – have a look at the reduction in the rental books that are available at the real estate agents because there are less people owning rental properties because of the legislative changes this government has made over the journey. They have made it harder for landlords to even want to invest, and the double whammy is they have now got their land tax bill. They are throwing their hands up in the air and they are saying, ‘We’ll sell this property. We’ll go and invest in Adelaide.’ Particularly a lot of them are investing in Queensland because it is far more attractive. It is a repeat of the time when fortunately Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the former National Party Premier of Queensland, took away death duties. We now have a government bringing in death duties, but Joh actually took away death duties. People started leaving Victoria to go to Queensland. Victoria had to get rid of death duties. As these housing investors go to Queensland the government is going to realise they are going to have to reverse that decision or the rental stock will decrease further.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (16:51): It gives me great pleasure to rise and to speak to this matter of public importance (MPI) that has been put forward by the member for Footscray. And to follow that – it was a little bit like Abraham Simpson just yelling at clouds, wasn’t it? It was a little bit like that. To have an advocate like the member for Footscray, who is our Parliamentary Secretary for Housing and who is ensuring that we have the opportunity to speak to this matter of public importance, really is a terrific thing. Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters. You know Abe Simpson-like characters yelling at clouds just ain’t going to cut it.

Here in Victoria more homes mean more opportunity. In Victoria we always run on making sure that we have security, opportunity and community. We make sure that we have the jobs that people need to be secure in their lives. We make sure that they have the transport and the education to help create opportunities, and now we are investing in the housing so that people have dignity, so that people have a roof over their head and so that they can participate in community – security, opportunity and community.

I am grateful to have the chance today to speak to what our government is doing to make sure that Victorians – especially families, younger people and vulnerable people – can have the chance to own or rent a home. A house is an opportunity. It is the opportunity to start a family if you choose, get involved in your local community and create the life you want to close to work, friends and family. It should not be something that is difficult to find. It should not be a market that people are locked out of because it is too expensive to save for a deposit or there are too few houses available. It is a reality for many. Here in Victoria we are committed to changing this so generations to come have that security, have that comfort and have that opportunity that they deserve.

We know that housing pressures are impacting house prices and rental prices and reducing the ability of those in lower socio-economic circumstances to secure a roof over their heads. This is something I hear from my community in Narre Warren South, particularly as the outer south-east is one of the major growth corridors in our state. The Labor government’s housing statement tackles this issue head-on by building more homes and in turn making them more affordable. Building more homes is just one solution to the problem, but we know there is much more to this story. It is why we have also delivered reforms to protect and strengthen renters’ rights. It is why we are building the infrastructure to make sure our suburbs are close to the public transport that keeps our state moving through projects such as the Metro Tunnel and the Suburban Rail Loop.

We are building and approving homes faster than any other state in the country, and ABS data from October 2024 confirms this, with more than 60,000 home completions over the last 12 months. That is nearly 15,000 more homes than New South Wales. Victoria is also leading the nation in protection for renters, with more than 130 rental reforms to ensure fairness and respect for renters.

There was once upon a time a federal Treasurer who, back in 2014, talked about a nation of ‘lifters and leaners’. We now have an opposition in this state where we can talk about this notion of builders and blockers. Let me tell you this: they will keep yelling, and boy, don’t they love to yell, especially in this chamber. They will keep screaming for housing to be built, but you can guarantee that they will keep blocking. While they block, we build, and we are delivering more homes where they are needed, most as a part of our landmark \$6.3 billion investment in housing. More than 10,000 new homes are already underway or complete across Victoria, and we are not stopping any time soon. I am proud to be part of a government who is doubling down on housing.

We recently made a series of announcements to help build more homes and create more opportunities for Victorians. This includes: planning for more homes near public transport, with the announcement of 50 activity centres – that announcement made I think in Church Street, Brighton, recently; slashing stamp duty to make it cheaper for people to buy a townhouse, unit or apartment off the plan; tackling subdivision reform to make it easier to build a second home or granny flat on your property; and announcing a new and more powerful building quality watchdog, the building and plumbing commission. The new regulator will have tougher powers to crack down on building work that is not up to standard. We are creating a simpler, fairer system for infrastructure funding for parks, community facilities and paths in the area where you build your homes. There is also a \$150 million fund for local infrastructure in growth areas in Melbourne, with the new growth areas infrastructure contribution funding round to focus on transport services. Through this scheme, developers will continue contributing funding for important projects in the places where more homes are being built, not just taking the profits from building those homes. This fund will service our local government areas of Casey as well as nearby Cardinia and Hume, Melton and Whittlesea in the north and the west too. The fund ensures our growing communities do not miss out on the infrastructure that they need, with funding for public transport services, school upgrades, health and community facilities, hospitals, sport and rec facilities, open space and much, much more.

We have also launched a \$30 million Pick My Park grant program. It is a fast process for well-designed houses that look great, and we are providing funding to boost planning capacity in regional councils. As a part of our landmark housing investment, we are also delivering 13,300 new social and affordable homes right across Victoria, with more than 10,000 already underway or complete, because as I said at the beginning of my contribution, everyone deserves a safe, secure and modern place to call home.

It would of course be remiss of me not to talk about the Suburban Rail Loop. The Suburban Rail Loop was first announced by this government on 28 August 2018. I remember the date – it was three months before the election in 2018, and we went to that election with the promise to get started on building a Suburban Rail Loop, a transport and urban planning project that will change the way our city moves, lives and grows. The project, I am very happy to say, is powering ahead. We have just signed the final tunnelling contract for the Suburban Rail Loop East, with tunnelling to begin in 2026. The SRL is going to connect our suburbs, slash travel times and support the delivery of 70,000 homes in the suburbs. People want to live close to schools, parks and services.

Steve McGhie interjected.

Gary MAAS: The member for Melton has just reminded me that that 2018 election was won by the then Andrews Labor government. It went again to election in 2022 and again that policy proposal got up. Now this government, this Allan Labor government, is continuing to deliver the SRL, beginning with the SRL East. The project is going to make sure our transport and homes are in the right places to manage the growth of our urban fringe, linking all those major railway lines from the Frankston line to the Werribee line via the airport as well as creating more activity in our middle

suburbs in the SRL precincts. The SRL will especially impact my electorate of Narre Warren South by opening up much better access to key health and employment, new homes and education destinations in the south-east.

It is with great pride that I support the member for Footscray's MPI, and I do so because Labor is the only party in this state that gets on with the job of providing more – that is more homes, more opportunities, more transport and more jobs. Unlike the Greens and unlike the Libs, who will just complain about it, we get on with it and we are doing it. We are doing it now. I support the MPI.

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (17:01): When we are talking about housing approvals – and I know we were talking about it last time, but now we are talking about it again – you are talking to the king of housing approvals, and that is me. I like kings. I like Elvis Presley very much, I really do, whether it is *Burning Love* or *Viva Las Vegas*, even sometimes *Suspicious Minds*. I like the king's *Suspicious Minds* when I look opposite, but I like the king very much, and I am the king of housing approvals.

I know this government is gloating about 180,000 lots over 10 years, which is like gloating you are going to build Adelaide's housing strategy for a city the size of Queensland, because we have got more people living in Melbourne than live in Queensland, and Labor's response is to say, 'We're going to release 18,000 lots each and every year for 10 years, and we've got a plan to get there.' The Minister for Planning is here. This is really good. I will school the minister while I can – a bit of Guysplaining – because for the four years that I was the Minister for Planning in this state we averaged 51,578 lots each and every year, not 18,000. We averaged 51,000 lots each and every year. And do you know what that did? That put 51,000 couples, singles and families into a home in a growth area each and every year. That is our legacy. Our legacy is not whingeing, like the Labor Party did certainly back then, or trying to fix a problem 10 years after you caused it. Our response was to get in there and just say, 'Look, we've got a job to do.' We approved homes for 577,000 Victorians; that is the population of the Gold Coast. But this government has now got so few cranes on the sky –

Lauren Kathage interjected.

Matthew GUY: Goodness me! Someone got the red cordial out. The red cordial has been shipped up to Yan Yean – I think you are from Yan Yean.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Yan Yean is warned.

Matthew GUY: Goodness, you must have found Danielle Green's Tang or red cordial. Sorry. If I were you, I would just be schooled by the king at this point in time, because we approved 577,000 lots. We also reformed the development contributions plans (DCP) so that they could be taken off the shelf so that – wait for it – infrastructure could be delivered much, much quicker than at the rate this government is currently doing.

We the Liberal and National parties brought in place works in kind, and that meant the developers could even bring in infrastructure before the houses hit the market, which was in fact then abolished by the Labor Party. Can you believe it. They abolished it. Why would you do something as dumb as that? Well, you could come up with a lot of reasons. But I introduced it, the Liberals introduced it, the Nationals introduced it, and do you know who blocked it? Do you know who opposed it? The Labor Party. They opposed it.

I have got a list of things the Labor Party blocked, now that we are talking on the matter of public importance, because I remember Daniel Andrews, the then member for Mulgrave, and his shadow planning spokesman Brian Tee opposed – it is like a game show – not one, not two but all of the 206,312 lots, saying, 'It's going to create slums' – their word – 'in the outer suburbs.' They also opposed the tens of thousands of apartments – homes – that we put in place in the downtown area of Melbourne, which rose to 74,000 units over four years. Do you know what has been done under the Labor Party in the last four years? 17,000. They opposed every single one and said, 'They're all slums in the sky' – their language. 'Slums in the sky' were Daniel Andrews's and Brian Tee's words, and

that was supported by the then member for Albert Park Mr Foley. That was supported by the then member for Richmond Dick Wynne, who became planning minister, and – wait for it – where did he put height restrictions? In his own seat. Who would put height restrictions and setback restrictions through Fitzroy, through Richmond? But he was not Robinson Crusoe on this, because then he was ably followed by another planning minister, the member for Carrum, and what did she do? She also put height restrictions in her own seat.

There was I, the former minister, going up as we used to do – we came in here, there would be breakfast and you would get a toaster – and I sidled up to Dick Wynne. I am only 5 foot 7½ – remember the ½. I sidled up to Dick Wynne – he is a big man – and twice I said to him, ‘Minister, Doncaster has mandatory heights of up to 17 storeys, and the council and I would like to get more, more, more, in central Doncaster, because we can handle growth there. It would take pressure off parts of the city where that growth would be inappropriate – say, Brighton, parts of Malvern, parts of Templestowe – but you can put it in activities areas.’ And do you know what he said? ‘Oh, that would have to be a planning scheme amendment process. It might take 18 months.’ I said, ‘Minister, I am offering it to you. I am saying my community can understand that central Doncaster is a place for major growth. We accept it. We can see it. And if we take the pressure off our suburbs and grow sustainably and sensibly, we could put growth where it should be.’ No, he would not do that. He went off and took his raisin toast – he is probably a brown toast kind of guy with no butter, I suspect, just a little bit of Vegemite – and I never got that planning scheme amendment. The council in Manningham never got that. And now we are still stuck with mandatory height requirements in the CBD of Doncaster.

So now, on record formally, I ask the Minister for Planning sitting opposite me in the chamber – here are the supposed blockers uttering: ‘Will you finally intervene once and for all, stop mucking around and please take off mandatory height requirements?’ We look at Box Hill and say, ‘We can manage growth. We can accommodate growth’, but the government blocks it, blocks that growth, just like they opposed and blocked houses in Footscray. The lead speaker on this motion – they opposed it. They blocked it. They wanted to stop it, just like the member for Bentleigh. He opposed anything. The guy did not even want backyards to have a place for your grandparents. He wanted nothing – ‘Lock it up. Leave it.’ Blocker. I like the member for Bentleigh, but now he is apparently all for it – ‘Gotta get into the ministry, so we’ve got to get in there and say we’re all for this stuff.’ He opposed it.

When the coalition government offered, for regional growth, to say ‘Our regional cities like Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo should be offered the chance for a capital city’s own capital city zone with controls throughout those CBD areas so that we can grow urban populations, take the pressure off the suburbs and put them in a place where they can go,’ guess who opposed it in Bendigo? Guess who blocked it? ‘Oh, no, we don’t want Mr Skyscraper coming to Bendigo’ was the cry.

But now it is okay for Mrs Skyscraper to head down to Liberal electorates around the state. But Mr Skyscraper over here said, ‘Let’s do it sensibly and sustainably in places that can accommodate growth,’ – in places, I might add, like Fishermans Bend, which has got a 30-acre park in the middle of it. The DCP would have built trams down Plummer Street. With the highest DCP on developers in the state’s history, it could have accommodated, wait for it, 80,000 new residents in one precinct. But it was blocked and opposed by Labor, because the true blocker of development in this state is the Australian Labor Party. If they cannot block it through planning scheme amendments, they block it through tax. That is why they have taxed the industry out of existence in Victoria; that is why they oppose growth in regional centres; that is why they oppose growth in the outer urban areas when we approved homes for 580,000 Victorians; that is why they opposed our zone structure, which they use still today – because it was the best; it was good. That is why, frankly, no-one believes this government when they say they want to build homes. They just want to tax the development industry. They want to put more land tax on Victorians, because this government is a woeful government, a short-term government, a government all for the politics and not for the outcomes. That is why they are polling at 28 per cent, with the Premier at 29 per cent. As the member for Brighton said, she is the runner-up Premier, who frankly will lose the next election.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:11): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the topic:

Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters.

I think we have to be careful when we are talking about gloating or otherwise. We have every right to rebut certain contentions that are put forward in the chamber. That is the point of debate. So to suggest that when we are referring to ABS data that is gloating I think is a stretch at best. I will seek to be absolutely clear about the matters that we are putting forward to the chamber, and I hope there is no incorrect inference of gloating, because we are actually being factual about what has happened.

If you listened to the opposition, nothing has been built and nothing is being done. It could not be further from the truth. We have been working closely with industry and the community to build more homes for Victorians right across the state. There is an important element which I think the member for Bulleen left out, and that is of course a quality product when you are talking amenities – not leaving infrastructure to the market and hoping to wing it, leaving residents in a very difficult situation. He was referring to Fishermans Bend – I am very happy to take up that topic. Of course people need schools, they need accessible parks et cetera and they also need apartments that are built appropriately, with windows and other things, such as light coming into the apartment, dare I say, et cetera. There were a number of those approved I believe during the era of the member for Bulleen that we could call into question. Henceforth the imperative has been not just building homes for building's sake but building homes that people can actually live in with a quality of life and also extending the choice around the state.

I see a lot of the opposition looking down their noses at people in high-rise housing. I actually live in a high-rise, and I wonder: am I considered somebody who lives in a ghetto because I am in a high-rise? I do not know, but I get a lot of negativity from those opposite. I really love the community. I am in Southbank. There are 22,000 people there, and the majority of them are living in high-rises. I do not know about the attitude of the Liberal–National parties towards people in high-rises. I only hear very negative and pejorative commentary from them, and I find that quite disparaging and disheartening, because it is a really connected and warm community. There are lots of families living there. Who knew? They love the proximity to great schools, probably most of which the Andrews and Allan Labor government built, such as South Melbourne Primary School – because, lo and behold, those opposite forgot about these important elements – and South Melbourne Park Primary School.

That was also built under the Andrews Labor government. They are fantastic schools and amenities, nice and convenient. This means that those people who choose to live in Southbank, just as an example, are not having to necessarily travel an hour and a half to get to work, assuming they may work in proximity to the city or otherwise.

This is all about choice, and I think this is a point that – and I am seeking to paraphrase here – both the Minister for Planning and the Premier have said a number of times. It is not saying everyone must live in X location. The whole point is: do you want to be in a greenfield site? Is that where you can see your family, your friends and community? Fantastic, so we are opening up choice in that regard. On the other hand, do you want to be in a built-up urban environment, such as I choose to be and many of the 22,000 people in the Southbank community choose to be? Fantastic, great. Or maybe you want to be a little bit further out into the suburbs in a middle-ring suburb – and heaven forbid, it is such a pity the opposition could not care less about millennials and opportunities for them into the future. Saying there are certain suburbs that are absolutely barred from any kind of development is extraordinary, to say the least. No-one is having a go at or criticising the premise of a suburb such as Malvern, Brighton or Templestowe, but simply putting up the gate and saying, 'No, nothing is allowed here,' I find absolutely galling, because there are opportunities in proximity to great transport. This makes really good sense. I think it is about having a more flexible attitude and thinking about the community. It is also thinking about the fact for further generations coming along the line: do you want them to be 2 hours away from you or do you want them to be closer to you?

This is one of the greatest things, I think, about the housing statement, and obviously the plans that we are putting in place and rolling out fast are thinking about keeping you connected to those you care about. The only way we can open up those choices is to build more choices and more opportunities across the state. If you say, ‘Only in this place or that place is where you can build,’ that is limiting the choices, particularly for younger generations. Contrary to what the member for Brighton has said about this being some sort of lead weight, I have to say I have had overwhelmingly positive feedback particularly from younger people saying, ‘Thank you. Thank you for thinking about us. Thank you for giving us hope.’ I am not gloating in that statement. Legitimately I can show you the emails and communication that I have had, That gives me hope too. That is also backing in exactly what we are doing here.

Talking about facts, not gloating – let us distinguish these – the latest ABS data shows Victoria completed building more than 60,000 homes in the last 12 months, nearly 15,000 more than New South Wales. That is just a factual statement. If you deem that to be gloating, well, so be it, but that is a factual statement from the ABS. And we have approved more homes than any other state over the last 12 months – 52,392 new homes were approved in Victoria, 18,000 more than Queensland and 9600 more than New South Wales. Who knew? Now, if we had only listened to those opposite, we would have thought absolutely the opposite. We can absolutely see here that the numbers do not lie. But of course we know there is more to do. That is exactly the point. We are getting on and doing it, doubling down on this work. We are pulling every lever to try and unlock housing supply and approve affordability.

The other thing that is really interesting is they are always trashing Victoria and saying everyone is leaving, but guess what? We are the fastest growing state in Australia. Our population is set to hit 10.3 million by 2051. We must be doing something right here. I darn love our beautiful state. I think Victoria is an absolutely fantastic place. We have got wonderful citizens here. It is a great place to live, and it is a shame those opposite think it is so terrible and awful and think it is a dreadful place to live, because I absolutely love it, and we collectively are—

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: That is right. There are choices. If they do not like it here, they can always go interstate, but we think it is absolutely fantastic. We also know that – I am just seeking here in the time that I have available; I am going to flick along – when it comes to the issue of housing affordability, it is really essential that we build more and we build more in a smart way and give Victorians choice. That is why I thought it was absolutely galling earlier today when the Leader of the Opposition was talking up housing et cetera, but at the same time we know he has been seen on the back of a ute talking down the Bills Street, Hawthorn, development, which has since seen 206 social and affordable homes adjacent to this site, absolutely fantastic homes that Victorians, fellow people in our community, can enjoy.

It is a bit of a contrast. It is that forked tongue again we have from the opposition, because they pretend to care about housing but any chance they get they jack up against it. We know that it is very important that we continue on this path. We resist those who are against providing more choice and more opportunities for Victorians to live where they want to live, particularly proximate to public transport.

We have to continue on this path because that is what they are telling us they want. It is not just some pie-in-the-sky thing. We have actually been engaging with community, and I know that they want accessibility and they want convenience. Actually it is a common topic in my electorate, and I have to say that since 2022 we have increased bus services by almost 1500 – that is, routes 235, 237 and the 606. When we are talking about infrastructure and supporting Victorians and particularly locals to get around the great seat of Albert Park and beyond, we are well aware that you have to look holistically. You cannot just leave it to the market, particularly with infrastructure. This is government’s job, and this is exactly what we are doing.

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (17:21): Renters are at breaking point. A report this week from Better Renting found once again that renters are cutting back on essentials just so they can pay the rent. Seventy per cent said that they would skip meals or cut back on groceries, 50 per cent are cutting back on medication and 60 per cent do not raise issues with their landlord because they are scared of a rent increase in retaliation. That is why for so many renters, even if legislated standards are improved and even if they are given better protections, nothing will change – nothing – unless this government fixes the unlimited power that landlords have to hike up the rent and force renters out.

Just a few weeks ago I visited James. He is a Fitzroy renter whose home floods every single time it rains. Bricks in the hallway crumbled when I touched them. Holes in the walls let mice and rats in and out. It clearly did not meet minimum standards, but did the real estate agent care? Not one bit, because they know that renters have to put their life on hold and have to fork out exorbitant amounts of money and time just to have their basic rights met. And once you piss off your landlord, you can bet that they will find a way to kick you out, and that is usually by hiking out the rent so much that you give up and move out.

I have said it before, and I will say it again: as long as landlords have unlimited power to hike up the rent and force a renter out, most renters will be too scared to ask for their minimum rights to be met and will continue to live in overpriced, substandard and insecure homes. I am not exaggerating when I say that most renters are constantly worried about paying their next month's rent and live in fear of their next rent increase. The situation is dire; you cannot spin it any other way. In Melbourne less than 1 per cent of private rentals are affordable for full-time workers in vital roles like hospitality, construction and early childhood education.

I know members opposite must be hearing from renters in their electorates saying, 'I can't get by.' Just one property in Victoria is affordable for someone on the disability support pension, and not one property in Melbourne is affordable for someone on the DSP. There are no properties in the entire state that are affordable for a single person or a single parent with a child receiving youth allowance or JobSeeker, and here is Labor patting itself on the back, self-declaring that they are number one for renters. They have manufactured a sustained state of hopelessness, of stress, of financial precarity which takes a huge toll on renters, with substandard living conditions literally resulting in renters having a lower life expectancy than home owners. Labor is not winning at anything. How dare you! It is so embarrassing. Labor is failing renters.

In fact this year rental affordability has hit its worst levels since records began. The Better Renting report is scathing and it is right when it says Australia's rental system causes real harm. It stops people from living their lives. It puts their health at risk. It makes them homeless. It allows domestic violence to fester. It brings instability into children's lives. People deserve rewarding, meaningful lives that are not just about working and paying the rent, so when Labor makes a song and dance about some basic reforms and has the audacity to take up 2 hours of parliamentary time to gloat about them, I think I would speak for the hundreds of thousands of renters in Victoria who are struggling to get by when I say the only way to make renting truly fair is to make unlimited rent increases illegal.

What is the use of roof insulation if you are too scared to ask for it and cannot afford to keep the roof over your head in the first place. While Labor tinkers around the edges, renters are drowning in unlimited rent increases. In the last two years, rents in Melbourne have gone up by 23.4 per cent. If Labor had introduced a rent freeze in January 2023 like the Greens proposed, guess how much renters in Melbourne would have saved? They would have saved \$9938 each in rent increases, almost 10 grand. Isn't that outrageous? Labor could have saved every single renter in Melbourne 10 grand, but instead they are signing hundred-million-dollar contracts to demolish public housing and they are handing out tax breaks to developers and investors.

Here is the truth. As long as Labor take policy advice and donations from property investors, they will always be the party for landlords. Shame on you. One year after Labor's housing statement, Victoria's housing crisis has worsened on nearly every key indicator. More people are in housing stress in

Victoria than any other state or territory, and Victoria has the lowest investment in public and community housing out of all the states and territories. Meanwhile, Labor's landlords collectively made approximately \$905,200,000 in 2020–21.

Why is Labor so determined to ignore the obvious, to turn away from renters when all they need is the stability and the security that rent controls would bring? What is the big barrier? Sixteen countries across Europe have some form of rent controls. Renters in the ACT, where the Greens have been in power, enjoy the security of rent controls. The Greens will keep fighting for a rent freeze followed by a cap on rents of 2 per cent every two years to allow wages the chance to catch up with astronomical rents. But there are models that Victoria could choose from around the world other than capping rents to a fixed rate, including tying it to rent ranges or a formula or linking rent increases to other indexes like the wage price index or the CPI.

What is the big problem, Labor? Why won't Labor bring in rent controls? When I asked the Treasurer last year, he said Labor could not introduce rent controls, because it would distort the market. What did he mean by that? As though the market is this perfectly formed, perfectly functioning system and that any attempt to regulate rents would disrupt this perfect balance, disrupt the natural forces of supply and demand – those very same forces that allow landlords to exploit renters, particularly when things get tough. But we know there is nothing perfect about the rental market unless you are one of the 1 per cent making a buck from it. The Treasurer's unwillingness to distort the market shows how this government continues to prioritise profits for landlords and developers over the basic needs for secure and affordable housing. It ignores the reality that in Victoria the housing market has already been distorted by speculative practices, home hoarding and a focus on luxury developments for investment rather than addressing the pressing need for genuinely affordable homes. What this argument fundamentally overlooks is the human cost of market-driven housing policies.

Labor is prioritising the health of the economy in terms of investor and developer profits and capital accumulation at the expense of people's wellbeing. Housing is a human right, not a commodity to be traded for profit. By rejecting rent controls Labor is effectively endorsing a system where people are increasingly vulnerable to rising rents and displacement, with no regard for the social consequences. The real distortion is the prioritisation of a few people's wealth over human dignity, as hundreds of thousands face housing insecurity while developers continue to profit. Instead of leaning into the status quo, ignoring renters' real misery and listening to property developers for their policy advice, Labor should be challenging this market-driven narrative and ensuring that everyone has a safe and affordable home. Rent freeze now.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind the member for Richmond and all members that using the word 'you' reflects on the chair. I also remind members to use parliamentary language.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (17:31): It is an honour to rise in this chamber in support of the member for Footscray's matter of public importance, and I would like to acknowledge the member for Footscray's excellent contribution. Today I am honoured to speak about why Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters. Melbourne is a global city, and it is not a museum where everything stays the same, for our best years lie ahead of us. The Allan Labor government is delivering the necessary reforms that will help cater to our growing population, projected to reach the size of London's by 2050. These reforms are underpinned by the landmark Victorian housing statement released last year. This statement is charting the course for the next decade across planning reform, housing construction and strengthened rights for Victorian renters. We know it is a bold plan. We are committed to this bold plan because we are fully aware of the pressures many Victorians are under when it comes to housing and housing affordability.

This Labor government understands that if we do not take decisive policy action the pressure will only grow as Victoria's population soars beyond 10 million in the coming years. This is why we will be using every lever available to the government to create the conditions to deliver our landmark \$6.3 billion investment in housing. We are streamlining planning decisions to make good decisions

faster. We are building more housing closer to jobs and amenities, and we are strengthening the rights of renters. There is no shortage of work before us. While those opposite bury their heads in the sand, we are creating more opportunities for young people, helping millennials into homes and ensuring our kids and grandkids know that owning a home is within their reach. I am proud to be part of an Allan Labor government which is committed to doing the work and delivering outcomes for Victorian families, including those in my electorate of Glen Waverley, where a crucial part of Australia's largest housing project lies: the Suburban Rail Loop East.

The Suburban Rail Loop is a shining example of our commitment to creating a better future for all Victorians. It will forever change Melbourne. It will revolutionise how we move, how we work, how we study and the communities we live in. It will help by tackling housing supply and affordability, with 70,000 new homes that will be delivered in the right places. This rail line will attract more homes and businesses as people choose to live closer to world-class public transport with quality jobs, services, amenities and open spaces nearby. We are working with the community, councils and key stakeholders to ensure that growth is well planned and delivers high-quality neighbourhoods along the SRL rail network. Those who want to block this project and the homes it will bring prefer to do nothing. They take the easy way out, but we are not blockers; we are builders. We are delivering this project because we cannot afford not to.

Deputy Speaker, on Sunday I joined you, the member for Ashwood, and the member for Box Hill to welcome the Premier and the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop to the east for an important and exciting announcement. The fact that the announcement took place in the member for Box Hill's electorate did not dampen my excitement. We announced the signing of the contract to build the twin tunnels between Glen Waverley and Box Hill. By 2026 there will be 4000 workers on the SRL East, with four tunnel-boring machines in the ground and twin tunnels being built, with major construction underway at every one of the six station sites.

When delivered it will transform the way people move across Melbourne, and even more importantly, it will also deliver 70,000 homes in our lovely communities where people want to live. It is a testament to our commitment to a brighter housing future for all Victorians, and with the announcement on Sunday we are getting another step closer.

There is more work to do. The Allan Labor government is using every tool at our disposal to get on with approving and building more homes for Victorians. That is why in addition to the Suburban Rail Loop we are making the most of existing land in established suburbs to make room for more homes and more opportunities for everyone. We are doing so by unlocking and rezoning in both metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria across over 50 activity centres, which creates the conditions to build 300,000 more homes by 2051. Our efforts to deliver new homes in established areas will take pressure off the urban fringe, leading to shorter commutes and homes near services, jobs and open spaces. We are committed to ensuring that growth is well planned and delivers high-quality neighbourhoods. This approach is in stark contrast to the haphazard rezoning of Fishermans Bend by the member for Bulleen, done overnight without any planning.

Our commitment to housing development and support for renters is unwavering. The Suburban Rail Loop and our efforts to unlock surplus government land are just two examples of how we are leading the way. At the same time we know more Victorians are renting than ever before, and that is why we are committed to further strengthening renters rights. For the benefit of the house, I thought I would take a trip down memory lane to look up the reforms in this space. My research looking into the last Victorian Liberal government returned an unsurprising 404 error. I am sure you are all well aware what the 404 error is. The policy inaction of the previous Victorian Liberal government resulted in no rental rights reforms. Fast-forward to the current Allan Labor government; the contrast could not be clearer.

I am proud to be part of a Labor government that takes action protecting and strengthening the rights of renters. Victorians are renting more than ever before, and it falls on us to take action. Back in 2021

we passed 130 strengthened protections for renters. Some highlights of this package of reforms included stronger antidiscrimination provisions, maximum bond amounts and limits to rent paid in advance. We also capped rent increases to once a year. We introduced mandatory minimum standards and expanded the definition of ‘urgent repair’.

Earlier this year I was honoured to support the passing of the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024, where we continued to build on our action to protect renters rights and make the system fairer and more reliable for renters. We banned all types of rental bidding and closed the loopholes to make it illegal. We made rental bonds portable rather than having to pay a brand new bond each time. We also increased the notice required for rent increases and evictions to 90 days, and we created Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria to make it faster and easier to solve issues and disputes.

With more Victorians renting than ever before, we know that the number of rental disputes has increased, and the process of dealing with disputes is stressful and time-consuming. For many renters the cost of the process also adds to the already increased cost of living. Renters should not have to find themselves caught up in a protracted VCAT case to have straightforward repairs carried out to get their bond returned. Timely, affordable and proportionate access to justice in these situations matter deeply, and the creation of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria is a crucial piece of this puzzle. By establishing this independent agency we took a positive step towards meaningful change to Victoria’s rental dispute resolution landscape, and we have made it fairer, faster and cheaper for Victorian renters and landlords.

Put together, these changes are about ensuring that Victorian renters can make their house a home and giving landlords peace of mind. It is important work, and I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which has made this a reality. It is truly a team effort to make it a reality. I would like to acknowledge all the work being done to realise the aims and ambitions of Victoria’s housing statement, to build the Suburban Rail Loop as the biggest housing project in Australia and to support and strengthen renters rights. Whether it be the Minister for Planning at the table, the Minister for Precincts and Minister for Development Victoria, the Minister for Consumer Affairs or the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, under the leadership of the Premier there is a power of work being undertaken in this space.

I am proud that Victoria is leading the nation on renters rights. I am proud that Victoria continues to lead the nation in the supply and construction of new homes.

I am proud that Victoria is number one in home approvals and number one in home starts and home completions. I am proud that Victoria is number one in approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters, and I thank the wonderful member for Footscray for raising this matter of public importance.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (17:40): My National Party colleague rose earlier and made scathing comments about the delusional nature of this matter of public importance today. This government seriously thinks Victoria is number one for approving and building new homes and number one for supporting renters. Only a serious case of mental fatigue and delusion can be responsible for such a statement coming from this government. We will go through it this afternoon, and there is nothing, there is not a fact, that can prove those statements. It is a matter of public importance for the people of Victoria that they currently have a government in place that is prepared to put that statement down in light of the facts that are there for all to see. The worst part about a housing crisis – a government-led, a government-caused and a government-created housing crisis – is that it is a cruel thing to do to people and to society to handle housing so poorly and to offer so little hope to not only the most desperate and those without homes but to future generations who are trying to get homes and access homes and who simply cannot.

What are some of those facts? It was only 12 months ago – just a little over 12 months ago – when the then Premier Daniel Andrews got up and said to everybody, ‘We are going to embark on yet another reset of our housing policy. We’re going to create 80,000 homes a year.’ It is an absolute, blatant lie. It is a lie because it is misleading and a mistruth to the people of Victoria to put that statement out when you have done absolutely nothing to create it.

It was only four years ago that the first Big Housing Build promises were made to the people of Victoria. Those Big Housing Build promises were a series of promises made to the most vulnerable people in Victoria. They were promises made to the homeless, to people without homes and to the lowest income people in this state. What did the then Premier Daniel Andrews and his housing minister Richard Wynne promise? They promised within four years – so right now, today – for the homeless in Victoria a 10 per cent increase in social and public housing. What have we seen? We have seen barely a 3 per cent increase. Why is that? It is because this government, with so many of the projects it undertakes, does not know how to complete a project properly. It does not know how to complete a project efficiently and with purpose. Instead they have actually over the last six months, from the most recent figures that they have allowed to be released to the public – because we are running 12 months behind. The most recent figures, leaked to the opposition, show that we actually went backwards in public housing. Can you believe that? We have spent four a half billion dollars and we went backwards in public housing.

But the 400 or 500 homes that we went back are only half the problem. The bigger problem is that over the four years of the big build, we have three and half thousand fewer bedrooms in public housing in this state. You talk about this line, ‘We’re number one for supporting renters.’ What about the most vulnerable families in the state, who desperately need housing provided by the state? They have got – after four and a half billion dollars, after four years and after an ironclad guarantee from this government that they were going to improve public housing – three and a half thousand fewer bedrooms. I mean, the only way this government can even begin to work on the homeless list – which, mind you, is 300 per cent higher than it was when we left government in 2014. You have increased the homeless crisis in Victoria by 300 per cent, you have gone backwards in bedrooms, you have decreased public housing and you have spent a heck a lot of money. That is an extraordinarily poor performance. What is worse is that I was prepared to cut this government some slack as Shadow Minister for Housing and say, ‘Oh, well, they’re not going to get a 10 per cent increase in the first year and maybe not the second year.’ But their commitment was pretty clear: in four years, a 10 per cent increase in housing.

We thought, ‘We’ll let them have a go and see if they can get that.’ When the most recent Victorian housing register, the homeless list, came out with the most recent figures, could you believe that the list went up 3100 families in one quarter? That is a third of the total homeless list that existed when we were in government in 2014. I mean, it was bad enough then, in 2014, at 9900, but this government added 3100 in just one quarter – after spending \$4.6 billion and after promising everybody that within four years there would be a 10 per cent increase. So when we talk about this matter of public importance, it is absolutely a matter of public importance. This government is not number one for approving and building new homes, and certainly not its own homes. I mean, it is an abject failure at building its own homes, but then to say it is supporting renters – can you imagine the distress and the heartache? Literally more than 60,000 families – approximately 120,000, 130,000 people – every day in Victoria are waiting longer for less from this government, and it is a crisis here in Victoria.

So what do we know about that? We know that if you are a family escaping domestic violence and absolutely desperate for shelter, for a home, for somewhere safe to keep you and your children, you are now waiting twice as long as you did six years ago. You are waiting 24 months. Interestingly, in this year’s budget the government keeps trying to reset it, and every year it puts in the budget an estimate that it is going to be a 10-month wait. It does not get to 10 months; it just keeps increasing. Every single year of this government since 2014, the waiting times for a home have increased; the waiting lists have increased. The only way you can deal with increasing waiting lists and longer wait

times is to increase housing stock and increase bedrooms. What has this government done in order to combat the ever-increasing wait times? They have decreased bedrooms, they have decreased public housing stock and they have only marginally increased – less than a third of what they promised four years ago has been delivered in the overall social housing space. It is an indictment on this state.

What we also now know is that not only have this government single-handedly destroyed, held back and just shown no capacity to deliver on social and public housing, but they are now attacking the private housing market. How do we know that? In Victoria once again we are number one, but we are not number one for solving the housing crisis, we are not number one for providing good tenant options and we are not number one for getting more houses; we are now number one for the most amount of distressed sales of homes here in Victoria. They are distressed sales because the people who bought them cannot afford to keep them.

But what is worse is that increasingly landlords across Victoria are selling up. Depending where you are, between 40 and 60 per cent of the homes going on the market were rental homes. For some reason this government is unable to connect the fact that if you overtax landlords and overregulate landlords, they can take their money from the private housing market, they can put it onto the stock market and they can invest it elsewhere; they will get better returns, less hassle and pay less tax. This government has not connected that, because it is broke, it is desperate, it has got out-of-control budgets and it does not know how to deal with the housing crisis. It is pulling every lever in the wrong direction. It is putting its foot on the accelerator as it goes around the corner. It is not heeding the signs, the warnings and the advice from the private sector, from the public sector and most importantly from those that are looking for somewhere to live in the state of Victoria. It is out of control.

This government cannot in any way claim it is number one as a landlord, it cannot claim it is number one at building houses and it cannot claim it is number one for renters rights. In this crazy situation of penalising the private property market through out-of-control land taxes and out-of-control regulations – I mean, the government has again trumpeted and foreshadowed even more penalties, costs and charges to put on landlords – these are all the wrong settings. They are heading in the wrong direction, and this state has a massive problem. People judge the capacity of a government by the way it treats its most vulnerable, and this government has done an appalling job at looking after the most vulnerable. After all the billions that have been spent, to think that we have less now to offer our most vulnerable: we have less bedrooms, we have less homes, we have less opportunities; we have people waiting longer – lists growing longer – for somewhere to call home. This government cannot in any way claim any credit. The only thing they can claim is that they are 100 per cent responsible for the mess that we find in housing, rentals and critical housing in the state of Victoria.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:50): I am so pleased to contribute to this matter of public importance, and can I start by acknowledging that we have in the chamber right now a fantastic Minister for Planning and Minister for the Suburbs. I know that my colleagues here will agree that she has done and continues to do a fabulous job. I think one of the things that sets our minister apart is the way that she listens. She listens to communities, she listens to families and she listens to members about what is needed for a good life in Victoria. Before this most recent announcement she put the hard yards in travelling the state, talking to people about the vision for Victoria, putting people first and putting families and family life first.

Can I contrast that with the former Minister for Planning, who we had in the chamber before. Boasting, he said, ‘I am the king of housing approvals’ – boasting, really, about putting developers first, about releasing land lots and making some people very rich. Is that something to be boasting about? I think the former Minister for Planning should have listened less to developers and more to community, which is what our fantastic minister does and has done.

I can give you an example. We have a minister who comes and listens about issues around schools and parks, who understands that for a good life in Victoria we cannot have this ‘king of housing approvals’ approach where the former minister said that he had 577 lots approved. Can we also

compare and contrast that he was very proud of that number but he did not speak about the number of dollars spent on infrastructure for those communities where he released the lots. He certainly did not boast, 'I'm the king of infrastructure.' No, he said, 'I'm the king of housing approvals. I'm the king of opening up lots,' not of infrastructure. Let us be really clear about that, because when they were in government they did not spend a cent on infrastructure in Yan Yean, so shame on them for that and shame on him for coming in here and boasting of his record as a planning minister, because we continue to grapple with the impacts of his decisions.

One of the great things that the minister has done is to work on the phasing and staging of precinct structure plans over the coming year. Over the school holidays I doorknocked over 250 families in Wallara Waters and Newbridge in Wallan and spoke to them about life, how things are, how I can help them, and one of the key concerns for families and community members there is around the sequencing of development, so making sure that when we build a school we have got the roads that are ready to take the traffic and when we open up new lots we have got jobs that are ready for people to work so they do not have to travel as far. Of all the announcements that have been made over the past few weeks by this government, the one that pleases me the most is the sequencing and the staging of PSPs. For example, those families that I spoke to in Wallara Waters and in Newbridge can look forward to having a new school built – a new primary school. The sod has been turned.

We are advertising for a principal, and a fantastic new public school will open in 2026. In the coming weeks we will have excavators and augers doing geotech assessments for the Wallan ramps. I know the members for Kalkallo joins me in welcoming seeing those getting built. We will have a new maternal child health service. We will have two new kindergartens for the community. This is all before the new lots are open. We do not have a minister boasting about opening up new housing lots. We have a humble minister who is going about making sure – I might tear up – that families have what they want and what they need in the outer suburbs.

I know those opposite are not interested in the outer suburbs. I know the member for Brighton does not want our type in his area. But I am telling you now that the humble and the hardworking people of the north are the best of Victoria, and I am so proud to represent them.

A member interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: I know the west is the best too. Can I tell you, talking about that same community, a Liberal member of the upper house was quoted in our local paper. That sequencing, staging and careful thinking through of development he is quoted in our local paper as opposing. He says it means that developers will have to pay increased tax or increased costs while they wait until they can sell their lots to the public. So his concern is about developers' hip pockets. His concern is that developers will not make as much money. His concern is developers' balance sheets, and our concern is busy families making ends meet. It tells you everything about the difference between those opposite and us. We are focused on families. We are focused on delivering for them. I am really proud to be part of this government, because it is about being fair. It is about being fair and making sure that all Victorians have access to good services and good facilities, and sometimes those opposite think that as well. Sometimes they do. We know that when some of the Liberal members are talking, it sounds like they are talking about the member for Brighton. We have seen some protesters lately, haven't we, and one member said:

... protesters ... swoop in quicker than a seagull to a chip on St Kilda beach. To put it plainly, these Green-tinged councils and political elites are the new xenophobes. While these do-gooders and hand wringers might think they are fighting a holy war ... all they end up doing is sending young families packing to growth areas like Mickleham, Beveridge and Wallan.

That was a Liberal member of the upper house speaking, and it was as though he was speaking directly to the member for Brighton, who does not think that we are good enough. It sounds like I am

exaggerating, but of course the upper house member who represents the same community as I do in the areas of Whittlesea and surrounds – does anyone know which quote I am going to – famously said:

There is no point putting a very low income, probably welfare-dependent family in the best street in Brighton where the children cannot mix with others or go to the school with other children or where they do not have the same ability to have the latest in sneakers and iPhones et cetera. We have got to make sure that people can actually fit into a neighbourhood.

Well, she represents the same hardworking and humble people as I do in the north. I hope they do not ever hear what she said, because quite frankly it is very upsetting and it is really unfair.

In contrast again to the ‘Let ’em rip’ policy of those opposite, which has created issues that we continue to work on and address through listening, through caring and not through boastful development of developers’ bottom lines, we are focused on creating the best life for communities and the best life for families, and we recognise that a house – a good house where you want to live and where you have that choice in housing – is a big part of that.

Can I close by sharing an anecdote about our down-to-earth minister who joined me at a local park where I wanted to show her that the developer-built park was lacking in toilets. I had told her, ‘This is a place where people come during the day to relax,’ and when we arrived an elderly couple, parents from India who were visiting their child, happened to be there. That was the family of Neelkanth Ravi. The gentleman, in his best English, asked us for a washroom. The minister thought that I had staged it for her, but I had not. The Pick My Park project is going to be fantastic for our area, and I look forward to seeing it roll out.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (18:00): I rise to address the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Footscray. In the 53 seconds remaining in the debate, I just want to bring home a really obvious truth that members of the government should know. If you tax something more, it does not get any cheaper. If you tax something more, it gets more expensive. After 10 years of Labor and 10 Labor budgets, of their 55 new or increased taxes, there have been 29 taxes on property, meaning that housing and home affordability is more out of reach for Victorians than it has ever been before. Victorians cannot trust the people who created the problem to fix the problem. It is as simple as that. As recently as yesterday in the Legislative Council the government and the Greens had an opportunity to extend stamp duty concessions for more than 12 months, but they both voted against it. They cannot be trusted when it comes to affordable housing in this state.

Bills

Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (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.

Motions

Budget papers 2024–25

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this house takes note of the 2024–25 budget papers.

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (18:02): The Allan Labor government's 2024–25 Victorian budget is a shocking budget that plunges Victoria further into financial ruin and sickening record debt. It cuts services and it increases taxes.

This budget was handed down in May this year, and six months later the government decides that we are able and allowed to debate the budget. For several months they have not allowed any of us on this side of the chamber to debate this budget because they know just how bad it is. After 10 years of Labor, Victoria's debt will soar to an unprecedented \$188 billion – more than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. To put that into some perspective, that equates to \$67,000 for every single Victorian, an extraordinary record debt that this Labor government is burdening our children and our grandchildren with, and it does not even include the new debt that Labor will have taken on if it continues with its back-of-the-envelope, inner-city, city-centric Suburban Rail Loop project – not really a loop, but a train tunnel between Box Hill and Cheltenham.

Let us not beat around the bush. The Suburban Rail Loop is not fully funded, yet Labor is recklessly signing Victorians up to contracts for a project that is expected to cost \$216 billion. It is a project that really should be shelved given the dire state of the Victorian state budget under Labor. If Labor ignorantly and arrogantly pursues and persists with the Suburban Rail Loop, it really could nearly double the already disgustingly mammoth level of debt that we have in Victoria. It will absolutely be a financial disaster. What is even worse is that Victorians will be forced to pay \$26 million each and every day in interest repayments just to service this extraordinary level of debt. These payments will not do anything to pay down the debt; they are nothing more than flushing hardworking Victorians' taxpayers dollars down the toilet. It is a consequence of Labor's reckless spending and financial incompetence.

Just think what we could achieve in our community for \$26 million a day – make the Warburton Highway in Seville East safer; fix all of the potholes; get some new trucks and equipment for all of our CFA fire brigades and the Lilydale and Emerald SES units; more local bus services; pay our police what they deserve to earn; pay our paramedics better; pay our TAFE teachers, who are still in a two-year protracted pay dispute with the war that the Labor government has with TAFE teachers; or provide desperately needed cost-of-living relief for people. Yet this budget provides nothing for my community in the Evelyn electorate – no funding to upgrade dangerous roads like the Warburton Highway, Seville East; Clegg Road, Wandin; Hull and Mooroolbark roads in Mooroolbark; or Hereford Road in Mount Evelyn; no capital funding beyond the design phase for Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood, our closest major public hospital; no funding for more bus services; and no funding to duplicate the Lilydale train line between Mooroolbark and Lilydale.

Victorians are absolutely fed up under a tired and dysfunctional Labor government. This is a financial disaster and has been made worse by the \$40 billion in budget blowouts on major infrastructure projects and the cuts across the board. The budget reveals that almost \$47 million has been added to Labor's debt every day since the last budget. This is despite Labor, over its 10 years in office, adding or increasing taxes 55 times. That is right, and the Shadow Treasurer knows this only too well – that is 55 new or increased taxes under Labor. It is only adding to the cost-of-living pressures that Victorians are facing right now. Victoria is now the highest-taxed state in Australia, with Victorians on average paying over \$5700 per person in taxes due to Labor's financial mismanagement. It is absolutely staggering that Labor's debt now represents 25 per cent of Victoria's gross state product. What is even worse is that Labor is doing absolutely nothing to fix these problems. They are only making them worse.

Government expenditure is estimated to increase this financial year by \$98 billion over the next 12 months. That is \$5.4 billion more than was forecast in last year's budget. Do not worry, you can always trust and rely on a Labor government to ensure that taxes will always go up and never go down as they would under a Liberal government. Under the budget revenue from Labor's economy-destroying taxes, it is expected to increase by \$45 billion, the budget revenue from Labor's taxes. Specifically in this budget, Labor increased the waste levy, a tax on putting out the rubbish, and they

increased the fire services levy despite – and I think Acting Speaker De Martino will know this – our local fire brigades not seeing any of the financial benefit from the fire services levy, forecasting these two tax hikes will rake in an extra \$1 billion in tax. So Victorians will be paying more tax just to put out the bins. No wonder they are itching to bin Labor in 2026, of course seeing that the Premier's approval rating at this point in time is absolutely plummeting, at 29 per cent.

The main driver of this unsustainable expenditure is the growth in the public sector wages costs. Public sector wages costs are now expected to hit \$40 billion by 2027–28. Public sector wages costs are now double what they were when Labor came to power in 2014. This is the big slap in the face for so many Victorians. When the Labor government gave out cheques for \$5600 for every public sector worker for voting up their new enterprise agreement, this just goes to show how out of touch the Allan Labor government really are, because throughout the pandemic of course government workers maintained their jobs and their salaries without interruptions and continue to this day to be allowed to work from home. This is a massive contrast to the thousands and thousands of Victorians in small family businesses, both the operators and the workers in small family businesses, who had their livelihoods ruined through the extreme lockdowns that were imposed by Labor. Many of these small businesses closed and never reopened after the COVID lockdowns imposed by Labor. Some of these businesses are still pursuing the Allan Labor government through a class action.

Small Business Australia has put this budget in context and described this budget as a 'whole lot of nothing'. It is right. This is a nothing budget because it does nothing – nothing to stop the spiralling debt crisis and nothing to help Victorian families and businesses recover from the financial ruin that we are currently in and deal with the cost-of-living pressures and the cost-of-business pressures.

Labor says by virtue of some economic miracle it will achieve a budget surplus of \$1.5 billion in 2025–26. How on any measure can Labor be taken seriously with this? Labor has been promising budget surpluses for years and has never delivered, and now they want us to believe that Victoria will return to surplus in 2025–26 with a surplus of \$1.5 billion. They want Victorians to believe this despite delivering a \$2.2 billion deficit this year, more than double their prediction last year.

Recall the recent fiasco a couple of months ago in the Department of Health where they threatened hospital amalgamations. Hospitals were closing wards because they did not have the funding to keep them open, resulting in waiting lists getting longer and ambulance ramping getting worse and worse. Then all of a sudden the Labor government miraculously found \$1.5 billion after the budget processes. After the budget papers were published they miraculously found \$1.5 billion that was not in the budget papers to allow hospitals to continue treating patients, to stay open. When the Premier and the health minister were asked about this additional \$1.5 billion and where it came from, they refused to answer. It was clear that the Treasurer Tim Pallas was furious about the massive blow-out in the health budget, because only a month into the new financial year the Treasurer said that he was rather unhappy with the presented 'shortcomings in budget management'. But I think the real reason why the Treasurer was so angry with the health minister was because only a month into the financial year the Minister for Health had already blown his promised \$1.5 billion budget surplus. That is right, the promised budget surplus of \$1.5 billion is exactly the same amount the Minister for Health needed to recover and cover up her budget shortcomings, her budget black hole, so it is clear that the promised budget surplus has already been blown away under the Labor government, another Labor broken promise.

Credit rating agencies have expressed serious concern about the rising debt and fiscal position of Victoria. Moody's has raised doubts about Labor's debt affordability, warning it will significantly constrain Victoria's operating profile over time. They also expressed doubt about Labor's ability to stabilise debt, meaning further pressure will be placed on the state's credit rating. S&P Global Ratings confirmed that Victoria's current AA rating was the lowest of any state or territory and noted Victoria's recovery from the global pandemic had been slow in comparison to the rest of the world. S&P Global said that the budget confirms the government's accounts are in large structural fiscal cash deficit. It is clear Victoria's credit rating is at serious risk of being downgraded again given the Treasurer's hastily organised trip to the United States back in July to lobby the credit rating agencies

not to downgrade Victoria's credit rating further. I can only imagine the Treasurer's horror, after promising and undertaking to these credit rating agencies that Victoria's deficit was under control, when he found the health minister had ripped up his promise of a \$1.5 billion surplus because she needed to fill her budget black hole.

In my portfolio of industry, innovation and manufacturing we have seen Labor's creative accounting at its finest. Touted as a savings measure in the budget papers, the government said it was taking \$360 million out of the \$2 billion Breakthrough Victoria Fund, but under sustained questioning in the Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) process it was revealed that the \$360 million was not a saving at all. Instead the \$2 billion being spent over 10 years as originally planned would now just be spent over 15 years, meaning there was actually no cut. That \$2 billion was still committed and the funding would just be delayed. Again, if this is the kind of creative accounting that Labor is relying on to deliver so-called surpluses, it is any wonder that Victoria is in the diabolical financial mess that it finds itself in under Labor. We were also promised that the government's new mRNA manufacturing facility would be manufacturing 100 million vaccines by 2024. We have only got one month left of 2024. We are now told that this will not happen until 2025 at least. All types of manufacturers in Victoria are being taxed out of this state, with land tax hikes of up to 300 per cent, absolutely business- and job-destroying taxes.

In the skills and TAFE portfolio the Labor government is at war with TAFE teachers. TAFE teachers are walking off the job because they are sick and tired of being forced to work unpaid overtime under Labor as the two-year protracted pay dispute drags on. While Labor try their best to spin efforts on their supposed record investments in TAFE, that quickly evaporated when the minister was forced to concede in PAEC that more than half of the funding actually comes from the Commonwealth government and that there was not a single additional cent of funding under this budget; it was just money that, in the department's terminology, was 'repurposed' from other programs. Victoria remains in a skills crisis and still invests the lowest amount in vocational education and training in Australia – and you do not have to believe me, just ask the AEU. The Victorian Liberals want to see a stronger vocational education and training system, but there is significant concern in the sector as private registered training organisations are being starved of contracts and in the upper house – the other house, the other place – Minister Tierney has refused to rule out that the Labor government will shut down regional TAFE campuses.

Again, for my electorate in Evelyn there was not a new cent of money for my local community. There is still no money to fix the Warburton Highway in Seville East, still no money to fix and ease congestion on Hull and Mooroolbark roads in Mooroolbark, still uncertainty about the upgrade for the intersection at Maroondah Highway and Killara Road in Coldstream despite the fact that the government has had money from the Commonwealth since 2019, and still no funding to fix Hereford Road in Mount Evelyn. Despite being promised over five years ago, the promised upgrades and expansions to the Maroondah Hospital in Ringwood continue to gather dust, and we are now hearing that potentially it is going to be moved to Wantirna, which would be a massive blow to the residents of the outer east and the Yarra Ranges.

This is a horror budget. Labor is ruling over Victorians with the highest debt in the country and the highest taxes and forcing up people's cost of living. It is a budget that does nothing to arrest the cost-of-living crisis that Victorians are facing right now because of the reckless spending of the Allan Labor government. Our state has become weak and vulnerable, but only a coalition government has the courage and conviction to set Victoria on a path of prosperity, to be financially competent, to lower taxes and to be pro business and pro Victorians.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:17): That was what can only be described as a negative and angry contribution from the member for Evelyn, and I can promise you a different tone. We are going to have an optimistic and positive tone. It is terrific to have the opportunity to rise and speak on this year's

Victorian state budget because it prioritises the delivery of the infrastructure, the services and the support the families across our state actually rely on.

As the Minister for Carers and Volunteers I spend a lot of time talking to people who provide support to others right across the state. There is a consistent message that I get – I am sure everyone here hears it – and that is that people are doing it tough. We know that. We know that the cost of living and interest rate pressures are affecting people across the state, across the country and indeed across the globe. There are many people, having never accessed support before, who are now requiring regular food relief, which is why this year's budget provided an additional \$6 million to support organisations to provide food relief, building on more than \$56 million that we have invested in food relief since 2020. This funding includes \$2.5 million to support the work of our neighbourhood houses, who are increasingly providing food relief; to continue the work of the state's six regional food hubs; and to fund competitive grants programs for statewide food relief providers and for community- and volunteer-led organisations. This is critically important funding at a time, as I mentioned before, when we are seeing the cost of living continuing to rise and interest rate pressure really taking a toll.

This funding complements other cost-of-living relief being delivered by this government, which in this budget includes further funding in my community sports portfolio for the very popular Get Active Kids voucher program. This program provides vouchers of \$200 to help eligible Victorians aged 18 and under to play grassroots sport. This program is not just popular, it is working. In the latest round of the program more than 50 per cent of applicants have told us that they would not have been able to participate in community sport without the voucher program.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Order! The time has arrived for the joint sitting to choose a person to hold the seat in the Legislative Council rendered vacant by the resignation of Samantha Ratnam MLC.

Sitting suspended 6:20 pm until 6:28 pm.

Ros SPENCE: It is terrific to see you in the chair, Acting Speaker Walter.

A member interjected.

Ros SPENCE: I did say it was terrific. I would never say that to my neighbouring member, because I know that what I have to say in this contribution will also be of interest to the member.

Before the joint sitting I was talking about our very popular and effective Get Active Kids voucher program. We know that it is working because more than 50 per cent of recipients have told us that they would not be able to participate in community sport without their Get Active Kids voucher. That is really a terrific outcome to have from that program, and it is something that I am very proud of as the Minister for Community Sport. Of course our government also understands that in order for Victorians to participate in community sport we need to have facilities that are fit for purpose, facilities that are appropriate and facilities that are accessible. That is why in this budget we are investing an additional \$17.5 million to upgrade infrastructure to improve ovals, pavilions, courts and change rooms, bringing our investment in community sport infrastructure since 2014 to over \$2.3 billion.

I am very pleased that in my electorate we are chipping in \$90,000 for new lighting at the Craigieburn tennis courts, and this is in partnership with Hume City Council. What it will do is provide more court time for people who want to get out and play some tennis, and it is building on our really significant investment, which is helping to get more residents out and active.

The budget backs more local clubs in every corner of our state with the continuation of the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund alongside basketball hubs in seven locations and of course the very popular country football and netball program. Our regional communities are incredibly important, and they are home to much of our world-class agriculture sector and our many primary producers. Having taken on the agriculture portfolio last October, I am delighted that this budget continues to support this sector. This includes supporting farmers and communities to save water and become more drought resilient

with a \$59.8 million investment to develop sustainable irrigation practices. Additionally through this budget we are partnering with the Commonwealth government to deliver a combined investment of over \$20 million in the Future Drought Fund to support farmers in preparing for future droughts. We are also helping farmers protect their livestock from pest animals with an additional \$2.74 million, which includes the continuation of the fox bounty program.

More broadly this budget makes a significant investment in supporting animal welfare research, policy, education and compliance, with over \$13 million provided in this budget. We released the draft animal care and protection bill for public comment late last year, and this was a really important step in reforming existing laws, which are almost 40 years old. I look forward to continuing this important work in partnership with a really wide range of stakeholders and the broader community.

This budget also makes significant investments in protecting the state's biosecurity, which is critically important to our state's prosperity and our \$20.2 billion agriculture industry. The budget delivers \$15.8 million to support emergency animal disease preparedness, and this is on top of the \$69.7 million announced in December to support the national eradication effort of the dreaded red imported fire ants.

I am also pleased that this budget supports families in my electorate of Kalkallo, which I note is now the largest in Victoria, with over 60,000 electors. As my community continues to grow we are continuing to build on the biggest investment in local education that our community has ever seen with funding to build a new secondary school and a new specialist school in the suburb of Kalkallo, both of which will open at the start of 2026. Mickleham South primary school, to be located to the west of Oscar Romero Catholic Primary School, which we have recently visited together and we also contributed to, will also welcome its first students in 2026 when that school year kicks off. Mickleham Secondary College, which opened just last year, will benefit from more than \$26 million in funding to deliver the next stage, including a new learning neighbourhood and arts building and the creation of an extra 675 places for local students.

Our government's investment in local schools has been massive, and by the end of this term I will have opened 14 terrific new local government schools as well as six non-government schools that we have contributed to, giving thousands of families access to state-of-the-art facilities close to home. In addition to these new schools, there has been consistent investment in school expansions across the electorate as well as expanding important programs like the school breakfast clubs; Glasses for Kids; Smile Squad; the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund; the affordable school uniforms program; and the tutor learning initiative – all really important programs that help ensure equitable outcomes for students.

Access to health care across Melbourne's north also remains a top priority for residents, and it is terrific to have secured funding to support better local care. Construction of the new community hospital in Craigieburn is well underway. In fact it will soon be completed, providing a wide range of services in a convenient, accessible location. Just down the road this budget has funded a massive upgrade to the Northern Hospital, including a brand new emergency department with a dedicated paediatric zone, additional inpatient beds and a mental health, alcohol and other drugs hub.

The Northern Hospital emergency department is one of the busiest in the state, and pressure is taken off this service by the virtual emergency department public health service for non-life-threatening emergencies. Whilst this service is part of Northern Health, it provides emergency care to Victorians anywhere in the state 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Finally, there is the important issue of transport in this growing community. We have continued to fund work to progress major projects like the Watson Street interchange in Wallan, which will see the delivery of a full diamond interchange at Watson Street and the Hume Freeway. This project is really important to the Wallan community, and with the business case now complete we are getting on with

the environmental surveys and investigation work so construction can start on this much-needed project.

Melbourne's outer north is a community of choice for many families, and it is why access to public transport is so important, whether it is giving young people the freedom to get out without relying on Mum and Dad or whether it is simply giving commuters the option to leave the car at home. Building on our investment in bus services, the new route 524 bus service will provide better access to transport across the Kalkallo community. This service will operate between Olivine and Kalkallo, connecting at Donnybrook station with route 525 and the 501, which is the new shuttle service that has already been delivered by the government. It is a direct shuttle between Donnybrook station and Craigieburn station, taking people from the V/Line service to the Metro service. It is incredibly popular and important to getting all of those new residents where they need to be.

As a representative of a rapidly growing community, I am focused on making sure that our community has the infrastructure it needs as it grows, and I am very pleased that in this year's budget we are continuing to deliver for all Victorians, both in my community and across my portfolios. As I said at the outset, we know that people are really doing it tough. That is one message that continues to come through. That is why it is important that the supports that are provided in this budget are there and that they go to the people that need them when they need them. That is what this budget does.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (18:37): I am very pleased to finally get to speak to the budget. The state budget highlights the reality and disadvantage that communities face due to this government's financial mismanagement and cost blowouts. I have never known a time of distress like people are experiencing right now. Cost of living, housing affordability and availability, rental stress and homelessness are at an all-time high. It has simply become so hard for so many just to make ends meet, and this government has a lot to answer for. Victorian families are facing really tough times, all because Labor does not have a plan to tackle the cost-of-living crisis or pay down the record debt that will make life harder for generations to come.

Victorians have been hit with more than 56 new or increased taxes, with the recent addition of a death tax, since 2014, and our state is being forced to pay the highest taxes in the nation, with less money to spend where we need it most. The \$216 billion in cost blowouts on the Suburban Rail Loop and the billions in cost blowouts should be spent on the housing, hospitals, roads, schools and infrastructure needed in our communities. We are currently in a health crisis, with hospital and service cuts. This budget cut health by \$207 million, down 33.8 per cent. Cuts to health will force Victorian hospitals – many, like GV Health, are already operating in deficit – to reduce services. It was appalling that the government called on hospitals to cut budgets in the planning of hospital amalgamations. This led to an outcry and community protest. We still do not have the details regarding cuts to hospital services and staff.

We do know that the government is forging ahead with grouping 74 health services into 11 local health service networks, as it is calling them – this is amalgamation – and the government is progressing measures to cut costs on the already distressed health sector. What does this mean for health services? The government then did do a backflip and there was an announcement of \$1.5 billion due to the outcry. There are still no details regarding funding from that budget announcement to assist GV Health, which in recent times had to close beds and put a freeze on staff recruitment. A community forum was held in Shepparton in August, where we heard firsthand from hospital staff from GV Health about extreme staff shortages, staff recruitment being frozen, staff burnout, ambulance ramping and patients being left on beds in hallways. There are still significant issues that need to be addressed across the health sector, and this government is failing.

In this budget we also saw dental services cut by \$36 million, ambulance services cut by \$24 million, the home and community care program for young people cut by \$41 million, health workforce training and development cut by \$24 million and maternal and child health and early parenting services cut by \$2.6 million.

This government have their priorities all wrong, and health care must be a priority. It is also appalling that 75 per cent of funding has been cut to cancer research. Cutting critical cancer research is scraping the bottom of the barrel and has outraged Victorians. After a decade of Labor we now have an exorbitant debt forecast to reach \$188 billion by 2027–28 and interest payments expected to hit \$26 million per day. This government has lost complete control of its spending and complete control of its debt, and it is Victorians who are paying the price.

Victoria has been labelled one of the country's biggest underperformers by the Reserve Bank of Australia, as new data ranks the state the worst for doing business. Victoria is ranked the worst state in the nation for payroll tax, land tax and land transfer duty. RBA assistant governor Sarah Hunter singled out the Victorian economy as one of the worst performing in the nation during an appearance at a parliamentary inquiry.

Cost of living is a significant issue impacting the lives of Victorians every single day. People are doing it tough, and my office is inundated with many people struggling to pay their bills and put food on the table. My hope from this budget was that we could help those doing it tough, but that has not happened and things just keep getting harder. Cost of living and financial stress have got to a level that is overwhelming, and the level of hardship continues to grow. How does this government expect people to manage with increased power bills, rental increases, increased grocery bills and increased taxes?

I recently had a response from the Treasurer to my adjournment matter. He said:

We know Victorians are paying more at the bowser, the supermarket and for their electricity bills.

The Treasurer's own response acknowledges the increased financial pressures being put on Victorian households. Well, Treasurer, you need to do something about it.

A growing number of working families are joining the queues for the first time of hungry Victorians relying on food donations. Just recently Shepparton Foodshare had a fundraiser highlighting the significant increase of people seeking food relief. The alarming increasing trend shows that many families are anxious about adequately feeding their families. I have been a volunteer at Foodshare, and it is overwhelming to see the enormity of the need to help people get food on the table. Agencies are stretched to the limits, constantly putting a call out for more support.

Just this week Shepparton Family and Financial Services put out a call for help for food donations. They are really struggling to meet the demand for food relief from the community as the numbers are growing at such a significant rate, and they mentioned their grave concerns for the increased number of families that will need support over the Christmas period. Organisations like Shepparton Foodshare are also putting calls out to the community to help provide food for those that are struggling.

People Supporting People are another local organisation who provide meals for the homeless and those in need, and I am a volunteer. I want to acknowledge the amazing work of Azem Elmaz and his team and the other volunteers. Azem is an extraordinarily selfless man who lives his life giving to those in need. This government could learn a lot from him. People that are living on the street and sleeping rough depend on people like Azem and his team. Azem also goes out most nights, delivering hampers of food to the homes of those who do not have food to provide for their families. It is extraordinary to think that that level of demand and of need is happening. Azem has also found the increase in demand has grown, and it has become extremely overwhelming.

The government just keeps adding more taxes, expecting the family budget to stretch further, and many households are under extreme financial pressure. This budget saw an increase of two more taxes, the fire services levy and the waste levy, adding additional and unforeseen costs to a family household. Once again this government expects people to just find these extra costs. Well, it comes at a sacrifice. I recently heard of a family that said they had to cut out swimming lessons and gymnastics classes for their children as they simply could no longer afford them. This would just be one example of how families are having to make sacrifices to be able to make ends meet. Victorians are paying the highest

taxes in the country. Every single Victorian man, woman and child has a yearly Labor tax bill of \$5834 floating over their head.

Real cost-of-living relief comes from lowering taxes, something this government continues to ignore. More than 3000 businesses packed up and left Victoria from January 2022 to March 2024. 3085 Victorian businesses moved interstate. At the same time Queensland welcomed 4276 new businesses. Victoria's growth rate of new businesses was the lowest in the nation. Victoria has the reputation of being the most expensive state to do business. Surely this government has to acknowledge these alarming figures and see the damage being done to the state by losing so many businesses.

When it comes to housing, we are in the midst of a housing affordability and availability crisis. Labor has introduced more than 30 new or increased property taxes in the last 10 years, and we are paying the highest property taxes in the nation, which is leading to higher property prices and higher rents and is driving critical investment in new supply interstate. The unexpected change in land tax, which has lowered the tax-free threshold from \$300,000 to \$50,000 during a housing and cost-of-living crisis, has had a significant impact and has been completely detrimental to the rental market. Property owners who had planned for their future are now finding themselves in a position where they must either pass on their costs to the tenant or sell their property. Just this week it was announced that Victorians are struggling to pay Labor's highest-in-the-nation property taxes on time, as new figures confirm that more than one in three unpaid land tax bills are more than 12 months overdue. This should be no surprise when so many Victorians are under extreme financial pressure. The headlines of 'tax to the max' are very accurate.

Let me read an email I received from Mr Stafford from Numurkah, who said:

[NAME AND QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I have made the decision that it is no longer feasible to own a rental property in Victoria, which is resulting in two families in Numurkah who will be looking for a new residence based on someone buying the properties to live in.

With the incredibly short supply of rental properties in regional Victoria, why on earth would this government target landlords? I have also been contacted by many self-funded retirees who are now faced with financial uncertainty, who thought they were set up for their financial future. These are people who are not financially dependent on the state, and who have tried to put themselves in a positive financial position for the future.

The state budget has failed to address housing. Housing availability and affordability have increased homelessness along with soaring living costs. We are going backwards fast in my electorate when it comes to housing, and those reaching out for housing support have significantly increased. Last week I met with Celia Adams, CEO of Beyond Housing, and we discussed the significant housing and rental stress in the Shepparton electorate. We have 2239 people on the waiting list for social housing, with half of those classified as priority applicants. We have one of the highest rates of homelessness across the state. It is a daily struggle for people trying to find an affordable house or rental, and if you do, there are probably 50 others in line. We have people living in cars, sleeping rough or couch surfing. The government promised 80,000 homes a year. The reality is 51,000 homes were built last year and mainly from the private sector. This government keeps making promises that it cannot keep. I ask: what housing in my electorate will be received out of the 80,000 homes a year? This government is turning its back on housing in regional Victoria.

When it comes to roads – where do we start with roads? My office is inundated with complaints about the unsafe state of our appalling roads. I have never seen our roads in such an appalling state. Based on a poll of more than 7000 Victorians, Goulburn Valley Highway, Nagambie to Shepparton, was ranked fourth of the state's top 20 roads with safety concerns, with motorists citing potholes, poor road conditions and intersection safety concerns. Labor failed to meet its road repairs target by 25 per cent. This past roads asset management budget was cut by \$19 million, and we have 16 per cent lower

spending than in 2020 on road maintenance. We have local trucking companies having to pay thousands of dollars per week on repairs to their damaged vehicles caused by the appalling condition of the roads, and many drivers are experiencing damage to their cars. Victorians do not feel safe driving on our dangerous roads, and this government needs to prioritise roads and road safety.

If we go back to Labor's daily interest bill, which is over \$20 million a day, in one day this could pay for 128 ambulances, two breast cancer centres, 2715 elective surgeries and fix many of our roads. In one day we could pay the yearly salary of 315 nurses, 510 police recruits or 305 paramedics, and the list goes on. Less than one day of interest payment would fund the state government share of \$20 million for the development of the Shepparton Sports Stadium. It is astounding that my community has been waiting for decades to have this stadium funded, yet you think about the astounding interest on the state's debt and what we could do with that money. There are many other rundown sporting facilities across my electorate calling out for investment. It is appalling.

The \$600 million it cost to cancel the Commonwealth Games is \$600 million of hardworking taxpayers money just gone, which could have gone towards important community projects. This is public money getting thrown away due to the financial mismanagement of this government. The economic opportunity that would have been invested into the regions is also now lost. It was an embarrassing debacle not only for our state but nationally and internationally. You do not have a significant announcement like the Commonwealth Games and then cancel and then pay for another country to host it. Tourism and major events have also been cut by \$286 million down to 60.9 per cent. Regional Victoria depends on tourism and major events, which make a significant financial contribution. The Airbnb tax will have a significant impact on regional tourism and visitation.

Labor should pause the Suburban Rail Loop, which is costing Victoria billions in cost overruns, and this project is still significantly underfunded, while Greater Shepparton is still awaiting a significant contribution to the Shepparton bypass. We have been waiting for funding for this for many, many years. The state government funded a business case showing that they do support and acknowledge the need for the Shepparton bypass. Twenty-five per cent of the state's trucks are registered in Greater Shepparton, yet we have this primitive road network where we try and navigate trucks trying to do what they need to do to get their produce to the port. We also have trucks belting through the centre of Shepparton and Mooroopna on the main streets every single day. It is dangerous, it has a huge impact on local businesses and it is time that this government supported regional Victoria when it comes to our road network. Infrastructure – there is so much that we need within our community. As I said, there is much run-down sporting infrastructure.

We also have been asking for a bus review, at a very minimal cost. Our region has grown significantly, yet we cannot even get the government to support a bus review. Many of our small towns – our regional towns – on the outskirts of the Greater Shepparton region do not have a bus connection. We have very minimal bus services. This makes life very difficult, because not everyone has their own car. People depend on public transport, and I have been calling for the minister to support this bus review, this much-needed, small contribution to my region.

Finally, I think the government needs to do more, and particularly more for regional communities. We are feeling very disconnected, and we need to make sure that this government governs for all Victorians.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (18:51): It is an absolute pleasure to rise in this place to make a contribution to the budget take-note motion. I do so knowing that I will be making somewhat of a truncated contribution. To that end, I will get right to it and speak to some of the benefits from this excellent budget, the first budget under an Allan Labor government, which is committed to delivering for all Victorians. I will be moving to speak to the parts that will really benefit my constituents in Narre Warren South.

The 2024–25 budget is helping families in my electorate of Narre Warren South, and it is doing so by investing in education as well as outcomes for our kids, both inside and outside of the school gates. I look at a fantastic school like Lyndhurst Secondary College, which will receive some \$13.6 million to upgrade and modernise the school. The funding for Lyndhurst Secondary College matches the commitment that we made in the lead-up to the 2022 election, and it is an investment that I am incredibly pleased to see come to fruition. It will meet the needs of our growing community out in the south-east through renovations, as well as adding more classrooms and amenities to this excellent secondary college. It was an honour recently to welcome our Deputy Premier and Minister for Education to Lyndhurst Secondary College, where we met the principal Eloise Haynes and students, who are very excited about the future of their school.

As a part of the \$948 million statewide investment, families in Narre Warren South will see a new primary school in their area as well. The new Casey Central primary school is set to be built by 2026 and is one of 16 new schools across the state. I am very happy to say that construction has already started on that site. This will provide young families with another excellent public school in our area.

Students around the state, including at schools in Narre Warren South, will also be able to hone their sports skills while strengthening their education outcomes. The Academy Movement, which provides rugby and other sports programs to schools, will be receiving \$747,000 in increased funding to help expand its programs to 10 schools. I know that the member for Melton has one of those schools in which the Academy Movement is supplying that program, and the funding has come through for that. I would just like to give a special shout-out to Jimmy Orange, who runs that program, a fantastic individual and a fantastic educator and motivator who is really bringing the best out of not just special needs kids in our communities but kids from different communities who would otherwise slip through the cracks. He is really making a massive difference to those students and their lives, as well as those of the whole community.

It was also excellent to welcome our Premier to Narre Warren South P–12 College earlier this year to see the wonderful outcomes for students who take part in Academy Movement's rugby program, and a thankyou to principal Peter Thatcher for facilitating that and to the founder of Academy Movement Jimmy Orange for his work in that program.

Narre Warren South is an incredibly diverse electorate, and there are many initiatives under the budget to cater for the wideranging needs in our community. As part of a \$3.5 million program, a Punjabi and Hindi VCE language program will be introduced at Alkira Secondary College; it is one of three beacon schools where these language studies will occur. Under a \$1.35 million package, community hubs, which service many migrant and refugee families in my electorate, will receive funding to continue carrying out their holistic and wraparound support services. The 2024–25 state budget will also invest in community legal services. South-East Monash Legal Service, an organisation which services many in my electorate, will receive a share of the \$28.78 million that was allocated to that. South-East Monash Legal Service provides invaluable legal support and resources for those trying to navigate the legal system, which at times can be quite complicated and inaccessible. The funding also helps to support the South-East Monash Legal Service Sporting Change program, which partners with schools in the south-east to teach young people about the justice system and provides schools with a school lawyer, integrated into their wellbeing team, as well. A big shout-out to CEO Kristen Wallwork and deputy CEO Ashleigh Newnham.

We know that greater attention on women's health is needed, and that is why \$18.3 million has been invested in women's health services. To that end I would like to acknowledge Women's Health in the South East, or WHISE. They are an organisation supporting a really diverse cross-section of women in my area, and they will receive a share of that funding to expand their work. Another shout-out, this time to the CEO of WHISE, the fabulous Kit McMahon. She really does some terrific work, and she and her team are just incredible at advocating for women's health and the prevention of gender-based violence in my community. WHISE made a submission to the Victorian government's inquiry into women's pain this year, and we know that that will help to shape systemic solutions to the gender pain

gap that exists in Victoria. There is some groundbreaking work that the government is doing in that area, and it really is terrific to have organisations such as WHISE adding their expertise and their skill set in contributing to the wonderful work that is being done by our Minister for Health. I know that this funding to WHISE will help give them the boost that they need to continue carrying out their valuable work in the future.

As I said, the budget not only provided directly to Narre Warren South but also contributed to various statewide programs that are assisting my community. We know that families are doing it tough, and that is why the state budget is helping to alleviate everyday costs through these statewide programs. This will make a difference to the hip pockets of families across the state in all electorates but also in Narre Warren South. There are quite a few highlights to go through, but I think I might just state what some of them are. They include the \$400 school saving bonus, the school breakfast clubs, the Glasses for Kids program, the Get Active Kids vouchers, community sport infrastructure and participation grants and the early childhood education grants as well. To that end I will leave it there.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Evelyn electorate bus services

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:00): (921) As Lilydale and Mooroolbark grow, with more houses and residents coming into the Kinley estate housing development in Lilydale, our local community is keen to know what the state government's public transport plan is for the area, in particular buses in and around Kinley. The matter I raise is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to detail the public bus plan for the streets within and around Kinley estate. Again, this is specifically for buses. Access to reliable, frequent and flexible public transport, particularly buses, is vital for our growing community. The government may point to the train stations at either end of Kinley, but the sheer size of the massive 163-hectare development at Kinley means there is a need for buses to ensure people can get around easily and safely and reduce the propensity for more cars to be on the road.

With an estimated 8000 more residents moving into the area as houses are built over the next few years, it would make sense to roll out bus routes within Kinley as soon as possible. Also, many residents may not have the need to use a train but would be better served by a bus – for example, accessing local schools such as Mooroolbark College, Rolling Hills Primary School and Victoria Road Primary School; to attend medical appointments at Eastern Health in Lilydale or the doctors and health services on and near Main Street, Lilydale; or to get to the shops at Lilydale Marketplace or Brice Avenue in Mooroolbark. Buses are needed to help all residents, whether they be elderly, vulnerable, young families, or teenagers getting to and from their casual after-school and weekend jobs.

In an adjournment that I raised back in March 2019, adjournment number 201 in the last Parliament, about adequate infrastructure in and around Kinley, the then Minister for Transport Infrastructure and now Premier stated in her response:

Planning for the former Lilydale Quarry site is ongoing, and the Department of Transport has been working alongside the Victorian Planning Authority, Yarra Ranges Council and site owner, Intrapac, to address a range of transport issues in and around the Lilydale Quarry precinct.

Importantly, in this response the now Premier acknowledged the need to address the range of transport issues, which necessarily includes buses. Furthermore, the October 2021 *Former Lilydale Quarry*

Comprehensive Development Plan, which was approved and gazetted, referred to an expanded bus network at section 4.4, page 22, stating:

A bus capable street network will be provided within the site, linking new development to ... the broader metropolitan network.

The Victorian Liberals pledge at the 2022 election was to undertake a comprehensive bus network review, and now that the government has taken up our policy our community hopes this will include new buses for Kinley without too much more delay. My community looks forward to the minister's response.

Oakdene estate, Ocean Grove

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:03): (922) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, and the action I request is for the minister to attend and visit Oakdene estate when they officially open their new extension, which was supported by the Regional Tourism Investment Fund in 2022. Thanks to a \$2 million investment from the state government, a new modern public art gallery, restaurant, tasting room and event space are close to being open at Oakdene vineyards. We welcome everyone to attend that popular winery on the peninsula. This project has supported local construction jobs and will boost the Bellarine's growing food, wine and art industries. Many people from across our country travel down to the coast to have this experience. I would be pleased to welcome the minister to visit Oakdene estate to see firsthand our government's investment in regional tourism and on the Bellarine.

Wild pig control

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (19:04): (923) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for him to confirm that feral pig controls in the east of the state will continue with standalone contractors and not be incorporated into the wild dog program. The rumours that we are hearing are that at the end of this upcoming financial year these standalone contractors will be no longer. It is a huge problem in the east of the state. These feral animals are vectors of disease; they pose great threats to our agricultural sector. If the plan is to incorporate them into the wild dog program, there are two problems with that.

One is that the wild doggers that control that area do not have spare time on their hands to be focusing on a new species. They need every hour of every day being put into controlling wild dogs on public land that are out of control killing stock hand over fist, and we simply cannot have their workload being increased. The second issue is the feral pig problem that we have. The contractors that are there now cannot keep up with the spread of this species, so we need an increased effort there, not a reduced effort.

We have read in the *Weekly Times*, in particular of recent weeks but throughout a number of media, that there are job cuts at DEECA and Parks Victoria, including the pest, plant and animal program. So I seek assurances from the minister that there will be no diminished effort in the feral pig control program and that it will not be incorporated into the wild dog program.

Keysborough South Community Hub

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:06): (924) It is great to join the adjournment and ask a question of the Minister for Children, and the action I seek is for the minister to update my community on the progress of the Keysborough South Community Hub which will have an additional 123 places for kindergarten. The Keysborough South Community Hub is a wonderful partnership between the City of Greater Dandenong and the Victorian government. It was a Building Blocks grant a little while ago, \$3 million from the state government, that helped enable this critical project. It will deliver, in addition to those 123 kindergarten places, long daycare and children services, and specialist consulting suites. It will accommodate maternal child health appointments and allied health services, and there will also be meeting rooms, a library and community garden.

Anyone who knows and visits the Keysborough South community absolutely loves and cherishes this local area. From the Keysborough Gardens Primary School that we are upgrading as part of stage 2 redevelopment works, \$5.34 million has been invested, to the plating works that are underway for an upgrade to the Keysborough CFA, we see investments across our area that have supported Keysborough South for a number of years. I can say – and I have said a number of times – the traffic improvements in Keysborough South that have been achieved by a project like the Mordialloc Freeway taking substantial pressure off Governor Road, off Springvale Road, and connecting local roads. It has made the lives of Keysborough South residents better over time.

All that investment, all that support is going into this area that was a growth corridor of the City of Greater Dandenong. It was just over a decade ago that Keysborough South was established. I remember as an adviser at the time to our federal member for Isaacs Mark Dreyfus going along to the opening of Somerfield estate back in 2012–13. What has come to be with the more than 15,000 people that call Keysborough South home is a thriving, interconnected community that love and appreciate one another – great diversity and a real exciting place to be.

Where I see Keysborough Gardens Primary School established, it was a Labor government that delivered that under the former member for Keysborough Martin Pakula. That opened up a few years ago. It was an outstanding contribution, and more than 450 students go through that school now. So across early childhood education, across primary education, in our emergency services and the emerging families and people who choose to move into Keysborough South, they know that an Allan Labor government is delivering for them each and every month of the year. I am really keen to get an update from the Minister for Children on the progress of the Keysborough South hub, its redevelopment and the kinder places that will be offered and provided as part of this significant redevelopment in our patch.

Chatty Cafe Scheme Australia

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (19:09): (925) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action that I seek is for the minister to meet with me and representatives of Chatty Cafe Scheme Australia to discuss the opportunity of securing state government funding for this vital community service.

Over the past 12 months I have reached out to the minister several times to highlight the extraordinary work of the Chatty Cafe Scheme, and the work that is doing right across Victoria including in my own electorate. One in three adults in Australia report being lonely each week, and the Chatty Cafe Scheme is a 95 per cent volunteer-run organisation which helps to reduce social isolation one chat at a time. Chatty Cafe's 'Have a Chat' tables have been instrumental in creating welcoming environments for people from all walks of life. The initiative is particularly beneficial for seniors, young parents and carers. These simple social interactions provide an opportunity for community members to build connections, and feedback from participants has consistently highlighted the significant impact on their mental wellbeing, with many reporting improved mood, reduced anxiety and the development of new friendships through the program.

Despite its success, Chatty Cafe faces an uncertain future due to limited and unguaranteed philanthropic grants, which are currently its primary source of funding. Without additional support, the organisation may struggle to continue providing these essential services to some of Victoria's most vulnerable individuals.

I have previously requested meetings with the minister on behalf of Chatty Cafe's founder Glenys Reid and board member Sue Barrett. While I have the opportunity, Glenys Reid is not just a magnificent Victorian but a magnificent Australian. She is well and truly deserving of an Australian honour at the next opportunity, more so than some other recipients in recent times. This meeting will provide an opportunity for the founder of Chatty Cafe Australia to discuss the program's impact and explore potential funding options from the state government to ensure Chatty Cafe's continued sustainability and benefit for Victorians. I urge the Minister for Mental Health to prioritise this request,

recognising the positive impact that Chatty Cafe has had on mental health right across this state. I hope the minister will listen to this, will heed this humble request and meet with us to talk about Chatty Cafe's future.

Glen Waverley train station

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:11): (926) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me for a visit to Glen Waverley station. Glen Waverley station is a busy and vibrant transport hub for so many. Located in the heart of my electorate, it is not only at the end of a train line but also a key station in many bus routes. Added to this is the fact that it is adjacent to a major shopping centre, the Glen Waverley shopping centre, and Kingsway, as well as Glen Waverley Secondary College and the Glen Waverley library – and your electorate office too, Deputy Speaker.

In essence Glen Waverley station plays a vital role in facilitating the movement of many people through this busy area, and that is why it is important to ensure that we make the most of the opportunities that come with the station being in such a strategic position. We must take proactive action to ensure that both housing and services, including both bus and train services, are ready to deal with an increase in population.

Under the great project of the Suburban Rail Loop, the Allan Labor government has designated the area surrounding the Glen Waverley station as one of the activity precincts. A power of work has been undertaken to develop the draft precinct vision document, and I am looking forward to the draft structure plans being delivered next year. This means that planning regulations are being reformed so that the densification of the area can be facilitated. Building the Suburban Rail Loop to connect our suburbs as well as appropriately developing denser housing in established areas means that we are transforming our state to not only modernise but also improve our standard of living.

The Suburban Rail Loop East, from Glen Waverley to Cheltenham, will open up so many opportunities for economic growth, and I know it make travelling more convenient for Glen Waverley residents. I look forward to the minister's response and I hope she can join me at Glen Waverley station.

Supermarket workforce

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:13): (927) My adjournment tonight is for the Treasurer and Minister for Industrial Relations. The action I am seeking is for the Victorian Labor government to finally crack down on the supermarket duopoly which is squeezing more and more from their workers and their customers. Two days ago pick and pack staff walked off the job at Woolworths centres across the country, including a liquor room here in Melbourne and a distribution centre in Wodonga. Workers only took this action because they have been pushed to the brink by a punitive, dehumanising monitoring system. It is called the 'coaching and productivity framework', and it turns human beings into data points for the profits of a big corporation.

Woolworths introduced the framework earlier this year to force their already oversurveilled workers into meeting universal pick rates or face disciplinary action. Pick rates are calculated by dividing the total number of items you pick by the amount of time that you have worked. Years ago Woolworths started forcing staff to wear headsets to track their pick rates in real time. Imagine being monitored every moment at work. That means on toilet breaks, in lunchbreaks and during tiny moments of rest you are monitored. Then you get a score at the end of the day like a video game, and your boss has access to that score. That is a system that creates unsustainable levels of stress, making workers less happy and less safe in some dangerous work environments. The framework is now on hold thanks to industrial actions throughout the year, including a Fair Work complaint, but let us be clear: Woolworths and Coles want to squeeze as much from workers as they do from customers.

At the same time as warehouse staff were striking, Coles was having its annual general meeting. The chair, James Graham, opened by expressing how disappointed he was to see cost-of-living issues politicised and targeted at supermarket operations. He may have been talking about the Greens-led inquiry across Australia into supermarket price gouging, or our bill here in Victoria for the Essential Services Commission to cap profits on groceries, or maybe how the ACCC itself is suing both Coles and Woolworths over their dishonest discounts system. Coles do not like this scrutiny, but they can cry into their \$1.1 billion of profit that they have made during the cost-of-living crisis. Supermarket profit margins in Australia are some of the biggest in the world. They are making more profits than almost all their global counterparts, but they are making those profits off the back of exorbitant grocery prices and underpaid, over-surveilled workers.

Labor does have the power, including here in Victoria, to bring the supermarket duopoly to heel. That means capping the prices of essential groceries and protecting the workers who pick them, pack them and deliver them. It is really the least that we owe the community, who are just trying to put food on the table.

McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:16): (928) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Housing in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister to come down to my electorate to meet with Lisa Byrne, the CEO of the fabulous McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery in Langwarrin. The gallery opened in 1971 and features the first bespoke modernist gallery designed by architects Munro and Sargent, to be built in what was then considered to be regional Victoria. However, McClelland's natural bushland and park setting is the legacy of talented and artistic brother and sister Harry and Annie May McClelland, whose family settled in the Frankston district in 1912.

The McClelland family became the centre for a Bohemian brood of creative personalities drawn from all strata of Victoria's social life, including Sir Daryl Lindsay, Percy Leason and WB McInnes. Harry was an artist and philanthropist, and his sister Annie May, a poet and entrepreneur who hosted the first children's radio program on the ABC. The land on which McClelland is situated was originally the site of Harry's painting studio and was known as Studio Park. Annie May bequeathed the land and the holdings of her estate to honour her brother's memory by establishing the Harry McClelland Art Gallery and cultural hall. Harry's studio is still to be found on the grounds.

It is an absolutely wonderful space to visit, walk around the gardens and look at the amazing sculptures scattered around the place, and of course go inside to the different in-house exhibitions or have a great coffee or meal at Harry's Cafe. It is a truly unique gallery based in the heart of Langwarrin. They have some terrific plans for building a sustainable future for art and culture in my electorate, which I would like to share with the minister. I look forward to the minister's visit.

Bushfire preparedness

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:17): (929) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the government to outline their plans for controlling the forest fuel load across Warrandyte State Park in my electorate. It is clear that much more needs to be done on this issue.

Even before I was elected I heard from locals in Warrandyte about their concerns regarding the bushfire risk in our area and what an uncontrolled blaze would mean for such a densely populated region. In 2020 more than 5000 residents in Warrandyte – that is over 10 per cent of my electorate – signed a petition expressing their belief:

That the government has neglected to proactively manage the Warrandyte State Park, and surrounding public land, which has led to an excessive build-up of fire fuel loads.

For many of my constituents the risk of bushfire is not just a potential inconvenience but an existential threat. Homes and properties are embedded within the surrounding bushland, and a forest fire could

quickly engulf homes and endanger livelihoods. This risk is already having tangible impacts as property insurance premiums are rising as insurance companies factor in the growing danger. One constituent recently shared with me that their insurance premium has doubled just in the last two years, largely due to increased fire risk.

Despite the concerns of thousands in my electorate, the number of planned burns listed by Forest Fire Management Victoria for the Warrandyte area has recently decreased – from two to just one over the next three years. This issue is causing deep concern at all levels of my community. Recently Lucy, a year 6 student at Donvale Christian College in my electorate, wrote to me. She said:

As a new resident of Warrandyte, the fire plan is not clear to my family and I. It is my deep concern that if there was a fire, residents, families and animals could be fatally wounded.

She went on to say:

What I propose that the government should do is have a burn off with all the excess sticks once a month and make it mandatory that people who own big properties should also have frequent burn-offs.

Amazing insight from Lucy in year 6 at Donvale Christian College. Given this decrease in planned burns, surely the government must have alternative plans to address the worrying level of fuel loads, and many in my community are eager to hear what those plans are.

Clayton South Primary School

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:20): (930) 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 upgrades and modernisation of Clayton South Primary School. All Clarinda district families should have a great local school to send their kids to, and that is why we are upgrading and modernising Clayton South Primary, so students can get the world-class education that they deserve. Funding for planning is the first step for the major \$12.45 million upgrade for Clayton South Primary School, which includes the rebuild of the main classroom wing and a new playground, building on the \$391,000 we have already provided to the Clayton South Primary School, a great local school. My good friend the member of Mordialloc was there at the announcement with the former principal at the time. This was a really exciting announcement from the last budget and an important announcement, because we want young Victorians to have what they need for success in the classroom.

The budget invests in upgrading schools across our state, including Clayton South Primary School, and includes other important cost-of-living measures for school families. With the recent rise in the cost of living, covering supplies and extracurricular activities can be hard for families doing it tough. Uniforms, camps and excursions all add up. That is why we are providing a one-off school saving bonus to help cover the costs. The \$400 bonus will help to make sure that our kids have everything they need for the school day, supporting families with children at government schools and eligible families at our non-government schools who need it most. We are also tripling our free Glasses for Kids program, making sure that even more young Victorians can be at their best in classrooms and beyond. And because we know that learning is not limited to the classroom, we have also invested \$6 million to extend our Get Active Kids vouchers, providing up to \$200 to help eligible families with the cost of sport club registration, uniforms and equipment. We will continue to make sure that our local families have access to the best school facilities, supporting kids to do their best in the classroom and ensuring world-class spaces for our kids and their hardworking teachers in Clayton South, across Clarinda and across Victoria. I commend the minister and am looking forward to his response.

Responses

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:22): The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport asking that the minister detail public bus plans around Kinley estate. The member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, seeking a visit to the Oakdene estate, where there has been a \$2 million investment thanks to the Allan Labor government.

The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Minister for Environment seeking confirmation that the control of the feral pig population by the independent contractors will continue and not be rolled into wild dog programs. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Children seeking an update on the amazing investment and work at the Keysborough South community hub. The member for Sandringham raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health asking that the minister meet with him and the Chatty Cafe Scheme Australia to discuss funding opportunities.

The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Public and Active Transport to join him to visit Glen Waverley station. The member for Melbourne raised a matter for the Treasurer and Minister for Industrial Relations for the government to crack down on the supermarket duopoly. The member for Hastings raised a matter for the Minister for Housing to come and see Lisa Byrne in Langwarrin and her modernist gallery. The member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Minister for Environment seeking an outline and an update on the forest fuel load plan in her electorate from the minister. The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education – hear, hear – in particular about the proposals and the work that is being done in the upgrading of the Clayton South Primary School. Thanks to the hard work of the member of Clarinda, the upgrading and modernisation program at Clayton South Primary School is underway, and he is keen for a further update on that work from the Minister for Education. I commend those matters to the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:25 pm.

*Joint sitting of Parliament***Legislative Council vacancy****Members of both houses met in Assembly chamber at 6:22 pm.**

The Clerk: Before proceeding with the business of this joint sitting, it is necessary to appoint a Chair.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier): I move:

That the Honourable Maree Edwards, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, be appointed Chair of this joint sitting.

She is willing to accept the nomination, I am advised.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition): I second the motion.

The Clerk: Are there any other proposals? There being no other proposal, the Honourable Maree Edwards, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, will take the chair for this joint sitting.

The CHAIR (Maree Edwards): Under the Constitution Act 1975 this joint sitting must be conducted in accordance with rules adopted by members present at the sitting. The first item, therefore, will be the adoption of the rules.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier): I move:

That joint rule of practice 2 be the rules for this joint sitting.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition): I second the motion.

Motion agreed to.

The CHAIR: The rules have been adopted. I remind everyone, including visitors in the gallery, that photos and applause are not allowed. I now invite proposals from members for a person to occupy the vacant seat in the Legislative Council.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier): I propose:

That Anasina Gray-Barberio be chosen to occupy the vacant seat in the Legislative Council.

She is willing to accept the nomination. In order to satisfy the joint sitting as to the requirements of section 27A(4) of the Constitution Act 1975, I also advise that the Speaker has advice from the Australian Greens Victoria's registered officer that Anasina Gray-Barberio is the selection of the Australian Greens Victoria, the party previously represented in the Legislative Council by Samantha Ratnam.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition): I second the proposal.

The CHAIR: Are there any further proposals? As there are no further nominations, I declare that nominations are closed. The question is:

That Anasina Gray-Barberio be chosen to occupy the vacant seat in the Legislative Council.

Question agreed to.

The CHAIR: I declare that Anasina Gray-Barberio has been chosen to occupy the vacant seat in the Legislative Council. I will advise the Governor accordingly.

I now declare the joint sitting closed.

Proceedings terminated 6:25 pm.