



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 12 November 2024

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew ¹	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaelle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira ²	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha ⁵	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Gray-Barberio, Anasina ³	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Limbrick, David ⁴	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Welch, Richard ⁶	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib

¹ Resigned 7 December 2023

² Lib until 27 March 2023

³ Appointed 14 November 2024

⁴ LDP until 26 July 2023

⁵ Resigned 8 November 2024

⁶ Appointed 7 February 2024

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

CONTENTS

BILLS	
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024	4209
Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024	4209
Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024	4209
Royal assent	4209
MEMBERS	
Samantha Ratnam	4209
Resignation	4209
JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT	
Legislative Council vacancy	4209
COMMITTEES	
Electoral Matters Committee	4209
Membership	4209
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Probate fees	4210
Parental incarceration	4211
Ministers statements: vocational education and training	4212
Probate fees	4212
Mental health workforce	4213
Ministers statements: youth mental health	4214
Water policy	4214
Animal welfare	4216
Ministers statements: Nas Recovery Centre	4216
Youth crime	4217
First nations custodial health care	4218
Ministers statements: maternal and child health services	4219
Written responses	4220
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Southern Metropolitan Region	4220
Western Victoria Region	4220
Eastern Victoria Region	4221
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	4221
Northern Victoria Region	4221
Western Metropolitan Region	4221
Western Victoria Region	4222
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	4222
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region	4222
Northern Victoria Region	4222
Eastern Victoria Region	4223
Northern Metropolitan Region	4223
Western Victoria Region	4223
Southern Metropolitan Region	4223
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region	4224
JOINT SITTING OF PARLIAMENT	
Legislative Council vacancy	4224
PETITIONS	
Inverloch surf beach	4224
Residential planning zones	4224
BILLS	
Constitution Amendment (Abortion) Bill 2024	4225
Introduction and first reading	4225
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee	4225
Alert Digest No. 15	4225
PAPERS	
Parliamentary Budget Office	4225
Report 2023–24	4225
Papers	4226
PETITIONS	
St Joseph’s Christian college	4226
Response	4226

CONTENTS

PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS	
Energy policy	4226
Residential planning zones	4226
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices	4227
General business	4227
MOTIONS	
Middle East conflict	4227
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Remembrance Day	4227
Hawthorn RSL	4228
Hawthorn electorate	4228
Remembrance Day	4228
Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference	4228
Remembrance Day	4228
Russia–Ukraine war	4229
Remembrance Day	4229
Eleanor Bryant	4229
Northern Victoria wetlands	4229
Mount Arapiles rock climbing	4230
Remembrance Day	4230
Combined Probus Club of Whitehorse	4230
Ahmed Kelly	4230
Golden Plains wind farm	4230
Remembrance Day	4231
Government performance	4231
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	4231
BILLS	
Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024	4231
Second reading	4231
Committee	4257
Third reading	4266
Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024	4266
Second reading	4266
Committee	4277
Third reading	4280
Roads and Road Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024	4280
Council’s amendments	4280
ADJOURNMENT	
Community food relief	4280
Remembrance Parks Central Victoria	4281
Mount Arapiles rock climbing	4282
Gendered violence	4282
Sikh community	4283
Marine and coastal conservation	4283
Freedom of speech	4284
Native grasslands	4285
Suburban Rail Loop	4285
Avian influenza	4286
Housing	4286
Middle East conflict	4287
Child protection	4287
Young mothers transition program	4288
Loddon Shire Council mobile phone coverage	4289
Health services	4289
Mount Arapiles rock climbing	4290
Mount Arapiles rock climbing	4291
Responses	4291

Tuesday 12 November 2024

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:02 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Bill 2024

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Bill 2024

Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Bill 2024

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (12:04): I have received a message from the Governor, dated 6 November:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Acts of the present Session presented to her by the Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly:

41/2024 Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Pill Testing) Act 2024

42/2024 Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment Act 2024

I have received a further message from the Governor, dated 12 November:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the under-mentioned Act of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:

43/2024 Building Legislation Amendment and Other Matters Act 2024

Members

Samantha Ratnam

Resignation

The PRESIDENT (12:04): I have received a letter from the Governor advising that she received the written resignation from Dr Samantha Ratnam as a member of the Victorian Legislative Council on 8 November 2024.

Joint sitting of Parliament

Legislative Council vacancy

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:05): I move, by leave:

That this house meets the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of sitting and voting together to choose a person to hold the seat in the Legislative Council rendered vacant by the resignation of Samantha Ratnam and proposes that the place and time of such a meeting be the Legislative Assembly chamber on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 6:20 pm.

Motion agreed to.

The PRESIDENT: A message will be sent to the Assembly informing them of the resolution and requesting their agreement.

Committees

Electoral Matters Committee

Membership

The PRESIDENT (12:05): I advise the house that I have received a letter from Sam Hibbins, member for Prahran, resigning from the Electoral Matters Committee effective 4 November 2024.

Before we commence question time, I wish to acknowledge in the gallery a delegation from the Bougainville House of Representatives, led by the Honourable Speaker Simon Pentanu and the Deputy Speaker the Honourable Therese Kaetavara. Welcome. The Honourable Speaker is a very interesting person; he spent 25 years as a clerk of the Parliament and then became the Speaker.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Probate fees

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): (725) My question is to the Attorney-General. Labor's new probate fee tax hike will rip tens of millions of dollars from the grieving relatives of dead Victorians. How can the Labor government justify imposing these outrageous new up-front fees that will hit grieving people at their most emotionally vulnerable time?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:07): I thank Ms Crozier for her question and the opportunity to address probate fees. It is a matter of fact that probate fees in Victoria are considerably lower than other states and do not cover the costs of hearings in the Supreme Court adequately. We want to make the system fairer, so we are abolishing probate fees for small estates – something that seems to be lost in some of the reporting. There will be no probate fees paid for small estates. We will keep medium-sized estates cheaper than New South Wales and South Australia. The policy will make it cheaper for many people, especially when the proceeds from the estate are less than half a million dollars. This value was increased following feedback from extensive public consultation that happened this year.

For the very small percentage of Victorians dealing with multimillion-dollar estates, the fees will be lifted to cover the level of administration and dispute resolution, as these complex applications often take up significant time within the courts. The most an estate will pay in probate fees is 0.24 per cent of an estate's value, keeping it fair for everyone who is navigating our courts.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Jaelyn SYMES: We are not introducing a death tax. What I would also point out, Ms Crozier, regarding the part of your question in relation to the up-front nature of these fees is that I am certainly across a concern that it can take some time for estates to settle and for some of the money held up in estates and banking, and we are doing some work and I am seeking further advice in relation to whether there are opportunities – which probably falls outside my direct remit, but I am interested in having further discussions with banks in particular – to free up money from estates earlier to ensure that the estates are covering these introduced fair fees, as opposed to them coming out of the pockets of family members and the like, who then have to seek recompense after the event.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): Attorney, thank you for that response. I think there is just an enormous amount of concern from so many Victorians on this issue. The fees charged by the probate office already recover three times the cost of running it. Under Labor's new death tax, probate fees will now recover 10 times the cost of running the probate office. Charging 10 times the cost of providing a public service is not fee recovery, it is price gouging. Attorney, why is Labor making grieving Victorians cross-subsidise other aspects of the Supreme Court's operations through inflated probate fees?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:10): Ms Crozier, I addressed these issues in my answer to your substantive question. It seems to be an ignored point that we are making the fees fairer. We are reducing them for many Victorians and abolishing probate fees for small estates. We want to make sure that the system is paying for what it costs to administer, and we are addressing those complex and often very large estates with multiple parties that are interested. That is where the fee increase will be noticed. It will be noticed as nothing for those with small estates.

Parental incarceration

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:11): (726) My question today is for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, more than two years ago, in August of 2022, the parliamentary inquiry into children affected by parental incarceration handed down a detailed report. It had 69 findings and 29 recommendations. That inquiry had dozens of submissions and witnesses, and it was a substantive piece of work by the Legal and Social Issues Committee. The day before the report was made public the government response to that report was also released. That response was a bare two pages and just outlined in generalities the issues that the government was either working on or already doing well on and listed a range of existing funding commitments. Minister, when will we see a detailed response to each of the 29 recommendations in that report?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:12): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest in this matter. I think you have outlined that there were a number of recommendations – 69 findings and 29 recommendations. Some do fall within my portfolio, some across the criminal justice system and some also to other service providers. I think as a government we recognise the importance of family connection to the wellbeing of not only those in custody but also the children and family on the outside, and that is why in my portfolio we have the Living with Mum program, which is focused on ensuring that women in custody, where appropriate, where there are appropriate risk assessments, can have their young children with them in a custodial setting. We also have a number of programs focused on counselling services and support services to keep that engagement and connection. We have those services out of Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, but also we have different support and connection supports in our adult system, not necessarily in the same way.

I know that the report is continuing to inform the work of my department. We also have our cultural review into the corrections system, and some of that work is informing the rollout of that work. I know DFFH is also being informed by that report. But there is a bit of crossover in terms of those recommendations; those 29 recommendations are not all in the corrections portfolio. As minister I am committed to ensuring that those in custody and their loved ones on the outside are supported to continue those connections, because we know the best outcome for people is achieved when they are connected to community and connected to family; that reduces their chance of recidivism but also leads to better outcomes for their loved ones on the outside.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:13): In the PAEC hearings in May this year my colleague Mr Puglielli asked if any of the 29 recommendations in the inquiry's report were acquitted by the most recent budget and you undertook to see what you could provide against those recommendations, but to date I do not think that this information has been provided. Minister, can you provide an update on the government's response to this report? I heard your initial substantive response regarding other ministerial responsibilities. Will you, in conjunction with your other ministerial colleagues, provide further information on the government's work towards each of the inquiry's 29 recommendations?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:14): I thank Ms Copsey for that supplementary question. As I stated in my substantive, as a government we are already undertaking to address several of the concerns. I cannot necessarily make a commitment on behalf of other ministers, but I will see what my office can provide to assist you. What I will say is that across government we are supporting children, not only in my portfolio but whether it be in other portfolios, with the Best Start, Best Life program or initiatives that are focused on supporting children. We are building over a hundred new schools across communities in our state. For those young people whose parents are incarcerated we are committed to ensuring they have connection, and I know Corrections Victoria works very closely with child protection to ensure that connection continues and the best interests of the children are considered in all those decisions. I will see what my office can provide in relation to those recommendations that fall within my portfolio.

Ministers statements: vocational education and training

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:15): I rise to highlight the fantastic work of our apprenticeship support officers (ASO) and what they do right across our state. I had the opportunity to meet several support officers and apprentices recently. Jessica, who is a qualified electrician, and Kimbelee, who is undertaking a mechanical trades apprenticeship, both told me of their experiences facing discrimination and sexism in the workplace, and I was struck by their determination and courage. No-one should have to face harassment at work. I also met Luka and Paul, who had also faced challenges in their apprenticeships with employers who were unsupportive of mental health or saw apprentices as just cheap workers. All four apprentices turned to their apprenticeship support officers for assistance and, thanks to the guidance, support and care they received, they have been able to continue and even finish their apprenticeships.

In 2023 the ASO program assisted almost 17,500 apprentices, and almost 70 per cent of cases involved apprentices aged 19 or younger. The program also has a strong presence in regional Victoria, with a third of the supported apprentices based outside of metropolitan areas. These apprentices received the support they needed to overcome the challenges and complete their training. The ASO program is delivered in partnership with Victorian TAFEs, with 29 support officers working across more than 25 campuses. Building on the success of this program, the Allan Labor government accepted all apprenticeships taskforce recommendations, recently announcing a \$9 million package to make apprenticeships safer and fairer. I want to thank our ASOs for their incredible efforts and also to thank Jessica, Kimbelee, Luka and Paul for sharing their experiences with me.

Probate fees

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:17): (727) My question is for the Attorney-General. The Allan Labor government is pushing ahead with plans to increase probate fees by up to 650 per cent. As banks do not allow access to deceased accounts until after a grant of probate has been made by the court, executors will now have to pay many thousands of dollars for a grant of probate from their own pockets. This will create very serious issues for applicants who do not have access to sufficient funds at or prior to applications being lodged in the court. How does the Attorney-General expect grieving families to fund up-front Labor's massive increase to the cost of probate fees before any distribution of the estate?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:17): These are important matters, Ms Lovell, but if you had listened to my response to Ms Crozier, I actually directly answered this question. I explained that although it is outside my direct responsibilities as Attorney-General, I would like to see the ability for access to estates at an earlier stage so that all of the costs associated with probate can be addressed from an estate as opposed to those that are responsible for managing it.

But I do want to repeat – you seem to ignore it, and I will keep saying it because maybe it will sink in at some point – that we are removing fees from small estates. Zero. Zilch. So it will be cheaper for many, many people who are going through the grieving process. When it comes to multimillion-dollar estates, they can be very complex and it is only fair that for those that are taking up the time of the court the fees come from that cohort as opposed to those who can least afford it. This is a fair reform and it is a necessary reform. In relation to the issues that you have raised, I repeat my answer to Ms Crozier: I am seeking advice, and I would like to have further conversation with the banks in relation to ensuring that there can be earlier access to money from estates.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:19): Current practice for many legal practices is to effectively bankroll applicants to enable documents to be lodged, and when the grant is issued by the court, they then arrange for such disbursements and payments to be refunded out of the deceased person's accounts when they are closed and funds are paid into a trust account. However, I have been contacted by legal firms in Northern Victoria who say that they will no longer be able to afford to

continue this practice for most applications. Minister, your responses to submissions on this issue said that you would not be allowing changes to be made to allow funds to be accessed early from accounts. You say you will be. Minister, will the government definitely enable executors to access deceased bank accounts and assets to pay the fees, as is the case for funeral costs?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:20): Ms Lovell, I went through this in great detail. If I had the power to do that, sure, but I would need to negotiate with the banks and I would need to have conversations with the banks. It is actually outside the remit of the Attorney-General. I am happy to have those conversations, and other people are already having those conversations because this came up as a matter of interest in the consultation process. Of course I listened to the matters that were brought up in our consultation process, which is why those types of submissions have been actioned.

In relation to some of the other issues that you raised, the other matter that is probably worth putting on record as well is that there is provision for fee waivers from the courts and financial loans in relation to those that are suffering significant hardship, and I can provide more information on that process for you, Ms Lovell, if you would like.

Mental health workforce

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:21): (728) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. As part of the negotiations on the Victorian Public Mental Health Services Enterprise Agreement 2020–2024, a memorandum of understanding was agreed upon by the Health and Community Services Union, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association and the Victorian Labor government. This memorandum provided for the delivery of a further 800 positions across all mental health services in Victoria. This was a welcome promise as mental health services, particularly bed-based services, are understaffed, overworked and often unsafe. Unfortunately, we understand that this government will no longer be delivering on that promise. I understand that this may be a matter for the Minister for Industrial Relations, but given the urgency on this issue, I ask: will you advocate for the implementation of these 800 positions?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:22): I thank Ms Payne for her question. Can I say from the outset I want to acknowledge the amazing work that our mental health workforce do each and every day right across the system, whether that is in the acute end of the system or in community mental health or in our locals. Wherever they are, they are doing amazing work which is helping to change lives and indeed save lives, so I will always stand with our amazing workforce. I want to acknowledge that for the success of the implementation of the royal commission’s recommendations, our workforce is really at the heart of a lot of that.

Our government will continue to back our mental health workforce. We have already invested \$600 million, which is the largest investment in our state’s history, to grow, support and retain mental health workers. That has resulted in, between 2021 and 2023, an additional 1700 additional FTEs across the system, and that represents a 17 per cent increase on our workforce numbers, well and truly above those historical averages each year. Those roles include nursing, lived-experience workers, medical, psychology and social work, occupational therapy and other allied health workers, and there is more on the way. We have also recently in this year’s budget invested \$15.8 million to increase the pipeline of workers in our locals – the missing middle, if you like. That is incredibly important because the continuing rollout of those services means that we are providing support to people early, which means that we alleviate pressure on the acute system and on our emergency departments, which, before the locals existed, were really the only option for people beyond just going to their GP.

I am absolutely committed to supporting our workforce and will continue to do that. I try to get out to different mental health services, including our acute services, regularly. I make a point of talking directly with the workers about what they need in their services and what is going to make a difference.

We will continue to work in good faith with unions that represent the mental health workforce, including HACSU, as they progress their enterprise bargaining negotiations, which are currently underway.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:25): I thank the minister for her detailed response to the question. By way of supplementary, occupational violence and aggression in the mental health sector is an ongoing and serious issue. We did hear from many lived-experience workers as well as many of the nurses in the sector just recently on this, and it is an issue that is likely to worsen if understaffing is to continue, so I ask: what is the minister doing to ensure that mental health service workers are being kept safe and understaffing is being addressed?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:25): Thank you for the supplementary, Ms Payne. I do not know if I can do it justice in the 1 minute that I have got, but a lot of work is going on. Obviously there are key recommendations in the royal commission final report around reducing occupational violence, reducing restraint and compulsory treatment. Of course the flip side to that is making sure that it is not at the expense of the safety of our workforce, so I am very mindful of the need to get that balance right. Our chief mental health nurse, who sits within Safer Care Victoria, is doing a lot of work right across particularly the acute sector of mental health in making sure that occupational health and safety is at the forefront of how our acute services are operating. I am very happy to provide a little bit more detail outside of the standing orders for you on other work that is happening.

Ministers statements: youth mental health

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:26): I rise to update the house on the work that our government is doing to give young Victorians the mental health care they need when they need it. We know that 75 per cent of diagnosable mental illness first emerges before the age of 25. That is why the Allan Labor government has not wasted a day in working to improve mental health outcomes for children and young people. We are delivering a youth prevention and recovery care centre in every region, which will see YPARCs in Heidelberg, Traralgon, Shepparton, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Dandenong, Frankston and Parkville. We have established three new infant, child and family locals in partnership with the Commonwealth to support infants, children and their families to access a range of health and wellbeing services. We have established the Child and Youth HOPE program, which provides targeted support for children and young people who have attempted suicide, have suicidal ideation or have self-harmed. We know that for some people being at home is the best place to receive support, so we have delivered youth Hospital in the Home beds in a range of different settings. And following recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, we have established the Parkville Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Service for the north-west.

Importantly, there are also foundational reforms underway and commencing as part of the royal commission's 10-year reform program, including infant, child and youth age streaming and improving Headspace integration. This is in addition to the \$200 million schools mental health menu, providing targeted mental health support to students when and where they need it most, and work is underway on a new social media safety program, Safe Socials. We are giving young Victorians the confidence that when they need mental health support, there are local services that will give them the tailored mental health care that they need close to home.

Water policy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:28): (729) My question is for the Minister for Water. Minister, the recent annual reports of Greater Western Water, Yarra Valley Water and South East Water indicate that over \$173 million in dividends was paid to the Victorian government, along with over \$5 million in COVID payments. Further, Dr Erin O'Donnell, a senior lecturer in water policy at the University of Melbourne, has argued that if water authorities have cash to spare for the government,

then customers could reasonably ask if they are paying too much. I therefore ask, Minister: don't metro water customers deserve to have their water bills cut by \$173 million?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:29): Mr Davis, as I recall, we have been over this territory a couple of times in relation to dividends and capital repatriation, and I note that you have referred to specific figures on dividends, but the themes remain exactly the same. I am very happy – and I suspect that we will have an opportunity – to go through the details on all of the annual reports that you have referred to in your question as far as material and non-material entities go. But, Mr Davis, I want to correct a couple of the presuppositions in your question. Victorians, for avoidance of any doubt, continue to have some of the lowest water bills anywhere in Australia. In fact no –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Harriet SHING: Well, Ms Crozier, let us actually tell consumers: no other capital city has lower water bills than Melbourne – no other capital city. And we know that it is also about the investment in infrastructure. When you go about questions like this that are reckless in their ignorance of the facts, we know that it is customers who come away from the claims that you make thinking that in fact their water bills are not the lowest of any capital city in Australia.

To be very, very clear, we make significant investments through the way in which the capital repatriation and dividend system is worked to make sure that when we work within the Essential Services Commission work in setting prices and the allocations for investment, we will see, as we have seen in the 2023–24 year, more than \$8 billion in capital expenditure across the 16 water corporations in the period between now and 2028. Just last year, Mr Davis, the water sector spent about \$2.5 billion on infrastructure, with about \$3.2 billion planned for the 2024–25 period. This is investment that is about making sure – and I know that other members in this chamber, including from your side, are keen to see this happen – that we see the investment that means that as the population grows, as our ageing infrastructure needs to be replaced, as we need to make sure we are investing in the sorts of investments for infrastructure that will safeguard us against the very issues that this Parliament has looked into and that the federal Parliament has looked into around natural disaster, coastal erosion, the impacts of climate change and the impacts of population growth, we have these investments that are being made as part of the ordinary work of government – *(Time expired)*

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): It should be noted that the minister actually did not answer the question about whether metro customers deserve to have their bills cut by \$173 million. Comments about a range of other matters do not deal with that central issue. I therefore ask: Minister, metro water prices are determined by the Water Industry Regulatory Order, which you have the power to amend under the Water Industry Act 1994. I ask, Minister: why have you not amended the Water Industry Regulatory Order so that households are not paying hundreds of dollars more each year in water costs because of your government's raids on water corporations' budgets?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:33): Mr Davis, again I am going to take you very clearly to the way in which pricing is set by the independent Essential Services Commission and by the work that we do with the commission, with water corporations – those material and non-material entities. We have the lowest water bills of any capital city in Australia right here in Melbourne. When you talk about the metropolitan water corporations and you make the sorts of spurious claims that you have, you are inviting a conclusion in fact –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, there was no spurious claim made. The figures are straight out of the annual reports.

The PRESIDENT: The minister is being relevant to the question.

Harriet SHING: Mr Davis, when you include in your supplementary questions words like ‘raids’, it is really important that we actually correct those assertions in terms of the way in which the Essential Services Commission sets prices. To be really clear: it is only water corporations with those bigger profits, so our metropolitan water corporations, that pay dividends, and they only pay them if they have a healthy surplus. Mr Davis, this is a return on the government’s equity, and it does not result in increases to customers’ water bills.

Animal welfare

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:34): (730) My question is for minister representing the Minister for Environment in the other place. On 8 October a Victorian Pest Animal Control employee shot a kangaroo in the head from their vehicle without authorisation on Melbourne Water public property in Smiths Gully. The constituent who witnessed this received a response from Nillumbik Shire Council in writing that this was done in so-called self-defence. Can the minister please explain how shooting a native animal from approximately a hundred metres away can be considered self-defence?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:35): I thank Ms Purcell for her question. I will refer that matter to the Minister for Environment for a response.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:35): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. Despite VPAC’s contract with the council expiring on 23 October last year, they were caught shooting deer on 5 February this year at the same location. After a local called out their illegal conduct they made a new contract and backdated it to cover the shooting. VPAC did not notify neighbouring homes until a local made a police report at 3 am. Just 19 minutes later the VPAC employee sent out a text saying he forgot to notify them. These illegal shootings are happening all of the time. What action is the minister taking to stop them?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:36): Again I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary, where she makes some serious allegations. That matter will be referred to the Minister for Environment for a response.

Ministers statements: Nas Recovery Centre

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:36): I rise today to update the house on my recent visit to the Nas Recovery Centre, a vital service provider supporting young people and families from African backgrounds, particularly the South Sudanese community. Nas Recovery Centre exemplifies the value of community-led initiatives in the youth justice system. With their ‘no wrong door’ policy, Nas create a welcoming environment where young people struggling with addiction can access tailored support without fear of judgement. Their programs include substance abuse treatment, counselling and family support services, all provided with deep cultural understanding and empathy. Importantly, Nas also supports families helping loved ones understand how to best support those on the recovery journey. I had the pleasure of meeting with Nyachan Nyak, the founder and managing director of Nas, along with Dr Santino Deng, the chair of our South Sudanese Australian youth justice expert working group.

Our government is proud to support the important work of Nas Recovery Centre and similar community-focused organisations through targeted investments. Nas recently received \$85,000 through the South Sudanese community grant program, part of our \$400,000 investment in supporting aid organisations committed to empowering South Sudanese youth. These programs are designed to address the social and cultural barriers that too often prevent access to addiction treatment and mental health services. By working directly with communities we are helping to provide young people with the pathways that keep them engaged and supported and ultimately help their families and their communities. These are not simply acts of goodwill. They are evidence-based interventions that promote healthier, safer communities for all Victorians.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend Nas Recovery Centre and its dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters, such as the member for Cranbourne in the other place, the member for Narre Warren South in the other place, the member for Bass in the other place and our very own member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, Mr Lee Tarlamis. Your work is not just helping individuals, it is strengthening families and communities. You are all truly making a difference.

Youth crime

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): (731) My question is to the Minister for Youth Justice. Minister, for too long the Allan Labor government refused to act on Victoria's youth crime crisis, despite crime by young offenders increasing by nearly 30 per cent – 28.9 per cent, actually – since Labor was first elected in 2014 and soaring by 20 per cent over the past year alone. Your government held a crisis meeting with stakeholders on the youth crime crisis. Can you update the house on the outcomes of this engagement?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:39): I thank Mr Davis for his question and his interest in our youth justice system. I will note that in terms of –

Jaelyn Symes interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: Yes, I was about to say that. I will take that interjection by the Attorney. But I think we have been very clear as a government that we are focused on community safety, and that is why we introduced the Youth Justice Act 2024, and everyone had an opportunity to debate it in this chamber for a number of hours. That bill at its heart was focused on improving community safety outcomes and holding young people to account who do offend but also providing a better pathway for their recovery and rehabilitation – more so by addressing their underlying behaviours – and understanding that young offenders that make contact with the criminal justice system will at some stage, if they end up in a custodial setting, be out in the community, understanding their young age. That is what we are focusing on. But before young people end up in custody we are focused on early intervention and diversion, and we are doing that work.

For the vast majority, Mr Davis, of young people that come into contact with the criminal justice system early intervention and diversion works – that works for the majority of young people – and we do not hear many of those stories. But for the young people where intervention may not work we obviously focus on addressing their behaviour, and that means through programs. Whilst they are in custody at our new youth justice facility at Cherry Creek, our intensive interventions are addressing their health needs, understanding that for many of the young people in our system the first time they get this kind of primary or specialist care is in our facilities.

We are also supporting our police. No government has invested more in Victoria Police than this government. We have more police, and I want to take this opportunity –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, whilst my question had some figures and background in it, it was a very specific question about the meeting with stakeholders. He has actually not mentioned the specific meeting at all. He has talked in general, but he has not talked about the meeting with the stakeholders, and therefore I ask you to bring him back to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was being relevant to the question.

Enver ERDOGAN: I thank Mr Davis. In relation to meetings, as the Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Corrections I have meetings all the time with commissioners for youth justice. Obviously as part of our announcement about our improvements to the youth justice system, the most comprehensive reforms in three decades, we are establishing COBRA, the Council on Bail, Rehabilitation and Accountability. That brings together experts from across the field, so we are bringing together people in youth justice but also people that work with families and people that work with police and that understand the operations of the system to make improvements to young people's

lives but also to keep the community safe. That is the ultimate focus of these reforms. These reforms have a number of measures that hold young people to account but also provide a better pathway to address the underlying behaviour, understanding that young people that come into the system –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: In relation to those interjections, Ms Crozier, like I said, we are holding young people to account. The majority of young people are being diverted. They are engaged in early intervention programs, but as a government we will focus on making a difference to the lives of these young people, addressing their behaviour when they are with us in custodial settings, because that not only keeps them safe but keeps the community safe in the long term. There is always a balance with youth justice reforms, and I feel like our Youth Justice Act is the opportunity to break that cycle.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): There seems to be a reluctance to engage with their own crime crisis meeting, and I –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: Well, go and read the press clips on it. Go and read them. There was a crime crisis meeting. He does not think it is a crisis, so there we are. Anyway, I am being distracted here. At the meeting there was limited opportunity for victims to be heard. In the various meetings was there any discussion of the impact of weakening Victoria's bail laws, which is seeing more violent offenders back on the streets and committing more violent crimes?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:43): Thank you, Mr Davis, for your supplementary question. I am also the Minister for Victim Support. Obviously you have asked a question in relation to my role as Minister for Youth Justice. We understand the concerns of the community, and that is why we have acted – we listen and we act on them. That is what the Youth Justice Act is about. It is about making sure that every Victorian has the right to not only feel safe but be safe. We make sure that people are safer if we can address the underlying behaviour of these young people. And there are tougher consequences. We are fast-tracking core processes; the Attorney-General can talk all about that. We have given police greater powers to crack down on knives. We have also strengthened the bail test and revocation. I want to thank the staff in our youth justice system that are focused on making sure that young people comply with their bail orders. We are focused, and we are getting on with the job. We have made these reforms, and they are being implemented as we speak.

First nations custodial health care

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:44): (732) My question is for the Minister for Corrections. We know all too well the consequences of not providing adequate health care to First Nations people in prisons, including the shamefully high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody in this state. After the investigation into Veronica Nelson's passing the coroner recommended that prison health care should be equivalent to that available outside of prison and, fundamentally, that Aboriginal people should have access to culturally appropriate health care. In her 2024 report regarding healthcare provision to the Aboriginal community in Victorian prisons, the Victorian Ombudsman recommended that the Department of Justice and Community Safety work with key Aboriginal community controlled organisations to design and deliver holistic custodial health services that are culturally safe and responsive to Aboriginal people, culture and rights. What work has been undertaken since the tabling of this report to action this recommendation?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:45): I thank Dr Mansfield for her question and her interest in Aboriginal health care in our custodial settings. I think it is a very important issue and as minister I am committed to seeing improvements, and we have made significant improvements during my time. I also take the opportunity to thank previous ministers who started that work. We do take our duty of

care to those in custody very seriously, and last year we did improve services across the system, particularly the women's system. We have got Western Health caring for the women at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. We made improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody with new health checks specifically designed to be the equivalent of what is available under Medicare, and I am pleased to report that there has been a very strong uptake of that, and that is equivalent to what is available in the community. We also understand that the health services we provide in correctional settings need to be tailored and sometimes cannot be exactly the same because of the custodial settings and the security measures that are in place, but we continue to work closely with the Aboriginal community to improve custodial health care and to improve culturally safe appropriate health care.

I can share with you that I have had a number of discussions with Aunty Jill Gallagher, and I want to thank her for her advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal community controlled health organisations. I do not have an announcement to make, but she has proposed a pilot at one of our correctional facilities. We are very close to having something. I am very hopeful of next year having something in our adult system – maybe at one of our men's prisons, that being a larger cohort in custody, understanding that 95 per cent of people in custody are in the men's system. We are trialling that. There is an example of that in the ACT, and I am very keen to go visit. I do not want to reveal too much about my movements, being the corrections minister, as you could appreciate, but I might be travelling to the ACT shortly to visit that trial, and that was on the suggestion of Aboriginal stakeholders and partners. Again I thank Aunty Jill Gallagher for that suggestion. So there is work being done. I do not have announcements today, but I will have shortly.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:47): I thank the minister for that encouraging response. As part of this recommendation the Ombudsman was explicit: adequate resourcing and funding is required in order to enable Aboriginal community controlled health organisations to deliver these services. So how much funding have you asked the Treasurer to allocate in the budget to do so?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:48): I thank Dr Mansfield. As a service-providing minister in charge of a large operational system, I am always advocating for more funds and resources. But I understand that embedding Aboriginal appropriate care is not just about the financial resources; it is also about having people who are properly trained, and that is why our government has invested in health pathways, in particular our investments in the TAFE system and also the higher education sector. I want to reach out to the Commonwealth as well for doing some of that work. But from my perspective, I am advocating for greater resources, especially to trial a pilot first to see what kind of model it will be, because as I know Aboriginal community controlled organisations themselves will say, whether it is the primary care or an additional level of care in a culturally appropriate manner, we need to trial that. We have a much larger system than what exists in some other jurisdictions in the country, being obviously the second-largest state in the nation. But I will do that work, and I will be visiting the ACT very shortly to see the model they have applied there. I am not sure if it will be necessarily appropriate – they have one facility; we have over 15.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the minister I acknowledge a previous member of this chamber, Mr Cesar Melhem, in the gallery.

Ministers statements: maternal and child health services

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:49): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is providing an important opportunity for Victorians to improve our maternal and child health system. Last month I was delighted to launch our maternal and child health survey, inviting Victorians from across the state to share their feedback on the work undertaken by maternal and child health services across the state and on where we can improve them in the future. The survey is open to everyone who has used the service in the past two years and can be accessed on the Engage Vic website. The survey closes on 1 December. It provides an important opportunity to share insights from across the state into how we

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

4220

Legislative Council

Tuesday 12 November 2024

can help improve maternal and child health services. This is across all aspects of our maternal and child health service, encompassing the universal MCH program, the 10 key ages and stages visits, the enhanced MCH program, the Aboriginal MCH program and the MCH phone line.

This is not the only way we are listening to Victorians on how we can improve the work we are doing. I have been meeting with maternal and child health nurses across Victoria, talking with them about their experiences in delivering maternal and child health services, and working with families on what works and does not work for them. We are also leading children's round tables with parents and carers to understand how we can improve Victoria's universal services. They are being held in Melbourne and regional Victoria, with families invited to discuss their experiences of maternal and child health services, early childhood education and care, early parenting centres, kindergartens and family services.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Victorians who have shared their stories and experiences with me. From foster and kinship carers, family members to first-time parents, I have appreciated your candour and open nature in sharing your stories and experiences. Each of you is providing important feedback that will inform how we improve programs, policies and initiatives across the state for children from birth to school age, because when it comes to delivering improvements to social services, Victorians know it is only this side of the house that will deliver.

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, during my question the Attorney-General offered to provide some further information on financial assistance that is available to cover probate fees, and I just want to say I would be very pleased to receive that information. If I could receive that this afternoon, I would appreciate it.

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:51): Minister Tierney will get the substantive and supplementary questions from the Minister for Environment for Ms Purcell, in line with the standing orders.

Constituency questions

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1223) I have a question for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the government's plan for high-density, high-rise development. What I seek from the minister is that she join a forum that will be hosted on 1 December. We are very keen to see her attend, and I am extending an invitation. My question is: will the minister attend a community forum at the Phoenix centre in Malvern East, in my electorate, on 1 December to hear from community representatives the results and views that they have on the government's high-density, high-rise developments that it is foisting on people throughout Southern Metro? In particular in the areas of Stonnington, Glen Eira and Monash the intention is to foist this development on people, whether they like it or not.

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:53): (1224) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services regarding the ageing fleet of CFA fire trucks in Western Victoria Region. The Mount Rouse group of fire brigades, operated by a dedicated group of volunteers in my electorate, have six tankers, three of which are over 30 years old. These trucks are designed to have a maximum life span of 25 years and are operated in extremely high risk environments. Bushfire threat is escalating in severity and frequency due to climate change, with this coming summer expected to break temperature records. How is the Victorian government going to address the issue of the ageing fleet in the CFA so that their volunteers can continue to protect our rural communities from the increasing instability of our climate?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:54): (1225) My question is to the Minister for Government Services. My Traralgon-based constituent Mr Burgmann has been unable to prove he is single and is wishing to remarry. He is planning to get married on 20 November, and family are flying in from overseas. He had been separated for eight years, and his wife passed away in 2022. He cannot legally remarry because he cannot access his former wife's death certificate to prove that he is single. Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria say he is a third party and they will not provide it. Also, marriage celebrants will not marry him because they fear it would be illegal if he applies for a no-record-of-marriage certificate. Minister, I made representations to your office in October twice and in November twice, and given the urgency, I ask you to intervene and fix up this bungle so that Mr Burgmann may be able to get correct documentation and marry in eight days time.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1226) My question is for the Minister for Planning. This week the government attended Berwick Springs lake for the renaming of the lake to Guru Nanak Lake. This happened on the 555th anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Guru Nanak is a significant figure for the Sikh community, considered the first guru that began the establishment of their religion. Whilst I have no criticism of the Victorian Sikh community – in fact I have publicly praised their significant charitable efforts many times – I did receive a call from a constituent this week who had some concerns. They were not necessarily upset with the name change, but it came as a surprise. Their concern was they felt the community was not consulted and this was just sprung on them without warning. My question for the minister is: what consultation was done with the local community in considering the renaming decision around Berwick Springs lake?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (1227) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister support the position of Macedon Ranges Shire Council to reduce the speed limit on Kilmore Road, which is also known as Main Road, in Riddells Creek to 40 kilometres per hour? On 26 June this year Macedon Ranges Shire Council adopted the draft *Riddells Creek Movement Network Plan*. The plan recommended a speed reduction on Kilmore Road, Riddells Creek – the C708 – from 50 down to 40 kilometres. That same stretch of road was the scene of a tragic accident yesterday when a water tanker veered off the road and crashed into a school playground, injuring a child and killing a teacher's aide who bravely pushed children out of harm's way. One resident said that trucks regularly hurtle through the town, and locals have been campaigning to lower the speed limit. I ask the minister to support council's position to reduce the speed limit and consider what other safety improvements can be made.

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:57): (1228) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Housing, although I am cognisant that the question could span portfolios. My constituent works in homelessness services in Brimbank. While my constituent acknowledges the Victorian government has made commitments to increase the supply of social housing under the Big Housing Build, any new housing is some years from being delivered. This does not address the rising number of people in Brimbank and across the west who are sleeping rough and/or living in unsafe situations, often with complex health needs. More is needed to alleviate the immediate and ever-increasing pressure on the homelessness services sector, with nearly 90 per cent of those seeking help being turned away on any given day. Funding for frontline services is more vital than ever as the exorbitant cost of rent and diminishing supply of affordable dwellings drives rising demand for homelessness support. My constituent asks if the government will provide more funding for housing stock, homelessness access points and assertive outreach programs to alleviate the current and growing homelessness crisis in Brimbank.

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:58): (1229) My question is for the Minister for Housing. Minister, it is my understanding that the department of housing owns land in the Delacombe area of Ballarat, particularly around Leawarra Crescent and surrounding courts. Public housing has been demolished and former residents relocated with a view to make way for increased density within the area. The problem is the land has been sitting vacant for 18 months – only a handful of houses have been built. Large parcels of land currently sit vacant where there used to be homes. Meanwhile, the grass grows and the threats of wildlife and fire increase. The irony of all this is that in an effort to increase housing the effect has been a decrease in public housing in the area, and now there are less houses available than there were before. I went there recently and saw it with my own eyes with concerned locals. Minister, why has the land been sitting vacant for so long, when can we expect to see construction and when will residents be able to move back into the neighbourhood?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (1230) My question today is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and it concerns reports of the potential closure of the Eltham post office due to skyrocketing commercial rents. Residents in my electorate have alerted me that the Eltham post office may be forced to shut its doors because the landlord is demanding an unsustainable and unreasonable rent increase. This would be a significant blow to our community, especially for those who rely on its essential services every day. It also highlights a broader issue where excessive rent hikes by commercial landlords are putting vital services and small businesses at risk across our region. Minister, will you investigate this situation and consider what actions the state government can take to address steep commercial rent increases that threaten essential community services like the Eltham post office?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:00): (1231) My constituency question is to the Minister for Local Government, and I ask: Minister, why has what is being called a contentious waste transfer station that will be operating just 250 metres from homes been approved by administrators of the City of Casey just days before the newly elected council was to be announced? This decision is even more incredible given the EPA in August this year introduced new and tighter guidelines for operating a waste transfer station in Victoria, stating that industry sites that produce odours should be located at least 500 metres from homes. Constituents in my area have already had to deal with issues around Veolia's management of the site, which operates in the south-east, and were notified of the council's decision on the eve of a public holiday. On this basis, I welcome all of our new Casey councillors who will be sworn in today and I am looking forward to no longer being under administration in the City of Casey.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:01): (1232) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Why is the government leaving vulnerable people in regional Victoria without sufficient mental health support? I have had two people independently contact my office saying that they have fallen through the cracks of the system that is meant to support them. They have both been clients of the Head to Health program run through the Bendigo Community Health Service. This service closed earlier this year when the state government funding was removed. While BCHS still delivers mental health services, they are now of a lower tier. By all accounts, the Head to Health system was working well at Bendigo Community Health Service and meeting community needs, ensuring people had access to the right services at the right time. The clients were referred on to another service, the new adult local, which has a higher level of care. Neither client has engaged with this service, but both have now been without any mental health support for months, and they are not the only ones. They are angry, upset and feel let down by the system.

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:02): (1233) My question is for the Minister for Planning. My constituent Andrew Little is a registered builder and owner of Ecowall Cladding, a small family-run startup business seeking to produce hemp-based mudbrick, which is a biocomposite building material made from industrial hemp. In July Mr Little finally gained approval to use a shed on his property as a hemp-processing facility, only to receive an immediate appeal to VCAT from one of his neighbours. On Friday Mr Little was advised that VCAT was scheduled to have a hearing in April next year, which would mean that the whole timetable for one approval will be over two years, for a development that has been shovel-ready for over 12 months. Minister, Mr Little has written to you on many occasions and first wrote to you about this issue in March. He has been told by your office that the letter is ready but needs to be signed by you. Minister, can you please take the time to sign this long overdue response to Mr Little – *(Time expired)*

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:03): (1234) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it again relates to the Johnstone Street and Broadmeadows Road intersection in Westmeadows in my electorate and the neglectorate of Greenvale. This dangerous intersection has been raised with me numerous times by local residents both via email and when I am out and about in the community. Indeed I have a community petition going on on this issue. The intersection is congested, there is a backlog of cars on Johnstone Street during peak hours, which is absolutely awful, making it extremely difficult for constituents to get to work or school. On top of this, it is a danger when you finally do get to Broadmeadows Road and try to merge quickly and safely onto a 70-kilometre-an-hour road at a sharp angle. I have raised this multiple times with the minister. Minister, will you please put traffic lights or even a roundabout at this intersection to make it safer for my community?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:04): (1235) My question for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC relates to the tragic accident at the Golden Plains wind farm yesterday, which cost the life of a 36-year-old technician. This is an appalling tragedy for family, friends and colleagues. My thoughts, and I am sure those of the whole house, are with them and with the emergency service responders involved. I have been taken aback, however, to hear just a day later widespread negative commentary on safety standards. AWU state secretary Ronnie Hayden told the ABC:

... parts of this site ... are just a shambles ...

And in terms of safety, he said that:

The renewable energy sector is about 15 years behind civil construction ...

... they believe they can get away with dodgy work conditions because they are out in the sticks ...

Minister, will you ask WorkSafe to extend their inquiry beyond this tragic accident to examine construction practices in the sector as a whole?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:05): (1236) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it relates to a community forum that I am holding with my colleague Mr Newbury in Brighton on 1 December. Like Mr Davis, we are hearing from hundreds of constituents who are concerned about the government's plans to have towers in suburbs right across our electorate. The government has announced 25 activity centres, but there was no consultation with the community. This was not taken to the election in 2022, and communities have been blindsided by this announcement from the Premier and the planning minister, who seems to have a different view when it comes to her own electorate and her backyard. I am asking that the Minister for Planning also

attend the community forum that we are holding on 1 December at 11 am at the Brighton bowls club, for her to hear from the communities of Bentleigh, Brighton, Moorabbin and the surrounding areas.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:06): (1237) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Wattle Park in my electorate was originally set up by the tramways board as a way to convince citysiders to come to the leafy suburbs of Burwood and Surrey Hills as a destination. Wattle Park was born empowered by the Melbourne to Burwood Tramways Act 1915. Under the control of Parks Victoria, Wattle Park's two iconic trams, the present W-class trams that are used for picnics and seating, are in total disrepair. These trams have been enjoyed for generations, but the current lack of repair and maintenance is looking more and more like neglect. It has been raised with Parks Victoria more than once. I recently visited and contacted numerous local residents who are worried about the unsightly display and how it invites vandalism et cetera. Will the minister please expedite the repair works on the trams at Wattle Park and direct Parks Victoria at Wattle Park to inform this Parliament and the community of the timeline for the works to be completed.

Joint sitting of Parliament

Legislative Council vacancy

The PRESIDENT (13:07): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that the Assembly has agreed to the Council's proposal for a joint sitting on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 6.20 pm in the Legislative Assembly Chamber for the purpose of sitting and voting together to choose a person to hold the seat in the Legislative Council rendered vacant by the resignation of Samantha Ratnam MLC.

Petitions

Inverloch surf beach

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 599 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the impact of coastal erosion on Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club, Surf Beach, dunes and public and private assets. The Inverloch community is deeply concerned that its much-loved emergency service facility and club is at immediate risk of being washed away.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to urgently undertake immediate works to address the accelerated coastal erosion at Surf Beach by constructing a sea wall to protect Surf Beach and save the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club, surrounding housing and infrastructure.

Melina BATH: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Residential planning zones

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 360 signatures:

We, the undersigned citizens of Victoria, respectfully urge the Legislative Council to note:

- the Allan Labor government has announced 10 high-rise high-density zones in the municipalities of Bayside, Boroondara, Brighton, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Hume, Kingston, Monash, Moonee Valley, Stonnington, Whitehorse and Whittlesea where planning rights will be stripped from councils and communities, high rise development will occur as of right and planning control will be exercised undemocratically by the state government;
- that, in addition to a central activity district with as of right 12 storey development, these zones contain enormous "catchment areas" where planning protections will be removed, where 3 and 6 storey development can occur as of right, where municipal heritage overlays and designations will be overridden resulting in the destruction of thousands of irreplaceable heritage properties and

where canopy tree protections will be overridden resulting in the loss of neighbourhood amenity and the exacerbation of heat island effects; and

- these plans are not accompanied by proper health or education service plans or plans for additional open space despite proposed massively increased local populations.

We therefore call on the state government to desist and recommence proper discussions and consultation with local communities and councils and heritage peak bodies in all 10 affected zones prior to taking any further planning actions to implement the announced high-rise high-density zones.

David DAVIS: This is a new twist on this because this is in addition to the other tranche of petitions, so it will build on those. I therefore move:

That the petition be taken into consideration conjointly with the earlier tablings of the equivalent petition.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Constitution Amendment (Abortion) Bill 2024

Introduction and first reading

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (13:10): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Constitution Act 1975 to constrain the powers of the Parliament to make laws repealing, altering or varying certain provisions of the Abortion Law Reform Act 2008 and for other purposes. I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 15

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (13:10): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 15 of 2024, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Parliamentary Budget Office

Report 2023–24

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:11): Pursuant to section 28 of the Parliamentary Budget Officer Act 2017 and on behalf of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, I table the Parliamentary Budget Office annual report 2023–24.

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Audit Act 1994 – Financial Audit of the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, year ended 30 June 2024, under section 81(4) of the Act.

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 –

Order of 23 September 2024 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Watery Gully Reserve.

Order of 22 October 2024 giving approval to the granting of eight licences at Sandringham Beach Park.

Order of 29 October 2024 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Albert Park.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the –

Boroondara Planning Scheme – Amendment C411.

Maribyrnong Planning Scheme – Amendment C189.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament –

Firearms Act 1996 – No. 125.

Supreme Court Act 1986 – No. 124.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to –

Statutory Rule Nos. 108, 111, 112, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121 and 125.

The Australian Computer Society Incorporated Professional Standards Scheme, under section 14 of the Professional Standards Act 2003 (*Gazette S594, 31 October 2024*).

Proclamation of the Lieutenant-Governor in Council fixing an operative date in respect of the following act:

Justice Legislation Amendment (Integrity, Defamation and Other Matters) Act 2024 – Part 6 – 1 November 2024 (*Gazette S579, 29 October 2024*).

Petitions

St Joseph’s Christian college

Response

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: the Minister for Planning’s response to the petition titled ‘Proposed St Joseph’s Christian college in Yuroke’, presented by Mr Mulholland.

Production of documents

Energy policy

The Clerk: I table a letter from the Attorney-General dated 7 November 2024 in response to a resolution of the Council on 29 May 2024 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to the *Future Gas Strategy*. The government has identified one document within the scope of the order. I table the document, together with a schedule of that document.

Residential planning zones

The Clerk: I table a further letter from the Attorney-General dated 31 October 2024 in response to a resolution of the Council on 16 October 2024 on the motion of Mr Davis relating to municipal population targets and activity centres. The letter states that the date for the production does not allow sufficient time to respond and that the government will endeavour to provide a final response to the order as soon as possible. The letter further notes that the government intends to search for documents relevant to the announcement of municipal housing targets as well as municipal population targets in identifying documents in response to this order.

Business of the house**Notices****Notices of motion given.****General business**

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:29): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 13 November 2024:

- (1) notice of motion 541 standing in David Ettershank's name on bus networks;
- (2) notice of motion given this day by Georgie Crozier referring an inquiry to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission;
- (3) notice of motion 498 standing in Georgie Crozier's name on health funding; and
- (4) notice of motion 600 standing in Jeff Bourman's name on deer hunting.

Motion agreed to.***Motions*****Middle East conflict**

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:30): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) the United Nations General Assembly voted on 18 September 2024 to adopt a resolution that demands that Israel 'brings to an end without delay its unlawful presence' in the occupied Palestinian territory, with 124 nations voting in favour of the resolution, 14 voting against, and 43 abstaining;
 - (b) the resolution calls for the state of Israel to:
 - (i) comply with international law and withdraw its military forces, immediately cease all new settlement activity, evacuate all settlers from occupied land, and dismantle parts of the separation wall it constructed inside the occupied West Bank;
 - (ii) return land and other 'immovable property', as well as all assets seized since the occupation began in 1967, and all cultural property and assets taken from Palestinians and Palestinian institutions;
 - (iii) allow Palestinians displaced during the occupation to return to their place of origin and make reparation for the damage caused by its occupation;
- (2) the resolution stems from the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in July, in which the court declared that Israel's continued presence in the territory 'is unlawful', and that 'all States are under an obligation not to recognize' the decades-long occupation;
- (3) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza;
- (4) supports calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire; and
- (5) calls on the Victorian government to advocate to the Australian federal government that it ends its support for the state of Israel's invasion of Gaza.

Leave refused.***Members statements*****Remembrance Day**

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:32): My first matter is that I had the great honour to represent the Minister for Veterans in the other place, Minister Suleyman, at the Remembrance Day service at St James Park on Sunday. I was joined by my colleague and friend Senator Raff Ciccone and community members to pay respect to the thousands who served our country. Almost half a million diggers served in World War I, a remarkable fact considering that our country at the time had

a population of less than 5 million – that means one in 10 served. To date it is our deadliest conflict, with 61,519 fatalities. World War I gave birth to a national identity and spirit which lives to this day.

Hawthorn RSL

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:32): I have a great association with the Hawthorn RSL and their leadership team – president Drew Maddison and vice-president Eamon Hale. The Hawthorn RSL is Victoria's largest traditional sub-branch, with over 350 service members. They host regular events for the community, but I particularly admire their work in advocating for their members on the issues they care about.

Hawthorn electorate

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:33): Quickly, on a further matter, it is always great to be out in Hawthorn. It is particularly interesting that people are still asking about the former member for Hawthorn, asking me to pass on their best wishes.

Remembrance Day

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (13:33): On 11 November, Remembrance Day, Australians gather to honour and reflect on the sacrifices made by brave Australian service men and women. This day, deeply ingrained in our national spirit, serves as a solemn reminder of those who sacrificed their lives for our freedom and for the legacy they have left for future generations. On Sunday I had the privilege of attending a moving ceremony at the Waurn Ponds Memorial Reserve, organised by the dedicated Waurn Ponds Memorial Reserve Committee, including Jack Harriott, Jeff Harriott and youngest committee member Thomas Welsh. This event not only honoured our fallen heroes but also marked the relocation and rededication of the National Servicemen's Association memorial monument, an enduring tribute to those who served. Yesterday I joined the Inverleigh RSL sub-branch with president Deema Johnston for a touching Remembrance Day service where we paid tribute to our Australian heroes. Following the service a restored 25-pounder howitzer gun was unveiled. It is a powerful symbol of Australian resilience, once used by our soldiers in battles from North Africa to the Pacific. There were other informative plaque unveilings, including that of the Lone Pine tree, grown from a seed from the original Gallipoli Lone Pine. Let us continue to honour their memories by being proud Australians and upholding the values they fought for. Lest we forget.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (13:35): Last week I travelled to Sydney to join several of my colleagues at the 67th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference. The CPA is a group of parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from Commonwealth countries who come together to share experiences and learn new skills to promote parliamentary democracy and deliver good governance throughout the Commonwealth. I was proud of my fellow colleague Michael Galea, who represented our great state as the designated delegate from Victoria. Mr Galea delivered a wonderful speech at a workshop and showed the delegates from all over the world the robust professionalism of the Victorian Parliament.

Remembrance Day

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (13:35): I was honoured to attend the Shepparton Remembrance Day service hosted by the Shepparton RSL yesterday. It was a moving service where we remembered and paid tribute to the brave men and women of our armed services and those that have lost their lives in defence of our great nation. I would like to acknowledge guest speaker and local policeman Leigh Johnson and local students Eli Rensford and Olivia Harry, who performed the royal hymn and the national anthem respectively. I want to particularly acknowledge Goulburn Valley Grammar School student Olivia Jackson, who delivered a touching recital of David J Delaney's *New Generation Veterans*. I close my contribution with a passage from Delaney's work:

I know on ANZAC day, we all remember with a tear,

but all vets young or old, they need our help throughout the year ...

Lest we forget.

Russia–Ukraine war

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:36): I rise to reaffirm my support for the people of Ukraine in their continued struggle against Putin’s heinous invasion. I know that this support is one that is shared across the chamber and indeed by fellow Victorians and Australians. Indeed we know that there is strong support from across the world for the continued effort to aid and support Ukraine. For one such example, the people of the United States continue to have a strong view on their country’s continued support. An SSRS poll commissioned by the University of Maryland showed that 61 per cent of Americans believe that the US should continue their support of Ukraine for at least two years, with 48 per cent of Americans believing that the US should support Ukraine’s defence from the Russian incursion for as long as it takes. Even now, more than 32 months since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian people remain strong and resilient as they battle to defend their nation and themselves. Slava Ukraini.

Remembrance Day

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:37): I also had the great honour of attending a Remembrance Day service yesterday in Clayton organised by the Clayton RSL sub-branch. I would like to particularly thank Michael, John and the entire team who organised what was a lovely service, as well as the incoming school captains at Westall Secondary College, who performed their roles perfectly and spoke excellently. It was a moving service. Lest we forget.

Eleanor Bryant

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (13:38): I rise to pay tribute to the heroic and selfless action of Eleanor Bryant, who was tragically killed while saving children under her care. At 2:20 pm yesterday afternoon a water tanker travelling along Main Road in Riddells Creek veered off the road, hit a power pole and crashed through the fence of the Macedon Ranges Montessori Preschool playground. The full details are not yet known, but reports have emerged that in the moment of utmost danger Eleanor acted immediately without thought for herself to push children out of harm’s way. But unfortunately, Eleanor could not escape the path of the oncoming truck herself.

Eleanor was a beloved wife to Tim and a mother of two children, an 11-year-old son and a nine-year-old daughter. I extend my deepest and most heartfelt condolences to Tim and the children, Eleanor’s extended family and friends and the Riddells Creek community. It is hard to comprehend the depth of courage Eleanor displayed in that tragic moment, but I am certain her bravery will never be forgotten.

Riddells Creek is a small and tight-knit community. The entire town has been devastated by this tragedy, and I pray they find comfort and strength in each other. Our words will do nothing to ease the unimaginable grief that Eleanor’s family and friends and the community will feel in her absence. Remembering her sacrifice and seeking to imitate that love and courage in our own lives is the least we can do to honour her memory. Rest in peace, Eleanor.

Northern Victoria wetlands

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (13:39): I encourage every Victorian to take a trip north to the central northern areas of Victoria, which have some of the world’s most beautiful wetlands. It is unbelievably lush and diverse, full of waterbirds and other native species, but very few international tourists visit there, which is such a pity.

In the 1980s Premier John Cain and ministers Joan Kirner and Evan Walker set out to protect Victoria’s Phillip Island penguins and to set up a world-class tourism attraction, and they succeeded on both fronts. Over a million tourists from all around the world now visit the penguins each year, and that contributes at least half a billion dollars to Victoria annually. We could do the same again;

Victoria's central wetlands have the same potential for a world-class tourism destination. When duck shooting is banned and an Indigenous wetlands tourism industry is established it will have the potential to draw millions of overseas tourists annually to Victoria. Such an industry could offer tourists the chance to see both magnificent native waterbirds and other wildlife and cultural experiences based on First Nations history going back millennia. Surely it is time to step into the future and have these marvellous wetlands available year-round, free from death and destruction, and from there build a sustainable tourism industry. I encourage the government to have the vision and courage past leaders felt able to demonstrate.

Mount Arapiles rock climbing

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (13:41): I just want to acknowledge the many people who have written to me from across the state and from overseas who are frustrated by the Labor state government's decision to close rock climbing routes at Mount Arapiles. Not very long ago Premier Jacinta Allan addressed the *Herald Sun* bush summit in Bendigo, and she said:

That's why today I want to be very clear as Premier and as a proud country Victorian I won't be putting a padlock on our public forests. It's not who I am. It's not what I believe in.

Yet what we have seen is the complete opposite – a world-class site, nature-based tourism at its best, closed without any prior engagement with the regional communities or industries that will be devastated by this decision. Cultural heritage is put forward as the basis for this decision, yet they will not release the documentation behind it, and that is just the tip of the mountain. Time and again we see no notice, no right of appeal, no transparency and no accountability. This is a state government in freefall, and Labor cannot be trusted. The next state election is November 2026 – just 100 weeks away – and it cannot come soon enough.

Remembrance Day

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:42): Like many Victorians and many in this chamber, I had the privilege of attending a Remembrance Day service, and it was my privilege to represent the people and community of Box Hill at the Box Hill RSL and the cenotaph in Box Hill Gardens. We were delighted to have pipers and a bugler, and we had a flyover of aeroplanes. I just deeply want to congratulate the Box Hill RSL and president John Haward for the incredible work they do for veterans every year. I would also like to make mention of a remarkable speech that the federal member for Menzies Keith Wolahan made to those who assembled at the RSL afterwards. I recommend people look that up online.

Combined Probus Club of Whitehorse

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:43): Also during the week I attended the Whitehorse Probus club. The Probus club is a wonderful opportunity for people to have friendship, fellowship and intellectual engagement during retirement. I was glad to speak at their monthly meeting this week. I would like to give my thanks to President Phil, Graham Ebert and Carol Ebert for the very warm welcome that I had.

Ahmed Kelly

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:43): Last but far from least, I also attended Glenallen School, and I was pleased to join them with the famous Paralympian Ahmed Kelly. Ahmed is Iraq-born, came to Australia as a refugee and ended up representing Australia in the Paralympics and the Commonwealth Games, winning golds and silvers, and he was an inspiration to the school.

Golden Plains wind farm

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:43): I want to draw the chamber's attention today to the terrible incident that occurred at the Golden Plains wind farm yesterday. A 36-year-old man has died, and that is completely unacceptable in the way this occurred. There is much to be investigated

here. The companies involved appear not to have taken the level of care and concern that we would all expect them to take. It is also true to say that WorkSafe Victoria itself has had close involvement here. It has had a number of pin notices involved and has also had close involvement with additional staff being put on site to attempt to bring security and safety to the workplace. Tragically, it has completely failed in that task. I make the point that not only does this need to be fully and totally investigated but that investigation must be independent. WorkSafe is not suitable to do that investigation because WorkSafe's involvement and activities are a matter of contention in themselves. We cannot have WorkSafe investigating its own activities. We need an independent inquiry. My sympathy and that of the whole house goes out to the family of the man involved.

Remembrance Day

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:45): I just want to place on record the significance of Remembrance Day and the services that I attended both in Hawthorn, at St James Park, along with other members in the house and the Leader of the Opposition John Pesutto – it was a terrific service – and also at the shrine yesterday, a very moving service remembering those that have fallen in the Great War and those who have served this country in conflicts and wars since.

Government performance

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:46): On another matter, I just want to put on record the concerns that I am receiving, as many of my colleagues are, from Victorians about the government's track record on a number of things. I received an email from a woman this week who was talking about how she and her husband have their own business in Mulgrave, which they have run for 31 years, and they employ around 15 people. They are actually being hit with the stressful burdens of the financial hardships that are being imposed upon them because of the government's actions. They speak about how their land tax has gone up, from \$19,000 to \$30,000 to \$55,000 in just three years. This woman says to me:

... so much for planning for our retirement – we can barely afford to pay for it as we still have mortgages on our properties, rates to pay & provide maintenance of the buildings!! ... We'll be selling up so they'll be less homes for renters in this homing crisis ...

They talk about WorkCover – it has gone up astronomically. The list goes on. The point is that life is getting harder under Labor.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:47): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 685, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:47): I rise to speak on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024, and from the outset I confirm that the opposition will not be opposing this bill. But in my contribution I do intend to speak about how we got to this place where this bill has come into the chamber, as it helps symbolise everything wrong with this decade-old Labor government. Getting more people into homes and home ownership is important; indeed it is a

fundamental Liberal tenet, allowing Victoria to grow and prosper and for Victorians to build something to pass on to their children. It is why we are not opposing this bill. As my good friend the Shadow Treasurer said, I fully intend to critique that Victorians may be the winners as a result of this bill; there are many, many more Victorians who will be losers as a result of this bill.

It says a lot about this tired decade-old Labor government that the bill we are debating now seeks to reverse their own measure, in this instance from 2017. You have got the same Treasurer and the same tired, old Labor government. But now in 2024 we have a housing crisis which Victorians are dealing with, so here comes government. Here they come, coming back and seeking to reverse something they have already imposed on Victorians in the first place, after the harm has already been done. This government cannot say they were not warned, and we did keep the receipts from back then. Seven years ago the Real Estate Institute of Victoria, the REIV, said:

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

There it is, in black and white, seven years ago during this government's first term, and yet they proceeded with it. They proceeded with scrapping the exemption. They proceeded with it to make life harder for Victorians, often vulnerable Victorians. Many Victorians could not afford to buy a home without this exemption being in place, and here we are in 2024. It is characteristic of this government. There has been no apology for their stuff-up, and it is a stuff-up of their own making. We know it is a stuff-up and a massive backflip, because they have sought to bring it back to the chamber. But you would think they would go, 'We are sorry, we got this wrong.' You would think they would front up – and I wonder whether any members opposite will do this – and say, 'We are sorry, we got this wrong.' They will not. They will wash their hands of it. They know that a change they made has made life more difficult for Victorians trying to buy homes and has made it harder for apartments and multidwelling complexes to get off the ground in terms of the economics of them. They know that because they have said that and they have said that this change will assist in that, but they will not apologise for it. It is a massive stuff-up from this government. My friend the member for Malvern warned the government in 2017. He said at the time:

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

He went on to say:

We have also seen the abolition of the off-the-plan stamp duty concession for everyone except for owner-occupiers. Again another increase in tax, another stupidly thought out, poorly thought out, ill-designed new tax from a Labor government which will have the opposite effect to that which is intended. The government says this is about housing affordability, that this is making it easier for first home buyers to get into the market because they will not be competing with investors for off-the-duty projects anymore.

The opposition understood the ramifications of this policy better than the Labor government, and we were sadly ignored, but now the Labor government is basically echoing some of the very good policy points we made back in 2017.

Here we are with the government pretending they are now fixing the housing crisis by reversing changes that they put in place – tax concessions that they removed themselves. They are here to solve the housing crisis by putting those concessions back. You caused the housing crisis. The government talks about how the status quo is not an option. Meanwhile Richard Wynne went on a spree, blocking housing developments all over the place and setting height limits in places like Brunswick, blocking the Preston activity zone and creating their own activity centre there and blocking our Carnegie activity zone and then eight years later putting their own activity centre there and claiming they were doing something about the housing crisis. You are the status quo, you have been in government for 10 years, and you are out of ideas. You are out of ideas so much that you are creating new ideas from things you ripped out of the hands of aspirational home owners in this state. This is a pathetic attempt to reverse

changes that this government made. It is their fault. The housing crisis lies at their feet, from what they did in the past.

Labor's poor decision-making in 2017 has meant that fewer Victorians, often vulnerable Victorians, have had the opportunity to own their own home and fewer Victorians have had the opportunity to have a roof over their head. In supporting this bill in 2017 the Treasurer said:

We all know how difficult it is to purchase a home, particularly for young Victorians, who are faced with ever increasing house prices and the upfront costs associated with buying a home ...

The sad truth is that that was true in his first year on the job and it is even more true now as we mark 10 years of Treasurer Pallas and the Premier as cabinet ministers. It would be refreshingly honest if the Treasurer would repeat those words and acknowledge what we all know to be true: that the government has done just about everything it could to make worse the housing affordability crisis in this state. At least today we have a small mea culpa from this Labor government over one of the many ways in which they are to blame but, as with everything from this government, it comes with a catch.

The government has said they will reverse this change that they made in 2017, but it will only be available for 12 months. Very few Victorians will take up this new initiative from the government. We know that from the government's own modelling on this, because the government has itself said that this will only cost the budget \$55 million. They themselves know a measure like this will be limited in its uptake. The government does not seem to really know what they are trying to achieve with this bill. Does the government expect there to be more investors taking up this time-limited offer or does the government expect more citizens to be taking up this time-limited offer? Because if the intent of the policy is to get more Victorians into homes and the reality of this is that the government expects more investors to engage with this temporary and time-limited measure, then there is no guarantee that Victorians will get into homes.

My colleague the member for Sandringham has cut to the core of what Labor are trying to achieve. This is not a bill about helping Victorians get into the housing market. As the member for Sandringham says, if the property is bought by an investor and if it sits there unoccupied, I am sure the Treasurer and I am sure the Premier and I am sure the State Revenue Office will be there rubbing their hands with glee, watching and waiting to charge the vacant land tax on that property at 1 per cent the first year, 2 per cent the second year and 3 per cent the third year after the dirty deal they did with the Greens, with that 3 per cent sitting for the foreseeable future. This is not about helping new homebuyers get into the market; it is another sneaky attempt to increase their tax revenue to prop up the bottom line after a decade of waste and mismanagement. Credit where credit is due to the Treasurer – he always seems to find new revenue streams and new ways to find new revenue streams: 56 new or increased taxes since coming to office, and their budget is so dire that the Treasurer has resorted to deceiving first home buyers in an attempt to fix his mess.

It has also been highlighted by the industry itself, with Real Estate Buyers Agents Association of Australia president Melinda Jennison saying that the government likely has a hidden agenda with this reform, with increased infrastructure charges and levies likely to flow from inner-city development. We know through the windfall gains tax and we know through these activity centres that as soon as the zoning changes go through the value of the rates increases, and if anyone decides to sell, the government will take half the uplift thanks, which will leave many residents worse off. This is all about a revenue-raising exercise. It has been raised many times with me and my colleagues by the good people of Essendon North and Niddrie who are very concerned about the activity centre proposals and what they mean. Mount Alexander Road has already got two very dangerous and congested roundabouts which they are still waiting on the government to fix. It is a heavily congested area, and it is about get more congested with Labor's activity centre and catchment area, so much so I was at a recent community forum with about 350 to 400 people, which was also attended by my colleagues James Newbury and John Pesutto. The community members that organised the forum did invite the member for Essendon and the member for Niddrie, and would you believe it, none of them turned up.

I also believe the Labor mayor of Moonee Valley was invited, but he did not turn up. Maybe if he did turn up, he would have won his ward in the recent council election. But he did not. Perhaps he should have turned up to the forum. Now he is no longer the mayor, and now he is no longer even in council. Perhaps he should have listened to his community rather than being a Labor lackey like all of these local councillors everywhere.

People are really concerned about the financial impact of these changes and what they will mean. I know my colleague Mr Welch held a community forum on the planning changes for the Suburban Rail Loop which had about 400 people there in Box Hill town hall. They were not too happy with the Labor member at all. I know there are several community forums going on. I am flooded with emails and correspondence from concerned residents, as I know the Labor members will be, except they either do not respond or reply back with platitudes saying, 'The community will be consulted, but the community will be consulted while we take your consultation and objection rights away' – even though we are here putting a concession that Labor removed, even though Labor actually passed the Planning and Environment Amendment (Recognising Objectors) Bill 2015, which actually gave VCAT more weight to consider community objections. You have got the same Labor government that gave VCAT more weight to consider objections coming in and saying, 'We're going to take all your objection rights away.' This symbolises how hypocritical this government is. It is 10 years on, and it has run out of ideas. They talk about how the status quo is not an option, when they are literally the status quo and have done nothing and sat on their hands for 10 years. Meanwhile our side of the chamber approved more homes in four years than they have in 10. Yet you have still got this government, out of ideas, trying to put back a concession that they themselves removed. We know that residents will face the financial burden of those activity centre changes.

The real estate buyers agents association know the impact of Labor's 29 new or increased property taxes, which have actually made property more expensive, made property more unaffordable, made home ownership more out of reach and made Victoria into a place that investors are actually fleeing from. Propertyology head of research Simon Pressley said the government stamp duty offer is a trap for buyers:

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

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

Another issue identified by the Shadow Treasurer is that the short 12-month limit fails to take into account the realities of development. It is not a tap – you cannot just turn it on and see the housing flow immediately; it needs that time to ramp up:

... a 12-month measure might very well create some sort of stimulus, but what we really need – what Victorians really need, what those looking for their own home, their first home, really need – is the certainty of more than 12 months. Under the policy in this bill, they simply do not have it.

These sentiments were echoed by Charter Keck Cramer's national research executive Richard Temlett, who said that there are fewer than 7000 off-the-plan options currently being marketed. The government cannot fall into the trap of thinking this will bring more development online. The market will not turn on overnight, and I would urge the government to take into account some third-party comments. As Max Shifman from Intrapac Property said in a quite considered article in the *Age*, where the headline is 'I'm a developer. Here's why Jacinta Allan's high-rise plan won't get off the ground', as someone in the industry that would know:

Temporary off-the-plan stamp duty savings of \$40,000 do not make up for the extra \$700,000 a young family needs ... to buy a relatively small three-bedroom apartment in the middle of Brighton, no matter how desirable the area might be.

And we know it will cost much, much more than that. These people work in the industry. They actually know how it operates in the real world, unlike the Premier and Treasurer, who have spent most of their

entire adult lives working at 1 Treasury Place. The government claims that this temporary cut of stamp duty will somehow assist them with their much-vaunted but little-achieved attempt to build 80,000 new homes every year. No tinkering around the edges will address the main problem causing Victoria's housing affordability crisis.

Labor's addition to exorbitant property taxes is deterring the supply of new housing developments across the state. Half of the 56 new or increased taxes introduced by this government – so 29 – are on property taxes, driving up the cost of housing affordability and putting it out of reach for so many. Industry experts have told us that Labor's increased taxes make up up to 42 per cent of the cost of a new home, with the Urban Development Institute of Australia stating:

There is a direct and well-documented correlation between –
these –

taxes and growing property prices.

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

As Sir Winston Churchill said, 'For a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket, trying to lift himself up by the handle.'

Another issue we have with this policy is a lack of choice in new homes. Under this concession freestanding family homes are excluded from this exemption, while Victorians living in an apartment or a unit could claim this exemption up to any value. So if you wanted a luxury apartment in the middle of Sandringham or Brighton or somewhere like that, maybe Prahran, or if you wanted a luxury penthouse apartment, you would get an off-the-plan stamp duty concession. But if you are a young family, perhaps a migrant family, with three children, trying to get into your first home, trying to escape the shackles of renting and wanting to move into a standalone townhouse, you will not actually get this exemption. The fairness argument comes into this.

There was some very interesting data that came out recently – it is something that I am passionate about, passionate enough to mention it in my maiden speech – about our plummeting birthrate here in Victoria. Victoria still has the lowest birthrate in the country; it has dropped to around 1.3 children per woman, so we have the lowest in Australia. I do not believe that a whole bunch of apartments and limiting choice in policy in such a way is going to turn that around for Victoria. The Treasurer should know and others should know that this is a deeply worrying economic problem for this state, and you cannot just turn on the immigration tap every time you are worried about the economy. We need to grow our birthrate here in this state, but I fear that our birthrate is declining because of the housing affordability crisis, because young families cannot get into a new home, because they do take into account the cost of living and the security of a roof over their head when making decisions like having a family, like having more children.

We really need to think about this when creating policy. And this policy creates differences between apartments and enables people to get luxury apartments in Prahran – a penthouse in Prahran, a concession for that – but if you want to live in a townhouse in a growth area, there are no concessions for you. That is deeply, deeply unfair and something this government should take into account. The Liberals and Nationals believe in choice. We believe in choice, and we believe in allowing Victorian families to have some control over the sort of home or dwelling, whether it be a house, an apartment or a unit.

This bill, which we do not oppose, will do little to fix the problems of Labor's making – 56 new taxes in 10 years, half relating to property. I note that this government, actually the Treasurer in 2017, blamed Malcolm Turnbull for the housing crisis. Well, the Treasurer has been in office now for almost 10 years. He sat around the cabinet table while Richard Wynne opposed every new development under the sun, set height limits in Brunswick, opposed the Preston activity zone that we put forward and Carnegie's activity zone that we put forward and then slapped two-storey height limits in Carnegie, only for their recent announcement to put in an activity centre in Carnegie. So if he wants to find out

who caused the housing crisis in Victoria, I suggest the Treasurer look in a mirror, because that is what he has done. That is his legacy in this state, being the status quo. They say the status quo is not an option. The Labor Party are literally the status quo, and the Victorian people will vote out the status quo in 2026, because you cannot put lipstick on a pig on market day. They have caused the housing crisis in this state.

I wanted to get to some amendments that have been discussed with the opposition and indicate the opposition will not oppose Mr Limbrick's amendments. We think they are eminently sensible amendments. Indeed Mr Limbrick and I were on the stamp duty inquiry together, and I found that a quite good inquiry and a detailed inquiry in terms of policy. I note that the property council presented to both Mr Limbrick and I and spoke about this exact tax, and they did not at that time, under parliamentary record and privilege, say that it should be 12 months. They said that this was distorting growth in the market and that they needed this to build new homes. They did not say they only wanted it for 12 months; that comes from the government. I do agree with the property council and what they submitted directly to that committee in that we need to have this concession to get more people into homes, to make the economics of apartments and dwellings stack up, because currently they do not. If you speak to any property council member around town, they will tell you that the economics currently do not stack up.

But as I was saying, many third parties have already stated publicly that you need two to three years to get one of these apartment complexes off the ground. And for any developer looking at this today who has an apartment complex in the pipeline it will take almost two years for it to get to the stage where they are raising capital off people buying off the plan – stamp duty – such is the red tape that burdens Victoria's housing market. So 12 months is not going to do anything. It is going to be great for those that are already at that end stage of their developments, but it will not do anything. As for the Greens' amendments, we will support one of them, which relates to reporting on how this has gone. I want to say on some of the other points that Mr Barber of the Greens supported getting rid of this concession and now you have the Greens here saying that they will support giving back this concession but only for 12 months, so it is quite the backflip also from the Greens. The Labor Party have done a massive backflip on this, but the Greens should not escape criticism for their hypocritical nature in siding with the government on almost everything.

The Greens will circulate amendments to say that investors should not be able to take part in this concession. I used to be a renter. I used to live in Abbotsford right behind the Terminus Hotel, and I know many Greens voters live around there. Many Greens voters have been given the opportunity to have a roof over their head because someone – mum-and-dad investors – happened to invest in capital, invest in an apartment complex, in property. So it is the height of hypocrisy that the Greens would come and say, 'We don't want investors to invest in property' for people who live in their electorates – for Victorians who need a roof over their heads, a place to rent, a place to call home. The economics of these apartment complexes do not stack up if you make rigid rules saying no investors can invest. This is the kind of B-grade economics we see from the Greens political party, who have been hypocrites on this issue, as has the Labor Party. I will end my contribution there.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:17): I was really enjoying that! I rise today to speak on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024. The Greens will be supporting this bill and seeking to improve it through our amendments. It has long been Greens' policy to abolish the inequitable stamp duty and replace it with a broad-based land tax. Almost every economist agrees that moving from stamp duty to a broad-based land tax would help ease the housing crisis. It was recommended in 2009 by the Henry tax review, in 2022 by a federal inquiry into housing affordability and again last year by the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into stamp duty, which recommended reform to this inefficient and volatile tax. Stamp duty is a regressive tax. It creates an unnecessary barrier to home ownership, particularly for young people, single people, first-time buyers and those looking to downsize. It makes homes less affordable, and people are charged every time they move.

A broad-based land tax could provide a more predictable form of revenue while also offering greater equity and efficiency.

This bill will provide a 12-month stamp duty concession for newly constructed, off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses, provided that they are part of a strata subdivision. The thresholds will be removed for this period, meaning the concession will be available on eligible properties no matter what the cost and anyone buying an eligible off-the-plan property will be able to take advantage of this concession. This means that not only first-time buyers and owner-occupiers can apply for this concession but also investors, companies and trusts, and I might come back to that a little bit later. This concession will apply between 21 October 2024 and 21 October 2025 and will allow the purchaser to deduct 100 per cent of the outstanding construction and refurbishment costs when determining the amount of stamp duty due. Stamp duty will still be paid on the land value.

The Greens will be seeking to amend this bill to add some additional provisions. I ask that those amendments be circulated now.

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: The first will replicate the requirement for the first home buyers concession that the person be an owner-occupier for the first 12 months after receiving the concession. If this should fail, a subsequent amendment would require that the house be used as someone's home, their primary place of residence, rather than be left empty. We will also seek to ensure that the land on which a property receiving this concession is built has not been public land within the last three years, and we are proposing a non-controversial reporting requirement so that the public will know how the scheme is being used and the impact it is having on housing affordability. I hope that with the successful passage of this bill and potentially the Greens' amendments this will be a step in the right direction to the complete replacement of stamp duty with a broad-based land tax.

There is so much work to be done to address this housing crisis. We cannot keep tinkering around the edges with small changes; we need bold and decisive action to actually make sure that everyone in our state has a safe and affordable place to live. This means doing more. It means building 100,000 public homes and 100,000 truly affordable homes and not relying on the private sector to do this. These public homes should be built by a public builder who will not seek to profit from the government at every turn. It means not knocking down massive amounts of existing public housing and instead renovating and refurbishing public homes. It means pushing the federal government to reform negative gearing and capital gains tax. It means protecting renters and making sure that there are enough affordable places for them to live; it is completely untenable that unlimited rent rises continue to be permitted. Housing has been commodified for too long. People are being pushed to the edge. They need decisive action now, not more handouts for developers. Instead, commit to true investment in public and genuinely affordable housing.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:22): I rise today to also contribute on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024. I would like to highlight the significant steps the Allan Labor government is taking to address the essential challenges in housing with particular focus on the newly expanded off-the-plan stamp duty concession. This initiative and other recent announcements form part of our comprehensive strategy aimed at boosting housing supply, reducing costs and supporting a fairer, more accessible housing market for all Victorians. The Allan Labor government's off-the-plan stamp duty concession, announced on 21 October, is a transformative measure that will have an immediate positive impact on Victorians looking to buy a home, because it is this government that understands the need for not just advocating for but delivering more affordable housing for Victorians. This concession allows anyone – and by anyone I mean first home owners, owner-occupiers or investors – who purchases an off-the-plan apartment, unit or townhouse to benefit from significant savings on stamp duty. In the past this concession was only available under certain conditions, with some capped-price thresholds, which often excluded many buyers from taking advantage of it. However, with this new change these restrictions have been removed.

This initiative is not about just making it easier for individuals that buy homes; it is also about a boost for our construction industry, which is currently feeling the pinch of slower sales due to high interest rates. The initiative will also create more job opportunities by reducing up-front costs. This concession will also incentivise developers to get projects off the ground sooner, increasing the supply of housing across the state and providing much-needed options for renters as well.

Can I just say that the mechanics of this concession are straightforward but really powerful. By deducting 100 per cent of the outstanding construction costs when determining stamp duty, eligible buyers can reduce their stamp duty obligations really significantly, and I will just happily provide an example of that. For a \$620,000 apartment bought off the plan, a buyer could save around \$28,000, paying just \$4000 in stamp duty instead of the full \$32,000. This represents a really substantial financial relief for buyers, allowing more Victorians to enter the housing market or move to homes that better suit their needs. It really is an important point, and we often hear stories of older Victorians hesitating to move from their family homes into more suitable housing because of the cost of stamp duty. This policy not only makes smaller dwellings more affordable but also frees up larger properties for families and creates new opportunities for subdivisions that they may not have considered otherwise.

Victoria's housing market really is facing unprecedented demand, and we are committed to meeting this challenge head-on. For many Victorians home ownership can feel out of reach, and the challenges go beyond just purchasing a property. Renters too do face difficulties, whether it is finding affordable housing, maintaining secure tenancies or even dealing with disputes. This government recognises that homes mean more opportunities for everyone. More homes means more opportunities, and our commitment extends beyond just building houses; it is about creating sustainable, affordable and high-quality housing that meets the diverse needs of Victorians right across the state.

The stamp duty concession is just one piece of the puzzle. It aligns with our broader housing policy, which includes creating more rental support and establishing frameworks that protect renters from unfair practices. To that end, the Allan Labor government is also introducing significant reforms for renters, some that we may have heard of in the public domain recently that really aim to simplify and improve the rental experience across Victoria. We know that disputes with landlords can be stressful, can be costly and can be ultimately quite time consuming. For issues like repairs, bond claims and rental increases, renters really should not have to resort to lengthy legal processes, which we know has happened. To address this we have established Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, or RDRV, which will commence operations in mid-2025. The free service will provide renters and landlords with a practical avenue for resolving disputes quickly and efficiently with the expertise of skilled dispute resolution professionals. More than 60 per cent of cases are expected to be resolved through this service, reducing stress and cutting legal expenses for all the parties involved. I am hopeful that this will free up VCAT to focus on other disputes and provide more efficiency for Victorians.

RDRV is just one component of our broader rental reforms. We have also cracked down on rental providers and estate agents that do the wrong thing. Since March this year our renting taskforce has been actively inspecting properties to ensure they meet mandatory standards for safety and livability. This taskforce, I am happy to advise, has already issued more than \$450,000 in fines for rental offences, demonstrating our commitment to enforcing fair practices in the rental market.

I would like to take a moment to thank the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gab Williams in the other place, for the incredible work she has done to make sure that renters are treated fairly and with dignity and respect. You see, in addition to expanding the housing supply, we are also focused on the quality of the homes that are being built, and the Great Design Fast Track initiative announced on 27 October aims to promote the construction of well-designed, affordable housing that aligns with Victoria's architectural history, heritage and commitment to sustainability. Under this plan, developers who meet higher standards in quality, aesthetics and sustainability will benefit from an expedited planning process. This fast-tracked pathway will apply to apartment and townhouse projects of three to six storeys, providing greater opportunities for architects and developers to create buildings that are

visually appealing, energy efficient and, importantly, built to last. Through initiatives like the Great Design Fast Track and our state design book, we will be showcasing exemplary housing projects which are actively working to encourage high-quality, affordable housing throughout the state. This is not just about quantity; it is about fostering a culture of excellence in design, ensuring that every Victorian can access housing that is safe, attractive and sustainable.

An effective housing strategy considers not only where people live but how they live, importantly, and developments that only benefit, well, developers and do not take into consideration how Victorians like to live need to be relegated to the past. You see, access to transport, to schools and to jobs is really an essential factor in building a vibrant community, and the expansion of our activity centres announced on 20 October does focus on creating more housing near train and tram stations and offering easier access to public transport in Melbourne's inner suburbs. Encouraging housing developments around 50 key transport hubs will aim to deliver more than 300,000 new homes across Victoria by 2051, supporting a sustainable and a well-connected city. I have mentioned it before and I will say it again: I love apartment living and have connected to my community and services that I value. By situating new homes, housing and apartments around public transport, we are supporting both the environment and the economy, reducing car dependency and making it easier for people to access work, school or indeed leisure activities. With 25 initial centres already announced, this program reflects our commitment to thoughtful urban planning that prioritises community needs.

Let me just say, beyond our inner-city suburbs we recognise the demand for housing in Victoria's outer burbs. On 22 October we announced a new \$150 million round of funding through the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund, also known as the GAIC fund, which will support projects in rapidly expanding areas – I am thinking Cardinia, Casey and Wyndham – and this will support essential infrastructure, including roads, schools and healthcare facilities, ensuring that our growing communities are well supported and well connected. Furthermore, our landmark 10-year greenfields plan announced on 23 October will unlock new land for housing, providing space for 180,000 homes over the next decade. This pipeline offers developers the clarity and support they need to begin construction promptly, creating more opportunities for Victorian families to find some homes in established suburbs.

I know that there are a number of other speakers on this bill before us, so I might take the moment to wrap up and just say that these Allan Labor government housing initiatives represent a really bold and comprehensive approach to Victoria's housing challenges. From off-the-plan stamp duty concessions to expanded rental protection, from streamlining planning processes to supporting good-quality design, we are tackling the housing crisis from every angle, and for Victorians this means more choice, more security and more opportunities to find a place to call home. We are committed to fostering a housing market that works for everyone, where affordability, accessibility and quality go hand in hand. Whether you are a first home buyer, a renter or a growing family, these policies are designed with you in mind, ensuring that the Victorian dream of a secure, sustainable and affordable home is achievable for all. I commend the Treasurer but also the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Housing for their work to ensure that this important reform will help Victorians, whether they rent or own, to have a place to call home. I support these changes, and I commend the bill to the house.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:32): I am pleased to make a contribution on this bill – this half-baked but one-tiny-step-in-the-right-direction bill. We have a housing problem in this state, a housing problem caused by Labor. Labor have been in power in this state, I think it is important to realise, for all but four years of the last 25, so the problems in the housing market – the lack of supply, the issues with housing – are entirely due to Labor, and the current Premier and the Premier before her, Andrews and Allan, are responsible for what has happened over the last 10 years in this state. They have had effective majorities in the lower house and effective majorities in the upper house all the way through, and what they have done with housing is nothing short of a disgrace. They have layered tax upon tax upon tax. About 29 new and increased taxes are related to properties and construction. When you talk to the Property Council of Australia or you talk to the Urban Development

Institute of Australia and look at the independent work that they have had done, it is clear that between 40 and 50 per cent of the cost of a new dwelling is comprised of state and federal taxes, of which the state component is overwhelmingly the largest component. So this government has jacked up tax year on year on year, and it has made it harder for young people to get into a home – much more difficult.

Now they have realised in the last six months, in panic, that their policies have not worked, and they are now flailing around, they are floundering, they are flapping as they move forward to say, ‘What on earth can we do?’ So we get this situation where we get a thought bubble almost every day or two on a further step that we could take on housing and development. Well, let me give you some ideas. Under the Liberals and the Nationals in government between 2010 and 2014, Matthew Guy as Minister for Planning approved far more housing than this government is doing at an annual rate, and indeed in those four years he approved almost as much as this government has approved over a decade. It has been a terrible outcome under the Labor planning ministers.

The Labor planning ministers like to point at councils. They like to say the City of Whitehorse is terrible or the City of Boroondara is terrible or the City of Frankston is terrible and they should approve more housing. But actually the truth is many times the planning scheme amendments are sitting on the minister’s desk in a tower in the city. The whole hold-up, half the time, is with the minister – the minister’s failure to approve, the minister’s failure to make the planning scheme amendments that are needed to allow projects to go forward, the uncertainty created by the minister.

We had for a long while there ‘Do-nothing Dick’. ‘Do-nothing Dick’ was Dick Wynne’s nickname. He was called Do-nothing Dick because he did nothing, and we got deeper and deeper into a housing problem as Do-nothing Dick sat around and stood there doing nothing. The approvals were not up to scratch. Do-nothing Dick was the first problem. Now you have got a new Minister for Planning. She has had a conversion. My great colleague here has pulled out a number of the key quotes that the current member for Seaford, now the planning minister, can have attributed to her criticising development. But now she has had a conversion experience because the government is in panic. Instead of having careful, methodical policy over time to bring forward new housing developments to ensure that there are proper quantities of new homes and houses coming forward, we have now got the member for Seaford, in her current iteration as planning minister, panicking and bringing forward things that in the past she would not have had a bar of.

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, I will just remind Mr Davis that the fine Ms Kilkenny is in fact the member for Carrum, not for Seaford. I know that he has an issue with Seaford when he gets confused with sky rails, but she is the member for Carrum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Thank you, Mr Galea. That is not technically a point of order, but Mr Davis has taken it on board, so we will move on.

David DAVIS: I have taken it on board, but she has of course targeted Seaford. That is what she has done with her new planning scheme amendments that are intending to create a dense high-rise zone. She is authorising six-storey as-of-right development along the coast in Seaford, in in the electorate of Carrum, or maybe it is Frankston at that point. Either way, it is nearby and it is close to sensitive coastal zones, but now she has reserved her previous opposition to intense development and is now saying you can have six storeys as of right along those sensitive coastal strips. You just imagine, though. You think of the height of the tea-tree, and now this is going to tower way above the tea-tree. There will not be any issue with views from this location. They will be able to see for miles out across the sea as they can see right out across the tea-tree along that strip in Seaford.

Let me be clear here, there does need to be more development and more sensible development. There is plenty of scope for sensible infill development. I am being very clear here. There are clear locations in Melbourne’s middle and inner suburbs where additional development can and should take place. But there is a process about how that should happen, and there is a good sense in protecting heritage

and protecting the ambience and quality of life in our suburbs. Unrestrained, unrestricted high-rise development as of right in sensitive locations is not going to deliver the outcome that is required.

What we are seeing with this government is a proposal to tear up heritage protections – they will be worth absolutely nothing.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: Michael Buxton made very clear that his conversations with the Victorian Planning Authority show that they are modelling 50 per cent destruction of heritage. That is what they are modelling. Your government is modelling 50 per cent destruction. Fifty per cent of heritage homes destroyed, bulldozed, gone –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Extra volume does not make you any more right. Mr Davis to continue without help and at a reasonable volume.

David DAVIS: Of course when interjections come it is easy to over-respond to them. I have got to take on board the need to not respond to these disorderly interjections.

But there are many locations across the city, and Mr Mulholland and I have talked about one in particular that I see, and I know this area quite well: the Maribyrnong defence site. It is 128 hectares of land along the river. Why has that land not been developed? This government has had 10 years to work with federal governments of whatever colour to clean it up, to get development happening there. I think you could put thousands of houses on that sort of location. Then you go to places like the edges of the city, and you see the state government has stalled precinct structure plan after precinct structure plan. They have stalled them; they have blocked them. We were down in Casey the other day. There is one precinct structure plan down there that has been languishing for five years. They rip out the tax. They take the growth areas infrastructure contribution, but they never give the GAIC back. The GAIC never comes back.

They require approvals from the minister, they require support from various agencies – water authorities, cultural heritage management plans, electricity agencies – a whole sweep of different agencies. It is the job of government to coordinate these and bring them on. And let us face it: you have had 10 years. Ten years and they are not delivering. Where is the new housing coming forward? Why have they not approved these? All of those precinct structure plans that have been languishing without the proper support are entirely the fault of Labor, the fault of the planning minister, the fault of the current Premier and the fault of the previous Premier. They blocked a lot of these precinct structure plans and they sat on the minister's desk year after year. We had the big circle-go-round with the Victorian Planning Authority looking up the wazoo of this and that and the ministers over here and the poor old councils trying to bring on precinct structure plans with no help from the government. Melbourne Water is over there. Melbourne Water, you cannot move them, I can tell you. And then there are the cultural heritage management plans, the Indigenous approvals that are required –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Do not make me stand up again – it is like exercise. Please do not do it.

David DAVIS: The cultural heritage management plans have stalled developments across the state. They have stalled developments. They are a very slow process. Melbourne Water, the cultural heritage management plans, the electricity organisations – this is what has happened on a lot of these projects. Slow, slow, slow is what is going on. They are very slow trains bringing these forward, and that is entirely the state government's fault, entirely the failure of this government.

Who abolished the stamp duty concession? Which government abolished it? It was the Labor government. This goes back to the 1990s, the stamp duty concession off the plan on larger

developments, enabling difficult and complex and larger capital requirements in developments to get off the ground and bring forward additional supply. We told them in this chamber when they killed the off-the-plan that this would stop housing development, it would slow the approval rate and it would mean less people were able to get into homes – and that is what your lot did. Your lot did it. You actually ripped the off-the-plan exemption away –

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Mr Davis, it is unparliamentary to point. Also, Mr Davis to continue without assistance and at a reasonable volume.

David DAVIS: Thank you, Acting President. Again, I am sorry for my response, but the truth is in 2017 Labor took away the off-the-plan concession. They took it away, and we told them. I am going to say ‘I told you so’ because I did tell them so and others on this side of the house did tell them so. They did not want to hear that, though. They did not want to hear that if you rip away the off-the-plan exemption you are actually going to get less development, and that is what happened. It is just another one of the taxes that is layered on – tax after tax after tax, restriction after restriction after restriction. That is what this government has done for the 25-minus-four years that it has been in power – it has been there since 1999, bar the four years when Matthew Guy was planning minister in that period. Other than that, Labor have had control that whole time, and they have layered on tax after tax after tax after tax. That is the truth of the matter, and that is why it is so hard for young families to get homes.

We need to make sure that those taxes are wound back to the extent that this winds the tax back for one year – for one year. Twenty-five years they have been in power, minus four – that is the truth of the matter. In this immediate sweep they have been there for 10 years, and in 2017 they tore away the off-the-plan exemption. And of course it has had an effect. Of course it has slowed development. Of course it has meant less options of greater density in targeted and thoughtful locations.

This government hates the eastern suburbs too. Let us be clear what is going on here: they hate the eastern suburbs, and they are out to really crunch many of the suburbs in Melbourne’s east and south-east. They are doing that; whether it is Whitehorse or Boroondara or Monash or Stonnington, that is what they are doing. I note that Mr Mulholland has worked with community groups to host some forums out in the north-west, in Niddrie and North Essendon. The government is going for broke with high-density there. Well, I say: protect our community. Make sure you are bringing through proper supply. Matthew Guy could do that – (*Time expired*)

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:47): This is rather embarrassing: this is the second tax bill brought forward by the government that the Libertarian Party will be supporting in a row. I am a little bit worried that the government is going to use this as some sort of propaganda in the future and wave it around and say, ‘Our tax bills are so good even the Libertarians support them.’ I hope that they end this madness soon. Nevertheless, this is a tax cut. It is adding in a stamp duty concession for off-the-plan townhouses and apartments, and this also includes investors. This is undoubtedly a good thing. This will make it more attractive to invest in apartments and more attractive to buy apartments and townhouses, so I will be supporting this. I think it is important to think bigger than this, though. We need to think about what has actually caused this housing crisis, not just here in Victoria, not just in Australia but throughout many Western countries. In fact I note that in some places in Canada, like Toronto, their housing crisis is even worse than here.

The thing that made Western countries rich and prosperous was our acknowledgement and the defence of property rights. Since the Second World War, on property in general we have had more and more and more things that attack property rights: things like more taxes, which we are talking about today – that is an attack on property rights – planning controls, heritage controls, neighbourhood character, cultural heritage management plans et cetera et cetera et cetera. All of these things really are people that do not own some form of property having a say on someone else’s property. That is an attack on property rights, and that makes it less attractive for people to own property, to invest in property. It has resulted in a dysfunctional market, which is what we have in Victoria and many other places throughout our nation. We have a dysfunctional market that is not adapting to demand. A tax cut will

help with that, as we saw throughout the stamp duty inquiry. Stamp duty is one of the worst taxes because it disincentivises not only people buying places but also transactions, so we end up with a misallocation in the market. People are not living in accommodation that is suitable for their needs because they do not want to pay the money to shift to another house. They are travelling further from work because they do not want to move closer to work because they would have to pay this massive stamp duty, or they are not taking a job further away from their home because they cannot afford to pay the huge stamp duty that would be required to buy a new house. Stamp duty has all sorts of negative effects.

With taxes the classic motto is that you tax things that you want less of and you lower tax on things that you want more of. If you want less arson attacks, for example, you lower tobacco excise tax. If you want more employment, you lower payroll tax. If you want more people to own houses, you lower stamp duty and land tax. I will be strongly supporting this bill, but I want to make it better, so what I have done is draft an amendment. Can I have that circulated now, please.

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

David LIMBRICK: I agree with much of the commentary that has been made by many in this chamber and in the media that 12 months is entirely too short to have a real effect. The idea of lowering taxes should be to incentivise people to make different decisions, but because of this short timeframe many of the people that would benefit from this stamp duty concession have already made the decision. It is not affecting the market at all. As has been pointed out by Mr Mulholland and others, the lead time on many of these projects, especially apartments, is extremely long, so they will not benefit from this 12-month timeframe. Therefore what my amendment seeks to do is something very, very simple: it seeks to make this concession permanent. I am certain that everyone in this chamber that supports more housing – both more owner-occupiers and more rentals – in Victoria will support this amendment, because that is exactly what it would result in.

I note there has been some commentary. I do not think the government support this – we will wait and see – because they are worried about the financial impact. I think the Treasurer said in the media that the cost in forgone revenue would be approximately \$55 million over the 12 months. My response to that is we already saw that the government wasted \$589 million on a Commonwealth Games that we did not have, so if we had not made one bad decision, we could have done this for a decade. I think that there are a lot of things that the government can do to cut back on spending. They could tap the brakes on some of these projects. They are at the point now where their own projects are competing for labour and for resources, and that is what is causing wages and materials costs to go through the roof. If they slow down and tap the brakes on some of these projects, that would maybe lower costs. I have got lots of ideas for cutting back departments and things like this, and I am more than happy to talk with the Treasurer's office about all my ideas. I have got lots and lots of ideas on things that we could cut. \$55 million is not much in the scheme of things, considering that it will result in more people getting houses, cheaper rentals and also making Victoria a more attractive place to invest in.

My vision for Victoria is not a state that everyone thinks is a basket case. I want Victoria to be a leader on investment. I want everyone to see Victoria and say, 'That's a place where I want to invest. They welcome investment. They welcome people bringing capital there from all over the world.' That is what I would like to see. We are not there yet, but this amendment and this bill will help a little bit.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:54): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024, a piece of legislation that seeks to make amendments to introduce a 12-month off-the-plan land transfer duty concession for eligible apartments and townhouses, commencing on 21 October 2024, subject obviously to the passage of this legislation. It was one of a series of important policy announcements made by the Premier recently as part of the Allan Labor government's absolute focus on giving more Victorians the opportunity to buy a home. We cannot and will not stop our commitment, our endeavour and our absolute undying work to see

that more Victorians are given the opportunity to buy a home. That is what this legislation before us will do as part of a broad suite of measures to help build more homes here in Victoria.

I have spoken a lot in the last little while, the last year or so, about the housing crisis in the Parliament. I have made a series of contributions, and the central point I have made in each of those contributions is that we are not going to fix the housing crisis unless we build more homes. Whether we talk about social housing, whether we talk about planning or whether we talk about tax arrangements to support the construction of apartments and townhouses, as this bill does today, building more homes is the way we are going to solve the housing crisis here in Victoria, and I will absolutely stand up time and time again in this place and keep repeating that mantra until we have got the job done. We are pulling every lever we can to make sure that more homes are being built here in Victoria, and that is why I am proud to support this legislation here today.

The legislation will introduce a 12-month off-the-plan stamp duty concession to purchase eligible apartments and townhouses by allowing a 100 per cent deduction of the outstanding construction and refurbishment costs when determining how much stamp duty is owed. This tax concession will make it easier and more affordable for buyers, while providing the incentive to developers to provide the homes we need. It removes, for the period, the restrictive eligibility thresholds of \$750,000 for first home buyers and \$550,000 for existing home buyers. In practice it will mean that a Victorian family, whether a couple or a single buyer, could pay around \$28,000 less in stamp duty on a \$620,000 apartment, with stamp duty slashed from \$32,000 to just \$4000. Obviously the amount that is actually saved will depend on how much construction has taken place when the contract is signed, and obviously that will vary by individual case. So we are cutting up-front costs for buyers, speeding up new building and making it more affordable for anyone who wants to buy a home off the plan in this state. We were listening to the industry when they told us that this was one of the things that would help facilitate the construction of more homes in this state, and we have acted in response. There was feedback, and I heard some of it myself, that the lack of pre-sale activity was one of the barriers to larger scale developments progressing to the construction phase, and that is what this legislation is designed to achieve.

I was very pleased recently to be with the Treasurer, who was the Acting Premier at the time, and the Minister for Planning to announce the approval of a very significant development under the Minister for Planning's development facilitation powers to construct 365 new homes in Hawthorn on a site previously owned by the University of Melbourne, who sold the site and no longer needed it for their education purposes. A development is underway, fast-tracked by the Allan Labor government's development facilitation program. 365 new homes will be built on that site. According to the developer, who we spoke to on the day, the changes made by the Allan Labor government, the decisions taken by the Minister for Planning, were shaving 12 to 18 months off the timeframe for that development, which is a significant timesaving in bringing more homes to market. Through the work that was done as part of that development facilitation program, the planning authority worked with the developers to make sure that we maximised the amenity on the site. For example, on that site in Hawthorn more than 80 trees along the perimeter are being preserved as part of the development. There is going to be 5000 square metres of open space in this development – far, far in excess of what statutory minimum requirements would have been. About three trees would have needed to be preserved under the existing rules, but through the development facilitation program and through the work that was done between the planning authority and the developers we will now see a development with 80 trees and 5000 square metres of open space 12 to 18 months faster than would have been possible under the existing rules.

Right next door to that development in Hawthorn we have just had construction completed and residents moved back into a new social and affordable housing development in Bills Street, where 52 old social housing units were demolished to make way for 206 new apartments, new dwellings and new homes for Victorians, a 98 per cent increase in the amount of social housing available on that site. What we are going to see just on one block in Hawthorn, thanks to both the Big Housing Build and

the work being done by the Minister for Planning, is about 500 new homes across the two sites, an old university site and an old social housing site, which had about 50 homes there before. Across the new site we are going to have close to 500 new homes available for Victorians: 206 of them are available and people have moved in already and 365 will be in there in about 12 to 18 months, faster than they would have otherwise been, because of the actions of the Allan Labor government and because of the way the development facilitation program is bringing developments onstream faster.

What this bill will do in the context of those sorts of changes is ensure that once the planning approval has progressed – once the faster planning approvals are given – construction will be able to start a lot quicker because of pre-sales and prefinancing getting more apartments sold so that construction certainty and financing certainty are there to enable these developments to get construction underway faster. That is exactly what Victoria needs and exactly what, particularly, Melbourne needs to make sure that we have got the housing available for the community and to meet the needs of our growing city. We know that it is working. We know. You just have to look at the statistics to prove it. Victoria is approving more homes than any other state. Last year just under 53,000 new homes were approved, almost 10,000 more than in New South Wales – 10,000 more than a state that is significantly bigger than us. More homes are being approved here in Victoria, and the work continues. We do have more to do. We do have ambitious targets, but we have also got an ambitious policy agenda to go with it. We have seen that through the way that the ministers and the Premier – we have seen absolute leadership from the Premier on this issue – have been out over the course of the last month talking about housing and talking about giving more Victorians the opportunity to own a home close to their family and close to the places that they grew up, so they do not have to move away too far and can remain connected to the communities that they know and love. That is the crux of what we are trying to do with things like our activity centre program.

What I have found really interesting in the contributions we have had in this debate thus far is that on the one hand we had Mr Davis imploring ministers to act – he spent a large part of his speech critiquing the past and saying we just need ministers to act. That is exactly what we have got this government doing. That is exactly what we have got in the Minister for Planning, a minister who is acting to get more homes built for Victorians. She is not just talking; she is acting, she is approving. But what we see from those opposite is campaigns to stop more homes being built here in Victoria and criticisms of this government's efforts to build more homes for more Victorians. They do not want to see more homes being built in our communities. They particularly do not want to see more homes being built in our middle and inner suburbs, which are close to infrastructure, close to great schools, close to jobs, close to amenities. They are blockers on that front; they do not want to see it. Whilst Mr Davis had the temerity to stand up and say to the chamber that he thought that there are many locations across the city where developments 'can and should take place' – he got up and said that – the only place that he actually mentioned was well outside his own backyard and well outside of the places that he then went and passionately defended against any further development. He said he wanted to 'protect our community'.

What I want to see is more homes for more Victorians being built in places where there is good infrastructure, where there are upgraded schools, where they are close to jobs, close to opportunities. I will absolutely be supportive of developments like the one that I spoke about in Hawthorn on the old Melbourne Uni site. It was brought to market, and planning approval was delivered 12 to 18 months faster than it would have otherwise been thanks to the Labor government's development facilitation program. It stands next door to 200 new homes – a 98 per cent increase in social housing on the site next door – a development that was opposed by the Liberal Party. So whilst others oppose the building of homes in our communities, Labor supports more opportunity for more homes to be built so that more Victorians can live in and be part of great communities. There are so many things that this Labor government is doing to support housing I cannot go through them all.

One of the other things that I do just want to touch on is the incredible work that is being done to support rights for renters here in Victoria. We have a new rental dispute resolution body being set up

so that simple disputes between renters and landlords, such as about repairs or maintenance or damage or bond claims or rental increases, can be resolved more quickly through a free public dispute resolution service so that we have the capacity for any disputes between renters and their landlords to be resolved. This is just one element of the extensive program of support for renters in this state that this Labor government is putting through alongside the plans that we are already putting through to get more homes built.

This legislation today, by creating this tax concession for off-the-plan apartment and townhouse purchases, is another step that we are taking to make sure that there are more homes for more Victorians.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:09): I rise to speak on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024, which is quite an interesting bill. It is basically the government saying that they are trying to tackle the housing crisis that they created. They are reintroducing an exemption that they abolished, yet of course they are trying to look like the heroes, like they are going a long way to help people. In this state over the past 10 years, this government has introduced or increased 55 taxes, and 29 of those have been property taxes, which has obviously caused rental providers to absolutely flee the state and has made living just about unaffordable. I love what Mr Davis said before. He said this is a half-baked-but-step-in-the-right-direction bill, and I agree with his summation. It has been very interesting to see some of those opposite get very stroppy when my colleagues point out the facts that just do not go with their narrative. So it has been quite interesting.

Victoria's housing policies, especially legislation offering stamp duty concessions on new builds, fail to address the core issues of housing availability, property rights and investment security. The government's recent housing legislation is politically expedient but lacks the necessary depth and foresight. Instead of effectively addressing housing affordability and security, the policy appears to prioritise immediate optics over substantial, long-term solutions. It is a manipulation, really, of the public's opinion that undermines substantial legislative reform and perpetuates Victoria's housing and investment challenges. I have been amazed to hear them say that the Liberal Party are – what do they keep calling us?

Richard Welch interjected.

Renee HEATH: Blockers – that is it. They are acting as if we are the people that do not support people getting into houses when that just could not be further from the truth.

There are two principles for any investment, and they are secure property rights and the rule of law. Under Labor, Victoria lacks both. Legislation that does not address these underlying issues will only see very short-term impacts. In addition to this, the small concessions for a narrow range of properties proposed in this bill are for future costs and are due once the building is completed. This does not address the present housing needs or provide tax relief for standalone homes. Then there is the reality that many apartments do not get finished. There have been lengthy delays, cost blowouts and new taxes under this government. We saw the disastrous way they handled the pandemic. There have been insolvent and shoddy developers. These things are all well documented.

Head of research at Propertyology, a guy named Simon Pressley, said that the government's stamp duty offer was a trap for buyers. I thought, 'That's interesting.' This is what he said:

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

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

I thought that was incredible. Even if completed, the process often takes years to complete, so this will not do anything to stimulate housing demand today, when people are desperately needing cost relief and a place to live now, not in the years to come.

Another man, national research executive Richard Temlett, said that while 32,000 sales is not beyond the realm of possibility in the coming 12 months, it is likely to be lower, as there are fewer than 7000 currently being marketed. He said:

The government can't fall into the trap of thinking it will bring them all online, the market won't turn on overnight ...

Finally, the bill was designed to stonewall any objections and is a shallow political attempt to make the government appear to be relieving the housing affordability crisis. The government did this by issuing a press release that pre-emptively framed us as attempting to oppose good housing policy. We have seen this in many of the speeches today from those opposite. They have said, 'The coalition and the Greens block; they don't want people to get into houses' – things that are completely false. The Premier's media release makes it clear. It says:

The Government is concerned that the Liberals and Greens will work together to try to block or delay this legislation ... If they do so, it will stop tax cuts for people who want to buy a home.

This is such a disingenuous tactic that manipulates public debate through narrowly framing any opposition as not wanting Victorians to own a home. This could not be further from the truth, and it is dishonest politics – the sort of dishonest politics that has got this state into the financial mess that it is in today.

What I find worse is that they give Victorians a crumb and then it is like they come up with an amazing press release to look as if they are doing something, and they want the Victorians that are suffering because of their horrific decisions to be grateful. It is quite disgusting. This government has done everything it can to tax property and housing investment beyond reach and to disallow people, to make it impossible for young Victorians to get into a home. I want you to consider as well this statement from the Premier's same press release:

Recent ABS data showed Victoria was number one in the country for home approvals, home construction starts, and home construction completions.

What decade was she referring to there? When you actually look at the facts and the ABS data from earlier this year, they show that the number of houses provided for construction in Victoria has crashed to the lowest level in a decade. So the Premier's comments are designed to deliberately stifle proper debate and analysis, which would expose this shallow, short-sighted and wasteful legislation that will ultimately fail ordinary Victorians and will not deal with the core reasons that are driving housing affordability.

In closing I just also want to raise that even in my short two years here I have seen and I have heard so many people talk about how rental providers are fleeing the state because there are more property taxes here, there is more red tape here and it is more expensive to live here. And the more heavy-handed legislation Labor introduces, the more Victorians suffer. Despite the Premier's claim of Victoria having the highest housing approvals, the data completely contradicts this. PropTrack revealed that the number of homes on sale on realestate.com.au was up 10.2 per cent year on year and the strongest activity for that month since 2015. Melbourne has also had the third-largest jump in listings of any capital city apart from Canberra and Sydney, rising 16 per cent year on year. This is not an attractive place to invest. It is not an attractive place to start a business, to build a home. Because of the uncertainty that this government has created, it is very hard for people to be confident in this state.

We will be supporting this bill because it is a limp in the right direction, but I will close by saying that it is Labor's housing crisis. They created it, so they really need to do a whole lot to address it.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:18): I rise to speak on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024. We know that more homes for Victorians means more opportunity for Victorians, and unlike the blockers opposite, this is a government that is supporting providing all Victorians with those opportunities, a government that is committed to supporting all Victorians with their aspirations, including those of my generation, millennials, and those younger than us, gen Z, as

well. This is a government, a Premier and a Minister for Planning who staunchly believe that every Victorian should have that opportunity to work hard to buy or build their own home.

We know clearly from their statements today that that is not what those opposite want. We have heard some rather curious claims from members opposite already today in their contributions so far. The first point I would make is that this is one very important part of addressing Victoria's housing crisis, but from listening to the contribution of Dr Heath one could be forgiven for assuming that all the government was doing was bringing this bill in and saying, 'We'll do this little temporary concession – job done.' But as I am sure the good Dr Heath well knows, that is not what we are doing. That is one of many reforms announced by the Premier over the last several weeks. Those reforms include, for example, fairer renting with those new rental reforms, which come on top of previous reforms in this space – nation-leading reforms by the state Labor government. Another part of it is the short-stay levy, which was introduced and will help to increase the availability of housing for people to live in.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Michael GALEA: Mr Mulholland, you might not be supportive of that, but in order to support people to live in these houses we need to make them available. It is also about the granny flat changes from last year and the recent announcement about making it easier for Victorians to do simple two-lot subdivisions on their lots. For people that have that extra space that want to be able to help some fellow Victorians and make some money in the process, they have the option to do so. That is another part of it. Of course another part is unlocking these outer-suburban areas. These precinct plans are in places such as Clyde North, with the part 2 of the Cardinia Creek South precinct structure plan, one of many to come in the south-east, as with other regions. They are unlocking land in regional Victoria and unlocking land in some of our best serviced parts of metropolitan Melbourne with new activity centres, 50 activity centres across metro Melbourne, which are going to provide people with the opportunity to invest or buy a home for themselves in an area where they want to live, whether that be in a great place such as Clyde North or Pakenham, whether that be in a great regional city like Bendigo or Traralgon or, yes, whether that might even be in Camberwell Junction. Some people do want to live there – it is perhaps not my cup of tea, but a lot of people do, and you can well see why when you see how well serviced it is.

Yet we have Liberal members in this place coming in time after time, whether it is about Camberwell, whether it is about Bayside, attacking sensible infill density developments around railway stations and around hubs and attacking projects that will help to transform the housing opportunities for Victorians, such as the Suburban Rail Loop. They come in and they say, 'Block, block, block,' because that is all the Liberal Party knows how to do – block, block and block.

Joe McCracken interjected.

Michael GALEA: I will take you up on that, Mr McCracken. Unlike those opposite who block, we are investing in building blocks. That is what this Labor government is doing. Whilst you block all housing, we are investing in outer-suburban building blocks. We are investing in those activity centres as well. Whether you want to live in the inner city, in the outer suburbs or in the regions, you should have that option, and you should not on account of your age be discriminated against and locked out of the housing market. I think that is something that we should all believe in. I know some members opposite – perhaps a bit more quietly these days – do in fact support that. If only they would speak up to their colleagues, such as the strange Mr Newbury, who is looking through hotel windows. If only they would stand up for millennial Victorians, for generation Z Victorians, and not just bow in fealty to the great Mr Newbury and his bizarre antics outside hotels in Brighton –

Renee Heath: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Galea just made a terrible statement about Mr Newbury, who is not in here, and I would like him to withdraw his statement.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora): Do you wish to respond to the point of order?

Michael GALEA: I am more than happy to withdraw saying that Mr Newbury was creepily looking through hotel windows.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora): Thank you.

Michael GALEA: As I said, this is but one very important part of the government's response. It is not the only part. It is not the only solution. Frankly, if I were standing here saying that in this housing situation the government's sole response is going to be this bill, the claims of the opposition would be fair. It would be fair for them to say, 'You're not doing enough,' but we are doing so many things. And with each of these things, when we turn around, what do we find? The opposition saying, 'No. No, don't do that. Yes, we do support density, but just not in my backyard – not in Camberwell, not in Brighton, not in these places that already have the infrastructure and services. Don't do it this way.' By saying that, what you are saying to the people of Melbourne and to the future home owners – as I said, those millennials and gen Zs – is, 'Yeah, sure, you can buy a house. You can buy in the outer suburbs.' Never mind that the Liberals have not given any indication of what plans they have to provide the jobs, services or transport in those outer suburbs while this government are continuing to deliver the roads, the public transport upgrades, the hospitals, the hospital upgrades, the 100 new schools across the state and the new kindergartens, ambulance stations and police stations. I can give you countless examples of all of those just in the suburb of Clyde North. We are doing that, and we are doing so in a sensible manner. And by unlocking further land in those outer suburbs at the same time as we are unlocking those activity centres, we are saying to Victorians, 'We actually think you deserve the respect of being able to choose where you wish to live.'

There are some fantastic opportunities for people in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. I am very proud to represent a region that is very dynamic, that is growing, that has great culture and that has great community, but we need to grow at a more sustainable rate, and if you talk to people in the outer suburbs, they will say the exact same thing to you. For all the investment that this government is making – and again I will use the outer south-east as an example, because I do spend, along with Mr Tarlamis, a lot of time working in that area – in new schools, buses, hospitals, roads, police stations and ambulance stations, we are still running just to keep pace with where we are. It is not sustainable for us to be doing this for ever and ever.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Michael GALEA: That is why, Mr Mullholand, it is so important that we are investing at the same time as unlocking that growth and at the same time as investing in activity centres in the middle suburbs – in places like Clayton, in places like Box Hill and in places like Glen Waverley. Those opposite will come into this place and shout down any sort of suggestion of those inner and middle suburbs taking on any more density. They are all fine with talking about it in hypotheticals and theories; as soon as it comes to their backyard, it is no, no, no. At least the good Dr Bach had the courage to stand by his convictions and stand up in this place and call out those in the Liberal Party who were holding you back.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Michael GALEA: You may not do it, Mr Mulholland, but Dr Bach had the good sense of character to call out his own party when they were saying, 'No, let's not give those opportunities to young people.' To all these millennial MPs in this place from the Liberal Party saying this to those people, you are effectively selling out those millennials and generation Z Victorians that deserve the same opportunities that others in this place have had – that many of us here in this place have had. You are saying to them, 'You do not deserve a fair go. You do not deserve the chance to aspire,' and that is a disgrace, frankly.

The situation that we are in – the housing situation here in Victoria – is replicated in every state and territory across this nation. It is replicated in New Zealand, in most of Europe and in North America. This is not a problem that is unique to Victoria. But the government is doing everything in its power

to fix the housing crisis and to provide those opportunities for aspirational working young Victorians, because that is what a good government does. It does not carp from the sides and then do everything in its power to block any measures to fix an issue. It actually works on good policy, good development and getting things done for the people, as it is elected to do. And that is what the Allan Labor government does in Victoria. That is the leadership that we have from the Minister for Planning Sonya Kilkenny, that is the leadership we have from the Premier Jacinta Allan and that is the leadership that we see entirely lacking from those opposite, especially since the departure of the good Dr Bach.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Michael GALEA: Yes, here we go indeed, Mr Mulholland, because at least Dr Bach had the courage to say that he supports the aspirations of young Victorians. There was a time when the Liberal Party claimed to stand for aspiration. They claimed to stand for that. I know in other states Liberals look at those down here and say, ‘What on earth are you doing?’ I know from talking to other colleagues and indeed members of the New South Wales Liberal Party just last week that they were astonished that the Victorian Liberals – well, they are astonished by many things about the Victorian Liberals, let us be honest – continue to oppose the Suburban Rail Loop. I was in Sydney last week, and I did have the chance to ride on the fantastic new Sydney Metro, a very good project.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Indeed – I will take you up on that, Mr Mulholland – it was a Liberal government that implemented that project. Labor took it at the end and delivered it successfully, but it was for the most part a Liberal state government project, because in New South Wales even the New South Wales Liberal Party supports public transport projects. They may have tried to ruin the Metro Tunnel here by routing it halfway to Fishermans Bend and back. They may still continue to oppose the Suburban Rail Loop. The Liberals in New South Wales do not understand why you are continuing to oppose this –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, Acting President, on relevance, we seem to have strayed from the intent of the bill. I could find nothing in the bill itself about public transport, so I would ask you to bring the member to order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jacinta Ermacora): I ask Mr Galea to return to the bill.

Michael GALEA: I will just say that the fact that Mr Mulholland refers to the Suburban Rail Loop as just a public transport project shows exactly their short-sightedness on what is fundamentally a housing project. It is a railway and it is a housing project. We are here to talk about housing. The fact that they cannot see it says everything about the lack of vision that that party has for our state – no vision, no plans, just carping from the sidelines at a government that is continuing to do everything it can with a Premier who is showing leadership and actually delivering outcomes for Victorians. We saw it with the level crossings; we have seen it with the growth area infrastructure. We are continuing to do the work.

In this bill we are making it one little bit easier for Victorians to own their own home. That is something that I would have thought even the Liberal Party would support, but apparently not. Apparently we are the only voice in this chamber – and perhaps Mr Limbrick as well – standing up for Victorians to have that aspirational opportunity to build or buy their own home. It is a great shame that, with the Victorian Liberal Party across there, we see the continued blocking, the continued lack of vision and the continued carping from the sidelines while this government gets on and delivers for all Victorians. I do commend this bill to the house, and I look forward to further contributions.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (15:32): I rise to speak on the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024. While this bill only provides a short-term solution to a long-term issue, the actuality is there is a housing crisis and Victorians are doing it tough. This bill falls short of actually addressing the issue at hand. The narrow focus on stamp duty concession for 12 months for off-the-plan purchases

is a limited, ineffective and ultimately inadequate solution to the problem that continues to plague our housing market. Victoria needs stamp duty relief across the board, not just on units in skyscrapers for just 12 months.

This bill proposes a significant reduction in stamp duty for off-the-plan properties, primarily for apartments and units. While such measures may offer temporary relief to some buyers, the bill fails to address the structural issues that underpin the crisis we are facing in the Victorian housing market. The government proposal essentially aims to encourage more speculation purchases to fix our own housing debacle. What this bill seeks to do is not a sustainable solution to the housing crisis. Reducing stamp duty on off-the-plan purchases might reduce some immediate costs but still does not guarantee that these properties will provide long-term value for the buyers or contribute meaningfully to solve our housing supply issues. The reality of construction costs, interest rates and market conditions means risk remains high for those entering the off-the-plan market.

Secondly, the bill fails to consider the broader need of the Victorian population. The reduction of stamp duty applies exclusively to off-the-plan apartments, units and townhouses. While these types of properties may suit some buyers, they do not suit or are not a desired option for many growing families. This bill simply fails to meet the needs of growing families who require access to outdoor space, gardens and larger living areas. There is a real danger in the government's approach to push families in financial difficulty towards smaller, more compact living arrangements in high-density developments, which is a driving cause of overcrowding that reduces quality of life for those who need space for children, pets and outdoor activities. This bill does nothing to stimulate the supply of house-sized homes, places with space for families to grow and kids to play. It fails to acknowledge that for many Victorians apartment living is not an acceptable substitute for a traditional family home, which we have all grown up knowing in recent years. There are clear gaps between the government's focus on units and the reality of what Victorian families need regarding housing.

This bill fails to address the deeper structural issues facing the construction industry, such as high land prices, labour shortages and regulatory hurdles. Slashing stamp duty alone will not solve these problems. If the government was truly committed to addressing the housing crisis, it would take a more comprehensive approach. A general reduction of stamp duty across the board, not just for off-the-plan purchases, would help all buyers, whether they are first home buyers who want to upsize or investors.

Furthermore, the government should consider broader reform of the Victorian property tax system, which currently includes 27 different taxes that place significant burdens on developers, homebuyers and property owners. To name a few: land tax, which has more than doubled recently; rent tax, which burdens small land owners and those with modest property investments; municipality and industrial landfill levies; bin taxes; and it goes on. To truly address this housing crisis, the government needs to think beyond short-term measures like a stamp duty reduction for only 12 months. A holistic approach is needed, with comprehensive stamp duty reform for all property transactions, not just for off-the-plan purchases.

Taxes never make homes more affordable; they only make them more expensive. The Allan Labor government must cut the red tape that holds us back and release unutilised Crown land for urban planning reform. The government must make more land available for housing development, streamline planning processes to encourage sustainable, affordable housing options and encourage investment in affordable housing for low- and middle-income families, including the construction of homes on lots that cater for the needs of growing families with family-sized homes with real backyards. Instead of relying on speculative off-the-plan sales, the government should incentivise local developers to build high-quality, community-focused, sustainable housing that meets environmental measures and the long-term needs of all Victorians.

In conclusion, while the Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024 may offer temporary financial relief, it fails to address the underlying issue that continues to hinder the housing market in Victoria

by focusing narrowly on off-the-plan sales and high-density property developments and does not provide stamp duty relief for families wanting to buy a house. While we do not oppose this bill, which offers immediate relief for those trying to enter the property market, it fails to address the deeper issue at hand which all Victorians are facing. The fact that Victoria has the highest property taxes in the country does not help. Under this Labor government, this is the real driver of the housing crisis we are facing.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:39): The Duties Amendment (More Homes) Bill 2024 introduces the stamp duty concession for off-the-plan homes that was announced by the Premier on 21 October this year. The bill is an important part of a comprehensive suite of actions by the Allan Labor government to address the housing shortage, and the bill for 2024 introduces a new temporary concession. Purchasers will be able to deduct all the costs of construction from the sale price when calculating how much stamp duty they owe. This will encourage more off-the-plan purchases for apartments and townhouses. Off-the-plan developments are an important part of the housing market. They provide purchasers with an opportunity to buy a brand new home, often with smaller deposits and longer timeframes for settlement. They also provide greater certainty for developers to move ahead with new builds, knowing that there are purchasers already signed up. Encouraging a steady supply of new housing is vital for our regional economy and our Victorian economy. The changes proposed in this bill will encourage investment and support the continued supply of new housing. It will provide an incentive for investors and others who are not eligible for existing concessions. The move responds to industry feedback that the current interest rate burden has slowed sales and stopped developments from getting underway. With a concession reducing up-front costs for more buyers, developers can look forward to more pre-sale success, which will help meet finance requirements faster and start the construction of new homes sooner. Bringing more projects to market sooner will boost housing supply, support the construction sector and grow the amount of housing available for rent. Overall it is about supply.

This bill will support anyone buying an apartment, unit or townhouse off the plan. Anyone can claim the concession, not just first home buyers and owner-occupiers, which is the current situation. Thresholds will be removed so the concession will be available for apartments, units and townhouses of any value. The 12-month extended concession applies from 21 October, and it will allow 100 per cent deduction of outstanding construction and refurbishment costs when determining how much stamp duty is owed. The amount you save depends on how much construction has occurred at the time you enter into the contract. Generally someone buying an apartment off the plan is likely to pay about a quarter of the stamp duty they would pay without the off-the-plan concession. The concession could mean Victorians might pay around \$28,000 less stamp duty on a \$620,000 apartment, for example, with duty slashed from around \$32,000 to about \$4000. The concession applies to apartments, units or townhouses in a strata subdivision, meaning they retain common property such as a driveway or a shared hallway. Properties that are not part of a strata subdivision, such as a house and land package, are not eligible, but existing concessions for first home buyers and owner-occupiers will apply in that category. This is good for Victorians broadly and specifically for those considering going into townhouses and apartments. Victorians are currently experiencing high rates of cost-of-living pressure, and this amendment to the duties payable will alleviate that pressure and boost housing construction. In particular it will provide a boost to units, apartments and townhouses.

I now want to add some of the broader context in which this initiative is occurring. The government has invested a landmark \$6.3 billion in the Big Housing Build and the Regional Housing Fund, ensuring more social and affordable housing in Victoria. More than 10,000 homes are underway or complete, and more than 5000 Victorians have already moved into their new homes. We know the demand for social and affordable housing and housing in general reflects the broader housing market and the cost-of-living pressures being experienced across the state.

In Warrnambool and south-west Victoria the government has already completed 38 new homes, and the construction of a further 85 is underway. On Mortlake Road in Warrnambool the Salvation Army

is preparing to construct a 21-unit development as part of Victoria's Big Housing Build. We are also putting significant focus on reducing vacant properties across Victoria, with a 30 per cent reduction in vacancy rates. This represents 1111 properties from 30 June 2023 to 31 July this year. Properties are being tenanted as soon as possible. This includes undertaking the necessary inspections, safety checks and repairs in line with Residential Tenancies Act 1997 compliance. As a result, newly tenanted properties are in good condition, ensuring comfortable living with tenant satisfaction and retention.

There are currently 11 vacant properties in the Warrnambool local government area. Of these, eight are being redeveloped – and these are public housing properties – as part of the Regional Housing Fund to provide 17 new dwellings. One requires extensive works to be undertaken to return the property to a tenantable standard, and the remainder are being made available for letting. It is a significant milestone that the Allan Labor government is redeveloping more end-of-life housing stock than ever before, and this is thanks to recent investments from the state and Commonwealth governments, including the housing statement, the Regional Housing Fund and the social housing accelerator program.

I would like to draw specific attention to the work done by Women's Housing Ltd, a specialist housing provider with a mission to advocate on the housing needs –

Richard Welch: On a point of order, Acting President, I fail to see what this has to do with stamp duty exemptions.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Further to the point of order, Acting President, my debate is about the broader context in which this bill sits around our housing initiatives, and debate has included that on both sides.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): It has been a very free flowing debate, I can say firsthand, but I will ask Ms Ermacora to return the bill.

Jacinta ERMACORA: I will definitely reiterate that regional Victoria is very, very relevant to this bill and that all of the housing initiatives that are in place and being put in place are relevant to the broader story around housing in Victoria.

In relation to Women's Housing Ltd, funded under the Big Housing Build by the Allan Labor government in 2019, in Portland there have been 31 dwellings forecast to be completed this month, with another 20 due for completion in June 2025. In Hamilton seven homes have been completed with an additional nine homes being completed in November. In Camperdown construction is well underway, with 13 homes due for completion in March 2025. Warrnambool has successfully completed eight homes in a very tight market. Women's Housing Ltd is of course working actively across the whole of Victoria, and I commend them for the work they are continuing to do to contribute to more housing stock for women and children.

Finally, before I close, the regional worker housing fund is another suite within the picture of this particular bill, and in Warrnambool recently we announced \$5.29 million for 14 cabins to be constructed in partnership with Warrnambool City Council and a range of businesses in the district to provide key worker housing.

All of these initiatives, including the specific initiative of this bill, are being implemented by the Allan Labor government directly to address the challenges in housing that are faced by this entire nation, and south-west Victoria is no exception. Alleviating demand for key worker accommodation, supporting vulnerable women, building more government-owned homes and supporting vulnerable members of the community into housing is a priority of this government, and I fully endorse this bill.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:50): You will be pleased to know I will have a short contribution on this bill. Honestly, the way those opposite speak you would think that this was some sort of revolutionary thing that is being done to transform housing in this state. What you are really doing is championing the fact that you are reversing something you opposed in 2017. It is

basically a capitulation. It is a capitulation like in every other element of your housing policy over the last 12 months. Capitulation after capitulation as your targets are missed, as builders go broke under your watch, as you add 29 taxes, as your precinct plans fall into a shambles and stumble around, as you take levies from the peri-urban areas and then do not invest back in infrastructure – none of what you have done here addresses the core issues in any meaningful way.

To give this a sense of scale, this is an initiative that is going to cost the government \$55 million. So let us just understand that in context: the government takes \$8.52 billion in stamp duty, it takes \$6.5 billion in land tax and it has taken \$1.2 billion from the COVID levy, so with the weight of \$8.52 billion from stamp duty and the weight of \$6.5 billion from land tax and \$1.2 billion from the COVID levy, \$55 million on this is going to suddenly turn around the housing crisis. The crisis that you created you are going to turn around with \$55 million for one year. That is why the amount of time expended by those opposite on talking about everything except the bill and the actual material benefits of the bill is quite extraordinary. \$55 million for some individuals will actually help tweak up demand because it does help affordability, and we do have an affordability problem. But in terms of the core economic problem, which is supply, what does \$55 million do? It does nothing to address the systemic problem that you have got in that you have done everything in all your policies in the last 10 years to destroy supply, to destroy the incentive for investment, to destroy the industry by competing with the housing industry with Big Build projects and diverting capital and effort and investment to those projects, to push up prices and to not release more land in regions.

And typical of the whole thing, your plan is just a continuation of your no choice and no voice, because again you have only put this stunning \$55 million policy on flats – on new flats, not on houses and not on homes, because for some reason the Victorian Labor government hates people having homes. It only wants people in flats. It is reinterpreting the Australian dream as having a two-bedroom flat on the 43rd storey of a high-rise building as somehow solving a problem. It is not a home really; they are flats. It is not where you raise families. People do not want them and yet this scattergun approach that we have seen in the last six months where you change a regulation here, you throw an activity precinct there, you override local amenity here, you suddenly say that you are going to change stuff – there is no systematic approach to this at all, it is just a series of throwing mud at a wall, hoping some of it sticks and hoping that some of it actually looks like a policy so that you can get another press release out in time for the news cycle.

This represents a \$55 million policy. We will support it; we will totally support it, but if you had a set of scales and on one side you had what you had done to disincentivise supply, with taxes after taxes after taxes, and you put on the other side of the scale a slight concession on stamp duty, it goes nowhere near levelling up the scales at all. So it is not going to solve the problem. We are very happy to see a reduction in tax – that is a fantastic thing. I commend the amendment which will make it permanent. I cannot understand why this does not apply to standalone homes. Why doesn't this exemption apply to standalone homes? Why aren't people pursuing the Australian dream of equal value? Why is it only people you want to lock up in dogboxes in high-density urban ghettos that this applies to? It is all because your policy is very wrongheaded indeed.

I will not go on much longer, because Mr Davis, Mr Mulholland and Dr Heath all made excellent contributions in terms of how it does not address the systemic problems. It does not address supply. It does nothing to incentivise the industry to really turn around their level of investment when they are confronted with the headwinds of land tax in Victoria. I will conclude there.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (15:56): It is very interesting to follow on from that contribution, because that reveals a lot about how the Liberals view housing and about what their fundamental beliefs are on housing, whereas this side sees the fundamental purpose of housing as being somewhere for someone to be able to build their life out of; to be able to go every day to a good job with fair pay and conditions; to be able to educate themselves and their family and get the training and the skills they need to continue to be a productive worker within our state, supporting our state's economy; and to be able to get access to good-quality health care via good-quality infrastructure,

connecting people with that, all within a sustainable local environment. This is the sort of holistic approach to housing that the Allan Labor government and Labor governments before it have taken to ensure that people not only have access to homes but have access to communities. Mr Welch wanted to try and boil all that down by talking about people living in dogboxes. He may be wanting to refer to the four years those opposite last had in power when there was no concern for quality, and I will come back to talk about the incredible lengths this side is going to to ensure quality and livability of homes for Victorians.

Those opposite obviously have a fundamental disdain for people living in different ways, much like they do socially with people living in different ways. If Victorians do not live according to the 1950s model of what the Liberal Party see as the way Victorians should live their lives, then they are fundamentally opposed to it. We see that across a range of social issues in this state, and Victorians do not like it. What we see out of the policies that members of the government have spoken to today and I will go through as I make my contribution is that they are about ensuring there are housing options for all Victorians wherever they are at in their lives, depending on their age, their family situation, their needs. It is about ensuring all Victorians have access to good-quality affordable housing.

I will come back to some other comments that we have heard from those opposite, but through this legislation we will see concessions for off-the-plan purchases of apartments, townhouses and units, which will see Victorian home purchasers save tens of thousands of dollars. As I said before, it is all a part of these many policies that the Allan Labor government is bringing to see more quality and affordable housing here in Victoria – the 50 new activity centres around our train and tram zones, with our high-frequency trains. The fact is there has been investment in metro. There has been investment in unlocking the capacity of our train network and in building those trains right here in Victoria for Victorians, ensuring that people can get jobs near these centres and that people can travel on these trains through the 50 new and upgraded train stations. Whether people are on public transport or are in their cars, with the 84 level crossings that we have already seen removed, it is all part of ensuring people can live where they want to live but have the networks and services to do so in a way that gives them the best quality of life possible. The upgrades to services, to our schools and kinders – 70 upgrades near these activity centres – ensure that the entire family, everyone living in that home, can access what they need to where they want to.

Another example of the Liberal Party's disdain for people having a roof over their head was shown last sitting week in the short-stay contribution debate. The Mornington Peninsula has high levels of short-stay accommodation, and it has become increasingly difficult for locals, particularly families, to be able to get a roof over their heads affordably so that they can stay within their communities. The short-stay levy, the 7.5 per cent levy, has been put in place to ensure that we can have more money to flow into social housing, new construction and maintenance.

Mr Welch made a comment before that this government has wasted money investing in the \$5 billion Big Build, and I will come to the extra \$1 billion for regional housing shortly, but again, it is another glimpse into the mentality of the Liberals that money invested in social housing is seen as a waste. Money invested in social housing, ensuring that people have a roof over their heads and that families are safe, is a critically important investment that this side will always stand by and work to deliver more of. The short-stay levy is a way of helping to deliver that, but it is also a way of helping to free up more family homes. We know that what those opposite said as the bill went through last week was that they will repeal it. They do not want to see people in their homes, because to them that is not the way they view housing. It is a very, very different mentality on that side. We have a number of other policies that are going to see more homes built and more Victorians in these homes, such as getting two homes onto one block, whether that is through our small second homes or the granny flats, speeding up the time it takes for approvals to be able to subdivide and get a second home and get more people living where they want to live.

I touched on before the \$5 billion of investment – we have got the Minister for Housing here – and the \$1 billion extra investment in regional social housing. I think it reflects the Liberals' lack of

understanding of the depth of need for housing. The fact that we are doing work within inner Melbourne, in middle Melbourne and in the regions means that we are getting people across the board into homes. We are going to have 10 years of greenfield sites coming online, the longest ever pipeline, with 27 additional greenfields. Having this continuity and having this longevity to give surety of investment will see that pipeline come and will see families in homes, because it is not about picking one or the other, as Mr Welch was saying before; it is about ensuring that people can live where they want to live affordably but also in good-quality homes. We know that with what those opposite did in their time, they would be lucky if many of them were left standing. They would be lucky if many of them were left standing from the quality of the build. Having worked in construction for 10 years, I can tell you that you can tell what is a good-quality build, what is a sound investment, what will stand the test of time and what is absolute garbage that is going to see high energy bills, is going to see low quality of life, is going to see people feeling the heat and the cold. Victorians would not need to be spending their income on electricity or other energy bills if you just get that building right from the start.

The government is working to unlock more land, including through VicTrack, continuing another of the many, many policies to make more housing become available. And Minister Tierney has recently announced regional worker accommodation. This regional worker accommodation is seeing workers able to get to where they need to be, around health services in regional Victoria. This \$150 million investment is making sure that that housing is available where it is needed and when it is needed. The knock-on effects of that are incredible, because when you talk to people in local communities about a variety of services, whether it is health care, whether it is child care, whether it is aged care, ensuring that those workers are there to deliver the services that are required, the services needed, is critically important to regional communities, because if you are living in a regional community and you do not have those workforces there, then you are in real trouble. We know that those opposite, particularly under the Kennett era, ripped the guts out of regional communities from an infrastructure perspective, so we have put that infrastructure back in. But the worker accommodation has ensured that not only is the infrastructure there but we have also got the workforce there, because there is nothing as crushing as thinking that there is not the workforce within that infrastructure to support the local community. That is where the investment we are making in child care and kinder, in primary and high school education is so important. We are ensuring that parents can be in the workforce and support the local community.

I do want to touch on a motion I moved last week and just note how the lead speaker on the other side, Mr Mulholland, has been sold out by his Liberal colleagues. Mr Mulholland has made some good contributions in the past. There have been some good terms around here. I cannot recall them off the top of my head, but the 'noalition' is I think one that we are all very familiar with. They do not want to get behind policies that will see more people getting homes. They want to use political partisanship to pointscore on so many policies that the Allan Labor government is bringing to Victorians to deliver more quality affordable housing. Each time they are just trying for their political partisanship to take a score on the way through – 'This won't work, that won't work, that's no good, this isn't any good' – when at the end of the day they will probably support it, they will let it go through. There will be some things like short-stay they will want to come back and repeal if they get in. We know that they will cut jobs, we know that they will cut services, we know that it will be nonstop cuts if the Liberals get into power again and we know it is Victorians who will pay through job losses and through loss of services.

The work that this government is doing to create a pipeline of housing through policy after policy, taking a holistic approach to ensure a variety of housing – of sizes and of needs – and connections to public transport, to road infrastructure, to local community parks, to services and to well-paid, good-condition jobs, every one of these policies connects together. It is easy for those opposite to take pot shots, because they do not have the value base to sit down – this is a word they will not comprehend – collectively, to sit down and identify what it is they believe in and what it is they want to say to the Victorian people that they will bring and offer. They are unable to do it. It is this side that identifies needs, identifies those values and brings the policy to deliver housing to Victorians.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clause 1 (16:12)

Evan MULHOLLAND: I might just roll through a bunch of questions on clause 1. Minister, why didn't the government consider a value cap as part of this proposal?

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for your question and your interest in this. One of the things that we have sought to do in developing and delivering this particular bill and the actions that underpin it is to make sure that we can provide that supercharged process for pre-sales of apartments, townhouses or units. This is where again we see a spectrum of value that operates across this particular configuration of housing offerings. That is why it is important that we have been able to deliver an off-the-plan concession in the terms that have been outlined by the policy announcement and also as contemplated by this bill. We do want to make sure that we are building more homes all the way around Victoria and that those homes are able to meet the variety of different needs for singles and couples and for families as well. This is where we are again addressing those challenges around poor showings for pre-sales, which are effectively creating delays and putting upward pressure on costs for projects for construction. In seeking to make those projects viable, it is about making sure that we can provide that assistance to people in activating the off-the-plan concession through those contracts entered into on or after 21 October.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Someone technically buying a \$6 million apartment or a \$5 million apartment in Prahran or somewhere like that, a luxury apartment, would get a concession under the government's proposal, but a family buying a freestanding home over \$750,000 would get no concession at all. Was there any thought or discussion or proposal about expanding the concession or making it fairer?

Harriet SHING: The rationale for the announcement – and this has been traversed at some length in today's second-reading debate but also by the Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Planning, and I have gone into in some detail since 21 October and the announcement of this policy – is to make sure that we can remove those obstacles that have presented in pre-sale and the pace of pre-sale for apartments, units and townhouses. This is about making sure that the areas where movement of stock is important for the purpose of certainty in development and making sure we can get those developments kickstarted earlier and with more surety and that visibility of a pipeline is about that particular configuration of housing. We know that as the population grows and as density increases it is apartments, units and townhouses that will be the types of housing that meet that need. This is where again the concession as it is set out in the bill will directly achieve these outcomes.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Under this proposed plan, the off-the-plan stamp duty incentive will only be enforced for 12 months. As you would know, developments can take years to scope and get off the ground. In your own portfolio even community or social housing developments will take years to get off the ground, so it is something you would be quite familiar with, Minister. Why didn't the government consider extending this incentive for a longer period than 12 months?

Harriet SHING: It is a one-off stimulus, and we have been pretty clear on that in public comment but also in the course of this debate. The current environment – as you yourself have said and as many other of your colleagues have referred to, again in this place, the other place and public discussion – has been really tough for the development sector. The housing statement and the affordability partnership and the work that the Treasurer, the planning minister and a number of other portfolios are doing have been about understanding where those blockages and those congestion points exist, where the pressure exists in the development and delivery of development projects for residential developments and how we can undertake work which alleviates those congestion points.

There are a number of peak bodies that have made their views particularly clear on this subject, and we want to make sure that when we kickstart those residential developments we can do so by encouraging people to get into that pre-sale environment and to make sure that we can see the concessions that have previously applied to investors. Since 2017 we have had that investor framework operate. We will have an existing off-the-plan concession for owner-occupiers and first home buyers that will continue to apply after this 12-month concession ceases, but this concession and the operation of this policy and the legislation is for a 12-month period again to make sure that we can respond to the industry feedback that the current interest rate burden has slowed sales and stopped those developments from getting underway. Mr Mulholland, it may be within your wheelhouse to predict what the Reserve Bank and others might do. It is not within mine, and that is why we have got the 12-month timeframe in place.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Has the government modelled or estimated how many additional homes will be built as a result of this reform?

Harriet SHING: The concessions are estimated to help support around 3000 property purchases over the next 12 months. As I said, it is about a kickstart stimulus for the purpose of development in pre-sales that will enable that work to get underway, will alleviate congestion points, will ensure that more projects can become viable and will also provide certainty to purchasers who can enter into those contracts. Generally someone buying an apartment off the plan is likely to pay about a quarter of the stamp duty that they would pay without the off-the-plan concession. I will give you a quick example, if I may. If there is someone using this concession who buys off the plan before any construction work starts, they could pay around \$28,000 less stamp duty on a \$620,000 apartment – that is not quite the \$6 million apartment that you referred to there – so duty will be slashed also from \$32,000 to around \$4000. So again, it is that kind of example which will see more developments get off the ground more quickly, and that then benefits people who are buying apartments, units or townhouses, including first home buyers, and we have had, as you would be aware, a range of initiatives including the homebuyers equity fund, the first home owner grants and other support for first home owners. This is then about making sure that in this particular species of stock, namely townhouses, units or apartments, we have got that stimulus in place to make sure that over the next 12 months we can provide that certainty and bring additional stock online.

Evan MULHOLLAND: And just to get it on the record, what is the anticipated cost to the budget of this reform?

Harriet SHING: The estimated revenue impact of the concession is about \$54.7 million from 2024–25 to 2027–28. The full cost of the concession is actually spread over time because we have got a lag between contract signing – so anytime for the 12 months after 21 October – and settlement. Settlement is likely to extend beyond 2027–28, for example. So that is where again we want to make sure that we are continuing to understand what the estimated impact is, and we will continue to work on that as the year progresses.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The government is lifting the eligibility requirements for this incentive, meaning investors, both domestic and foreign, as well as homebuyers can have stamp duty cleared or reduced. What do you anticipate the split will be between investors, both domestic and foreign, and homebuyers?

Harriet SHING: The Department of Treasury and Finance has estimated that around 3000 taxpayers will benefit from that 12-month stimulus from 21 October, but there has not actually been a split that has been modelled by the type of taxpayer. Again, this is about providing more homes, so the split of taxpayer is then something which is of secondary relevance to what it is that we are seeking to do and what the rationale is that underpins this bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND: But some will technically not be taxpayers if they are foreign investors – some. If the government has not done the modelling, what would the minister say the chief objective

of the bill is? Is it a policy designed to help Victorians purchase homes or is it about incentivising property development?

Harriet SHING: Thanks, Mr Mulholland, for a really useful question. But I do just want to correct you: foreign investment does still pay tax.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Harriet SHING: You say ‘some tax’; foreign investment pays tax on property, such as property contemplated by the pre-sales which are supercharged by this particular bill and by the policy announcement. So when you talk to what the primary objective is, one is inexorably linked to the other. That affordability and availability have been two of the key challenges around housing supply and what that means for mechanisms that will enable people to find a place to call home. We do know that we are seeing a change in affordability in Melbourne. Some corners of the political discourse will paint this as a change in house values, but it is about affordability – that housing is becoming more affordable. This is indicative of the fact that the work that we are doing through the housing statement, through the changes that have been introduced not just through this bill but through the planning framework and the work that Minister Kilkenny is doing alongside at least four other portfolios, mine included, is having an impact. But this is long-term work that requires a sustained effort, and when we provide this support to enable the construction cost to be deducted from the sale price when calculating how much stamp duty someone owes, this then means that there is a double benefit – not only for developers, who get the benefit of a pre-sale more quickly and with more certainty, but also for the people who are purchasing a unit, a townhouse or an apartment in this period, which enables them to claim the concession. That means we can have those buildings, of any value, form part of what we are doing to incentivise purchase for the purpose of development and bring these additional homes on line.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Seven years ago, dating back to 2017, when the government made these changes to remove the concession that it is now bringing back, the Real Estate Institute of Victoria (REIV) warned that they do not support the removal of off-the-plan concessions for investors and said that that change would reduce the attractiveness of property investment in Victoria, further limiting rental supply at a time when vacancy rates were already tightening. Do you agree that that is what has happened, and does the government regret removing the off-the-plan concessions?

Harriet SHING: It is a nice attempt at expressing an opinion. I do not intend to do that as it relates to this particular bill, but you have begun by quoting the Real Estate Institute of Victoria. I do just want to take you perhaps to a number of public comments made by the chief executive of the Real Estate Institute of Victoria Kelly Ryan by way of media release on 21 October, the date of the commencement of this policy, entitled ‘REIV welcomes stamp duty cuts for off-the-plan units, apartments and townhouses’. The release reads as follows:

The Real Estate Institute of Victoria (REIV) welcomes the Victorian Government’s plan to offer stamp duty concessions on all new apartments, units and townhouses purchased off-the-plan in Victoria.

In particular, the REIV supports the government’s decision to make concessions uncapped and available to all buyers of off-the-plan strata properties, not just first home buyers.

...

We’re pleased the Allan Government is introducing tax concession measures that seek to incentivise private investment in Victoria’s housing ecosystem ...

While we recognise this is a first step –

it goes on to say –

our hope is that these concessions will not only help stimulate development of urgently needed higher density homes across the state, but also establish a clearer pathway for broader stamp duty reform.

That is not within the scope and contemplation of this bill, just to be clear. The release goes on to say:

The REIV has long advocated for tax reforms including a comprehensive review of stamp duty, a burdensome tax that restricts investment and mobility in Victoria’s property market.

...

A strong pipeline of new housing in established areas will pave the way for long term stability in the housing market ...

The REIV and the real estate industry will be closely watching the Victorian Government's announcements relating to its Housing Statement throughout the week.

On that, I also just want to talk briefly to the REIV's position on rental yields and what that means. It is a topic that I and many other ministers have covered extensively with, for example, Jacob Caine of the REIV, who is very quick to confirm that rental yields are at an all-time high. It is then also, though, in addressing that challenge of affordability and availability, about making sure that we can bring additional stock online, and that includes across the offering of real estate investment and owner-occupier work as well as those purchasers, whether they are first home buyers or people looking to downsize. It is then about providing that greater volume of stock coming onto the market, which we know is going to have, and is already having, an effect on affordability here in Melbourne.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I will ask the question a different way. You quoted the REIV, who said that this change will make housing more affordable. Did the government's changes seven years ago make housing more unaffordable?

Harriet SHING: Mr Mulholland, I am here to speak to the bill today. Again, they might be matters that you can speculate on. They will no doubt be matters that you will continue to speculate on, and it is something that I have heard as a quite frequent theme in the course of the contributions made by you and your colleagues. What we know is the work we are doing in a number of different portfolios – the work of the housing statement, tax reform in the form of this stamp duty concession and the work on everything from targets through to a review of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 – is all working. It is long-term work, however. If we are to provide the volume of supply into the market, we need to provide certainty for developers. We need to alleviate the challenges of a complex system, and this is one part of doing exactly that.

David LIMBRICK: I move:

1. Clause 1, line 3, omit "temporary".

I went over what this amendment does earlier, but it does something very simple – it takes this temporary concession and makes it permanent.

Evan MULHOLLAND: We will not oppose this amendment, and I thank Mr Limbrick for putting it forward. As I said in my contribution earlier on, many in the sector have called for this concession in the past. We both heard from the Property Council of Australia in the stamp duty inquiry we were on, and they were quite keen to see this concession back and did not advocate for any time limit at the time. I think it should be supported if we believe that this policy will do good and if we believe the many in the sector who say that it will not work if it is just for 12 months, that that will not have the intended effect. We certainly do not want to get in the way of an effort to get more people into homes.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: As I stated in my contribution earlier, the Greens' view is that, as proposed in the bill, removing stamp duty for a limited time period is definitely accessible. We have been on the record: we do not like stamp duty. However, the idea of removing it in perpetuity without a corresponding method of taxation to replace that lost revenue – for example, a broad-based land tax – in our view would have too big of an impact on the government's ability to pay for things that Victorians need. In that vein, we are not able to support this amendment today.

Harriet SHING: Thanks, Mr Limbrick, for your amendment. We have been really clear on the intent of this stimulus – it is a one-off stimulus. The current environment, as I said earlier in response to a comment from Mr Mulholland, is really challenging. I do not have the ability to prognosticate about where and how interest rates may go such that the current circumstances and the pressures being faced by developers and also by consumers of purchasing and purchasing arrangements would be affected. A 12-month concession will encourage more people to purchase those off-the-plan properties

sooner rather than delay purchase. Again, this is about kickstarting residential development and those developments that have been approved but are currently on hold because of a lack of pre-sales. This is about bringing those various pieces together.

It is also about, as I said, responding to that industry feedback, and this is something that the Treasurer and a number of others, including myself, the Minister for Planning, the Minister for Precincts and the Assistant Treasurer, have been part of discussions on. It is about making sure that when we have that existing off-the-plan concession for owner-occupiers and first home buyers continuing after the 12-month concession ceases, it will be off the back of this stimulus which applies more broadly. The government will not be supporting your amendment.

Council divided on amendment:

Ayes (15): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (20): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Amendment negatived.

David DAVIS: Before we move off clause 1 –

Harriet SHING: Are you going to be brief so we do not –

David DAVIS: I will be very brief. I will do this in a minute or so. I want to understand whether this applies to developments that relate to refurbishment of off-the-plan. I am going to read something. This is a very interesting statement from 10 November 1994, first Kennett ministry, Alan Stockdale –

Harriet SHING: Most people weren't born then, David.

David DAVIS: No, it is very relevant to this bill. This is talking about a new act and tax provisions. Another amendment clarifies that the stamp duty exemption for off-the-plan sales applies to refurbishment of existing buildings as well as new buildings. Mr Stockdale said that:

Some doubt has existed as to the practice of the State Revenue Office in allowing concession in the case of the refurbishment and conversion to strata title units of existing buildings. The amendment will clarify the application of the concession to transfers of real property in those cases. The terms of the amendment have been structured to prevent the concession being exploited as a device for the avoidance ...

But then he went on to say that even in the constrained budget position of the state these reforms showed the burden of state taxes on people and businesses can be reduced. My point here is: does the exemption that is proposed here for just one year apply to refurbishments?

Harriet SHING: Thanks, Mr Davis, for your very brief question. The concession will enable buyers to deduct 100 per cent of the construction or refurbishment costs incurred on or after the contract date when determining how much stamp duty is owed, and that is again something that has been stated repeatedly in this place and in the public domain by way of release of the policy.

David DAVIS: I just note that under the Kennett government it was a permanent change; under this government it is a single year.

Harriet SHING: I am going to have the last word on this one. There were lots of permanent changes under the former Premier Jeffrey Kennett and thankfully not all of them were permanent, and that is why we continue to make Victoria a place where people do have an opportunity to access a home and we do have more homes and more opportunity as a result.

David DAVIS: I should just say that affordability of homes was much greater under the Kennett government than it is under this government.

Clause agreed to; clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (16:43)

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

1. Clause 3, after line 14 insert –
 - “(ba) the transferor is a person other than the Crown, an agent of the Crown, a Minister of the Crown or a public entity; and
 - (bb) within the 3 years immediately preceding the transfer, the dutiable property was not –
 - (i) unalienated land of the Crown; or
 - (ii) an interest in land owned by the Crown, an agent of the Crown, a Minister of the Crown or a public entity; and”.
2. Clause 3, after line 27 insert –

“*public entity* has the meaning given by section 5 of the **Public Administration Act 2004**.”

As foreshadowed in my contribution earlier, the effect of these amendments is that property on land that is public land or was public land in the last three years would not be eligible for the concession, effectively incentivising that public land remains public land, and if you are going to build housing on it it should be public housing. In order to receive a concessional rate of duty the land in question must not be Crown land owned by the state or Commonwealth government or freehold land owned by the Victorian government, Victorian government agencies or Victorian government departments or land that has been in the three years prior to the dutiable transaction public land remaining public land.

Harriet SHING: Thanks, Mr Puglielli, for your amendment. Unsurprisingly, the government will not be supporting this amendment. We do support the sale of land owned by the government in certain circumstances, including where that land can be put to better use; for example, in providing, amongst other things, cases for housing. The amendment would, if carried through to its logical conclusion, in fact limit the effect of the bill in boosting supply of housing, particularly for the sorts of configurations of homes – units apartments and townhouses – which are geared very squarely to providing more availability across the state. As you yourself have noted in the challenges around finding affordable housing, this is something which drives the objectives of this bill.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Liberals and Nationals opposition will be opposing this amendment.

David LIMBRICK: The Libertarian Party will also be opposing this amendment. I know of many cases within South-East Metro where councils and other government bodies are selling land to be used as housing, and I do not see why people should have to pay extra tax because a council decided to consolidate two kindergartens into one and is selling one of the kindergarten sites for an apartment block. That does not seem very fair to me, so I will be opposing this amendment.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (3): Katherine Copsey, Sarah Mansfield, Aiv Puglielli

Noes (32): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Amendments negatived.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

1. Clause 3, line 18, omit “2025.” and insert “2025; and”.
2. Clause 3, after line 18 insert –
“(d) the transfer meets all the requirements to receive a concessional rate of duty under section 57J other than the requirement that the dutiable value of the dutiable property is not more than \$550 000.”.

In speaking to this amendment, as it stands Labor’s bill would allow anyone buying an eligible property off the plan to claim this concession, but the benefits of this concession in our view should not flow to companies, trusts and investors, including overseas investors as was foreshadowed earlier. We should not be, in our view, providing stamp duty discounts for property investors so they can buy up new apartments to add to their property portfolio, building their wealth, which is why we have drafted this amendment so that this concession prioritises first home buyers and owner-occupiers. This amendment would mean that the concession would apply to all owner-occupiers or transferees who satisfy principal-place-of-residence requirements – for example, first home buyers, downsizers, divorcees, single parents and people moving house. It gives first home buyers and owner-occupiers an advantage rather than giving concessions to property investors, effectively taking what was proposed under the bill as is but ensuring that it is for first home buyers and owner-occupiers.

Harriet SHING: Mr Puglielli, the government will not be supporting this amendment. Part of the intention of the bill is in fact to get more projects off the ground and to speed up those pre-sales that have not made projects viable because they have not yet been acquitted by way of a contract. We want to therefore make sure that we are providing that stamp duty concession to investors as well as boosting the investor market. Being able to help to get more homes built will also help both homebuyers and renters. We know that where we have more affordability it is because of, amongst other things, availability. This is squarely intended to deliver on the latter.

David LIMBRICK: The Libertarian Party will not be supporting this amendment. This one is a bit mystifying to me. The Libertarian Party wants more rentals on the market, and the Greens do not for some reason, but rentals require an investor, and removing investors from the qualifications for the concessions does not make any sense at all to me.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting this amendment. As I said in my contribution, for the Greens to claim they support renters while not supporting the investors that put a roof over the heads of those renters is a bit gobsmacking. In a perfect Greens utopia those investors would not be able to receive concessions, so they would have to invest out of the goodness of their hearts and then cop a rent freeze as well. In the Greens utopia it would be no concessions but lots of taxes and lots of rent freezes for the people that, out of the goodness of their hearts, put a roof over the heads of renters. As I said before, it is B-grade economics, and we will not be supporting it.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (4): Katherine Copsey, Sarah Mansfield, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Noes (32): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Amendments negated.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

1. Clause 3, line 18, omit “2025.” and insert “2025; and”.

2. Clause 3, after line 18 insert –
 - “(d) the transferee intends for the residential property to be occupied as a person’s principal place of residence.”.
3. Clause 3, after line 24 insert –
 - “(2A) The concession under subsection (1) is subject to the requirement that a person occupies the land as the person’s principal place of residence for a period of at least 12 months commencing within the 12 month period immediately after the transfer.
 - (2B) Sections 43B, 43C and 43D apply to this section as if –
 - (a) a reference to section 43A were a reference to this section; and
 - (b) a reference to an exemption under section 43A were a reference to a concession under this section.”.

Just speaking to these next amendments now, it is our view that this concession should only apply to homes that will actually be lived in, not vacant homes, holiday homes or Airbnbs, which is why we have drafted this amendment for a residence requirement. Our amendment ensures that in order to be eligible for the concession the property must be used as someone’s principal place of residence for at least the first year. This includes, for example, homes occupied by a family member or renter-occupied. It is a commonsense argument, really. We should be building homes for people to actually live in. Without these amendments we are concerned that the bill would allow investors to buy up and land-bank, effectively keeping properties unoccupied, sitting empty while the investment increases in value in the middle of a housing crisis.

Harriet SHING: I will be very brief again. The government will not be supporting these amendments, and while it may be the intention of the Greens to effect an amendment along the terms that have been outlined, it would have the effect in practical terms of excluding investors from the extended stamp duty concession. In doing that it would reduce the supply available on the market for rental properties, and it is the supply which is contributing to the challenges of affordability, which we know needs to be addressed as one of a number of policy and legislative and regulatory approaches that are contained in the housing statement and in the raft of announcements that we have made in recent weeks as part of the ongoing work to provide additional homes in the configurations referred to in this bill, namely units, apartments and townhouses.

David LIMBRICK: The Libertarian Party will also be opposing these amendments. I appreciate the concerns about empty houses, but I will note that the state already has a disincentive to leaving properties vacant through the vacant residential property tax. I think there are already disincentives in place, and this is unnecessary.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The Liberals and Nationals will not be supporting these amendments.

David ETTERS HANK: We understand the intent of the Greens, both in these amendments and in the previous two. I think they are perhaps examples of the pursuit of perfection being the enemy of the good, and the net effect can only serve to reduce rental stock availability. Accordingly, we will be opposing the amendments.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (4): Katherine Copsey, Sarah Mansfield, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

Noes (32): Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Amendments negatived.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: I move:

1. Clause 3, before line 25 insert –
 - “(3) At least once every 12 months the Treasurer must cause to be laid before each House of Parliament, and publish on an appropriate government website, a report setting out in respect of the period covered by the report –
 - (a) the number of transfers of dutiable property to which this section applied; and
 - (b) the total amount of adjustments to the consideration for transfers of dutiable property to which this section applied; and
 - (c) the amount of duty foregone, or likely to be foregone, by the State because of the application of this section.”.
2. Clause 3, line 25, omit “(3)” and insert “(4)”.

Given the roaring success of our past few amendments, hopefully this one is a little bit less controversial for folks. It is our view that this bill should have a reporting requirement. To that effect this amendment is to see that at least once every 12 months we have a publicly available source of data on the number of concessions granted and on the cost of these concessions. We need to know the impact of this change as proposed in this bill and the impact it has on the actual affordability of housing.

Harriet SHING: Thanks, Mr Puglielli, for moving that amendment. Government already reports, as you would know, annually on the duty that has been forgone through the off-the-plan concession through the budget process. This amendment, again in practical effect, would create an unnecessary administrative burden for the State Revenue Office (SRO) and for government. Our priority is getting this bill passed as quickly as possible to provide certainty to the sector and, to echo the comments made by Cath Evans of the Property Council of Australia, to provide certainty and also to get more homes built for Victorians. On that basis we will not be supporting this amendment.

David LIMBRICK: On consideration I think that what is being proposed here is sort of redundant because the data will already exist within the SRO. I do not think it is helpful to put in legislation what the reporting requirements may be, because they will change over time and should be flexible. I do not think that it is helpful to add this, and therefore the Libertarian Party will not be supporting it.

David ETTERS HANK: We will be supporting this amendment. We think it is useful additional transparency. We appreciate the comments regarding the administrative burden, but we think on balance transparency and clarity for the electorate is more important.

Evan MULHOLLAND: The opposition will be supporting this amendment.

Council divided on amendments:

Ayes (18): Melina Bath, Gaele Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Richard Welch

Noes (18): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

Amendments negatived.

Clause agreed to; clause 4 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (17:08): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (17:08): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, a message will be sent to the Assembly informing them that the bill has been agreed to without amendment.

Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:09): I rise to speak to the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and I want to make a couple of points in relation to the importance of this bill and indeed acknowledge the sector. As a woolgrower's daughter, a meat grower's daughter and a cropper's daughter, I understand the importance of agriculture and the long associations my family have had with the agriculture industry over many, many, many decades in Victoria and in Australia.

What this bill does, though, is amend a number of acts with the aim of making improvements to food safety regulation – another very important element of what governments are charged to do. The key changes include creating new offences in the Dairy Act 2000 relating to the sale, delivery or provision of raw milk; making changes to improve the administration of Dairy Food Safety Victoria; amending the Food Act 1984 to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden on local councils relating to inspections of registered food premises; giving the Secretary to the Department of Health power to declare requirements for the display of registration information relating to food premises; removing a requirement that proceedings against a food operator relating to food sent for analysis must be commenced within 90 days; amending the Meat Industry Act 1993 to enable PrimeSafe to share information more efficiently in specified circumstances, such as sharing information with Agriculture Victoria or the Department of Health – noting that PrimeSafe also have a very important role to play in terms of maintaining the high standards of agriculture and meat products in this state and enabling that reputation to be enhanced and to be maintained; and of course amending the Seafood Safety Act 2003 to expand the fit and proper person test for assessing licence applications. I will return to elements of this part of the bill a bit later, but I am pleased that the government has agreed to support the coalition's amendments, which will address these issues, because of the nonsense that this particular component of the bill – before the government supported our amendments – had been proposing. As I said, I will come back to those amendments.

In relation to amendments to the Dairy Act, I did mention raw or, as it is known, unpasteurised milk, which is banned from sale for human consumption in Australia, and that is an important aspect of our safety requirements. The requirements in Victoria in particular apply to licence-holders only, and they can be penalised for breaches of licence conditions, such as selling raw milk products without adding a bittering agent. There is good reason for that to occur. What that means is that unlicensed operators cannot be charged for breaches. The bill closes that loophole to bring all businesses under the regulatory framework, which is a sensible measure that the coalition supports.

Another change that has industry support is the removal of the requirement for Dairy Food Safety Victoria, DFSV, to hold an annual meeting with senior industry representatives after submitting its annual report. I mean, it is just extraordinary that we are even talking about this in legislation, quite frankly. What I understand is the meetings are poorly attended and not an efficient form of stakeholder engagement. DFSV can use resources for this purpose more effectively in other ways such as digital communications. I think, again, in this day and age, in 2024, when we have the ability to communicate in that way, what a sensible move that is. Other administrative changes enable the selection committee to recommend appointments to the DFSV board in the case of a vacancy or absent committee member, and this more flexible approach prevents delays in the process of appointments.

In amending the Food Act, the bill implements recommendations from the Auditor-General's report last year *Regulating Food Safety*. These changes to the Food Act are designed to reduce unnecessary burden on local councils regarding the inspection of registered food premises. The Secretary of the Department of Health is given power to declare requirements for food premises to display registration information. Whilst I understand that that is an important element that we need to maintain to have proper processes in place, we need to ensure that those processes are actually adhered to. I have to mention I Cook Foods in regard to this, because this is exactly what did not happen. We had the chief health officer shutting down an excellent food operator. Ian Cook, his family and the 40 people that worked for the Cooks had an extraordinary set of circumstances that led to the closure of I Cook Foods. I have not got time, unfortunately, to go into the details. But this Parliament held two inquiries into that saga, and it was a saga, because in the first inquiry we found out that even the chief health officer did not provide proper evidence to the committee. In fact you wonder what on earth he was doing, whether he was actually across what he was supposed to be doing or whether there was a deliberate misleading of the committee. But what he said during that first inquiry was that I Cook were the sole suppliers of food to Knox hospital. It was just an outright lie, and I am pleased that last year in November the Supreme Court found that the former chief health officer Brett Sutton unfairly shut down I Cook Foods. Whilst it is just devastating and disappointing to the Cooks because of the investment they put into their business, they did have that satisfaction that the Supreme Court made those findings.

I just need to go back to that matter because it goes to the process that I spoke of earlier. In the minority report that the Liberals and Nationals provided to the inquiry – Ms Bath, were you on that one with me?

Melina Bath: No, I wasn't, but I listened with interest.

Georgie CROZIER: It was Ms Lovell. In fact a lot of Victorians listened with interest, because what we found and what we said was:

It is a matter of great concern that Professor Sutton's incorrect evidence was allowed to stand as part of the record for 14 months. This is despite the fact that senior departmental officials had clear evidence that his testimony regarding food suppliers was inaccurate.

Had Mr Christy not come forward, goodness knows what may have occurred. That is what I am talking about when you have got senior departmental operatives such as the chief health officer misleading the Parliament and misleading the committee. The whole thing was just appalling. To this day, understanding what I know in terms of the condition of the woman who was subjected to the entire shutdown, well, there was a lot that never came out in that inquiry that I was privy to, and I think it was said previously that justice was not done to the Cook family and in fact an injustice was done to them. That is why you have to get these things right, because that was a legitimate business.

If I go back to the whole issue around how this thing started, it was back in 2019 when I raised Community Chef in the Parliament, which was, I might add, set up by the then federal minister responsible, none other than Anthony Albanese, who was a great friend of the then health minister Daniel Andrews. They cooked up that little Community Chef together. When I got hold of the Pitcher Partners report, which I finally got tabled during the inquiry, it showed that there was a grant provided by then Minister Albanese, who provided a grant of \$9 million. There was a Department of Health

and Human Services grant of \$6 million, and then the health minister, as I said, was Daniel Andrews. There was a loan from the ANZ Bank of \$9.5 million, a loan from Hobsons Bay City Council for \$1.87 million and \$2.2 million of equity from shareholder councils. No-one could say whether those loans had been repaid. In fact it was more taxpayers money down the tube while a legitimate business itself was shut down, and it was found by the Supreme Court that it was shut down unfairly. That is why it is very important when you are making legislation that you do get things right and that, if the Secretary of the Department of Health is given this power to declare requirements for food premises to display registration information, they do not abuse it like it was abused with Dr Sutton.

Another necessary change in the bill is removing the requirement that legal proceedings in relation to a food sample taken for analysis must be commenced within 90 days. I understand that this timeframe is often insufficient to allow proper investigation, particularly if food samples need to be tested overseas, and that does occur on occasion.

Amendments to the Meat Industry Act address issues around current outdated restrictions on information sharing that can hamper investigations, and the meat and seafood regulator PrimeSafe is unable to share information easily with other departments. For example, the minister currently must intervene to allow PrimeSafe to share information with Agriculture Victoria in relation to animal welfare. I think Ms Bath might mention this in terms of the pig inquiry that this Parliament undertook.

Melina Bath: Mrs Broad was on it.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, Mrs Broad. I sat on that final deliberation, and I could not believe that the government was siding with the Animal Justice Party and what the Animal Justice Party was actually requiring some food producers to do. It still astounds me that the government was backing some of those archaic and very unnecessary and unfair provisions.

The bill updates confidentiality provisions so that PrimeSafe can share information more efficiently in specified circumstances. As I said, while we accept the intention is to improve processes, we have concerns around various aspects of the bill in the context of this legislation to be introduced, the Animal Care and Protection Bill, and I just mentioned that pig inquiry that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee conducted last year. So we are concerned about broadening the scope of information sharing, including reporting requirements, which has the potential to allow private information to be shared without knowledge or permission of the business involved. We do not want Big Brother overseeing that without businesses understanding exactly what is going on, and that is something that I am sure the shadow minister will address at the time. We do need to ensure that there is a balance between the necessary provision of information to allow for timely and thorough investigations and allowing them to maintain privacy of business information on the other.

As has been highlighted, the Shadow Minister for Agriculture, my colleague Ms Kealy, raised concerns around the expansion of the fit and proper person tests for seafood licences – absolute nonsense – and she so clearly articulated the elements around what a fit and proper person test or application must consider. They must be ‘of good repute, having respect to character, honesty and integrity’, and it goes on further to include associates, business associations and business associates of associates, and a person who holds a relevant position in the seafood business must also be of good repute. So you can see how ridiculous that is, and that is why we have enormous concern about this whole definition around how you can even describe how someone is of good repute when it is not defined and what considerations are used to inform the decision that meets the appropriate standard. As I said, there are a number of pieces of legislation that this impacts. There are 42 pieces of legislation in fact that mention a fit and proper person test, and only three of those make reference to good repute. These are the Meat Industry Act, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – only in relation to cultivation of opium poppies – and also the Non-Emergency Patient Transport and First Aid Services Act 2003. It is extraordinary that it is put into those three acts specifically, and we do have serious concern around this.

As I said, there is the additional criteria that is being applied to licensees in the seafood industry in this bill where the good repute requirement extends to family members, associates, business associates and associates of business associates. Again, what a nonsense, and it smacks of absolute hypocrisy from the Labor government, who do not apply those same standards when it comes to their own links and associations and their associations of associations, and I particularly am referencing the union movement and the CFMEU in particular, where you have known people. As Ms Kealy has highlighted, you have got John Setka coming into the Parliament listening to maiden speeches, yet look at his reputation. Is he a person of good repute when you have seen all of these aspects in the CFMEU, the corruption that has gone on in this state?

John Berger: On a point of order, President, I fail to see what the relevance to this bill is of Ms Crozier talking about the CFMEU.

Georgie CROZIER: I will explain if you like, President.

The PRESIDENT: I will not uphold the point of order at this point. Ms Crozier is the lead speaker and she does have more latitude than other speakers, but I will try and direct her to the bill, if I can.

Georgie CROZIER: I will go back to the bill. The bill talks about the fit and proper person test. This means that they must be of good repute, having respect to character, honesty and integrity. The bill goes further to include associates, business associations and business associations of associated associates. A person who holds a relevant position in the seafood business must also be of good repute. I am making the point what a nonsense it is and how hypocritical the government is when they have got direct links and associations with people like John Setka and the CFMEU, who have corrupted the Big Build, and the appalling mismanagement and waste that has gone on. You have got bikie gangs in there, you have got people of disrepute who are absolutely running roughshod over the Premier, who was the transport infrastructure minister for years and is now the Premier, and you have got these elements in this bill, and that is why we are moving the amendment –

John Berger interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: which you agreed to, Mr Berger – your government has agreed to it because you can understand what a nonsense it is to have this in this bill. It is extraordinary. I do not know who is drafting your jolly bills, but it just shows how incompetent the government is when you have to have elements like this and you do not even understand the implications of what you are doing. It just is extraordinary. On that note, if I may circulate the amendments which go to this very point –

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

Georgie CROZIER: The first of the amendments that the Liberals and Nationals are proposing in my name seeks to insert this 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”.’.

That is in relation to the Meat Industry Act. We are seeking to have an understanding of an associate of that fit and proper person included in that. In clause 30, page 17 of the bill, our amendment is to omit all words and expressions on several lines. I will just read it out:

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

That is what we are saying. That does not need to be in this bill. You need to have the clarification around the Meat Industry Act, which these amendments seek to achieve. We thank the government for understanding that that is a huge concern to the industry. They have seen sense in agreeing to support the Liberals and Nationals’ amendments that will improve this bill. I do want to thank the government for their support on that.

Can I say again: we do have some concerns around some other aspects that we can talk about when other bills come into this place, but in terms of making sure that our food safety regulations are adhered to and there are safety measures in place but that they are fair and businesses are not being unduly compromised or put at a disadvantage to support our agricultural industry, I think that all those in the industry should be applauded for the work they do in sometimes very trying circumstances when nature takes its path and it is out of their hands. They do a remarkable job in providing food, fibre and huge impacts to our economy. With those words, I will end my contribution there.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:29): Well, it had to happen eventually – the libertarian gets up and talks about raw milk; what a cliché. If you know, you know. I am going to talk about raw milk even though there are other things in this bill. When I was a little boy, we used to live on a little farm out in Cranbourne – yes, there used to be lots of farms out in Cranbourne – and we had some cows. I still remember as a little boy milking the cow into the bucket, and we had a cream separator. We separated the cream, and on one occasion we made butter from it, which was actually delicious, and I remember drinking the milk. The idea that sharing that milk with the next-door neighbour would have led to my late father receiving a fine of tens of thousands of dollars, as proposed by this bill – frankly, I think my dear father would be turning in his grave, so there is no way in the world that I can support this. On some of the other things in this bill with regard to seafood licensing, the Libertarian Party will be supporting the opposition’s amendments there – they do provide an improvement, as outlined by Ms Crozier. But nevertheless, on the expansion of the penalty regime and the tightening down on raw milk, I just think that lots of people who live in country areas milk cows and they share this sort of thing, and the idea that they are going to be liable for these enormous fines is intolerable and I cannot support it.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:31): I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This bill will give Victorians confidence that the food we consume is safe to eat and also give members of the various agricultural industries peace of mind as they conduct their business. This will be achieved by strengthening the regulations across several agricultural industries and by making alterations to a series of acts to improve communication between food regulatory bodies. Agriculture is a major part of the Victorian economy, and our farmers are truly the backbone of our community. They should be incredibly proud of the work that they do. This bill will support their industry, whether it be dairy, seafood or livestock. By strengthening the legislation and regulations applying to these industries, every participant within the industry can be assured that they are safe from causing harm. This amendment bill will make changes to several acts. These include the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003, the Dairy Act 2000 and the Food Act 1984. It is similar to recent amendment bills we have seen in the past relating to agricultural regulations in the state of Victoria.

First, the bill amends the Meat Industry Act. It will introduce changes to confidentiality requirements. The updated confidentiality requirements are designed to allow easier information sharing under the Meat Industry Act and improve the efficiency of regulation in the industry. The bill provides who may share confidential information and under what circumstances that information may be shared. There are currently sections providing for circumstances under which confidential information controlled by the Meat Industry Act can be shared and how it must be handled. However, without these amendments the act does not specify exactly who is responsible and able to share and handle this information. These amendments establish that an official person who the confidentiality section of the act applies to is one of the following: officers or employees of the authority – that is, the PrimeSafe inspectors who conduct audits or inspections; former members, officers or employees of the authority; and former inspectors. By including a clarification of who this section of the act applies to, the regulatory body will be more effective in its management of confidential information.

Now that we have established who may use the information, how may the information be used as prescribed by the act? There are already specifications as to the disclosure of confidential information within the act; these amendments simply serve to further clarify the circumstances. Firstly, the

information can be shared while performing functions under the Meat Industry Act or other relevant acts. Additionally, disclosure of confidential information is allowed to public sector entities. However, this disclosure is only permitted if it relates to the administration of laws affecting the individual whose information is being disclosed. Similarly, disclosure may be permitted on a case-to-case basis with the full consent of the individuals to whom the information applies. Information may be shared with bodies responsible for food safety regulations. It is vital these bodies can function at the highest level. This is a public safety measure. As public safety must always be the top priority, this bill also provides that information may be disclosed if it is used in combating a public health concern. Finally, disclosure is permitted in the context of court or tribunal proceedings or if ordered by the court or as required or authorised by this act or any other law.

There are a couple of industries that I want to point out. There is the dairy industry. It is the backbone of many regional communities thanks to the employment and economic benefits it brings. Due to the \$3 billion it brings into the Victorian economy, we should be incredibly proud of our dairy farmers in this state. Other industries that fall under the agriculture sector also contribute greatly to the Victorian economy and employ vast numbers of Victorians. For example, the horticultural industry produced nearly 2 million tonnes of fresh produce during the previous financial year. That was a quarter of Australia's national fresh produce production. The nearly 2 million tonnes of fresh produce was worth almost \$4 billion, but most importantly the industry supports over 14,000 jobs in our regional communities. As for our grain industry, 1940 specialist farms covering 3.5 million hectares produce 8.8 million tonnes of grain. In fact this industry has been growing, meaning we nearly outproduced New South Wales with half the land. The industry made around \$4 billion last year and contributed 21 per cent of Victoria's agricultural output. With nearly 10,000 jobs, the grain sector is just another example of how vital agriculture is to the economy. Every single agricultural sector in Victoria is a big revenue maker and big employer. The numbers alone reflect this. These numbers reflect an industry that needs regulatory support and legislative support like the bill before us.

To wrap up today I want to talk about a topic I always mention, and that is consultation. The Allan Labor government is committed to our ongoing engagement and consultation with industry stakeholders. This will address any questions or concerns about the bill. We will engage in targeted consultation sessions and the publication of detailed information on the Agriculture Victoria website. So far we have consulted with PrimeSafe, Dairy Food Safety Victoria and various government departments – a multipronged approach. This includes the Department of Health, the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions and the Department of Treasury and Finance. In addition, we have engaged with peak bodies like Dairy Farmers Victoria, Seafood Industry Victoria and the Australian Meat Industry Council. It is important to listen to those from industry.

The amendments to the Food Act in particular are in direct response to recommendations made by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, also known as VAGO, in their June 2023 report on regulating food safety. The report highlights the need to reduce administrative burdens and improve transparency for consumers regarding food premises registration. I also want to note the work that SARC, the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, did on the bill. SARC is an invaluable tool in our democracy and is an important part of the Parliament's function. The Allan Labor government is currently considering their feedback, and it is my understanding it will respond soon.

To summarise my contribution, agriculture is important to this state through every stage of the supply line. I commend the bill to the house and seek for my colleagues to join me in support of that.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:38): I am pleased to rise today to speak on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and in doing so I would like to put on record my thanks and gratitude to our Shadow Minister for Agriculture Emma Kealy, the member for Lowan, for the very constructive work that she has done on this piece of legislation. If you listened to her contribution and those of the Nationals in the lower house, you would hear and understand the grave concerns that Emma had in relation to particularly the seafood industry and the impediments and onerous restrictions that were going to be placed on them and therefore the industry and therefore the

flow-on effects of that into our Victorian economy and jobs in our communities. She was very feisty, as she often can be, in that but pointed out some real and live issues. In response to Emma's contribution and her subsequent negotiations with the Minister for Agriculture, which can happen and does when Parliament works at its very best, Minister Spence has produced a better outcome for this piece of legislation. Therefore if those amendments that my colleague Ms Crozier has circulated today on behalf of the Liberals and the Nationals are accepted, then certainly the Nationals will not oppose this bill. But it is worth just drilling down into a couple of elements of this bill to put them on record.

Also, in relation to Mr Limbrick's conversation about raw milk, I grew up on a dairy farm so I certainly have had my fair share of raw milk. My understanding of this bill is that it is not meant to capture those who have a cow in their backyard or in their small farmlet, or even if you are on a massive dairy farm, rotary dairy farm et cetera. If you are drinking it and sharing it with the neighbours, this bill does not capture that. What it does capture is a loophole; it closes a loophole where businesses do not hold a licence and are not effectively mandated to meet the requirements of a licence. This bill will incorporate the licence conditions into new legislation and will close a loophole in relation to the provision of raw milk.

Many years ago, in fact 30 years ago, when I was a young girl just into business, I ran a health food store for a number of years, and we sold raw milk. We actually sold raw goats milk. We got up very early in the morning, drove to the back of beautiful Boolarra, collected that goats milk and sold it on the day. Under those provisions today, that would be illegal, and I understand that. But back in the day it certainly was provisional, and everybody enjoyed that goats milk. But there was very much a serious case involving bath milk, as it is now classified, and selling raw milk, which has to have an additional additive to make it bitter. There was a case where it was attributed to a young infant who died from drinking bath milk. These sorts of provisions need to be dealt with and done sensibly, and that is a little bit of context around that first Dairy Act 2000 amendment in this legislation.

It also looks at regulation and reduction of regulatory burden and amending the Food Act 1984 to reduce the necessary requirements and regulation on councils participating concerning inspections of food premises. Likewise, going back to the early 1990s when I ran that health food shop and owned that store, over a 10-year period certainly we had our fair share of council officers. Health inspectors would come in and say, 'Look, I know you are running a clean and tidy business, but this is our requirement.' We are not saying that that should not exist, but we are saying that where there can be regulatory burdens streamlined, then that is a good thing for both council and businesses alike and for commercial entities and the people purchasing goods.

The other one that is there is in relation to information sharing. This bill amends the Meat Industry Act 1993 to enable PrimeSafe to share information more efficiently with other agencies like Agriculture Victoria and the Department of Health. Whilst we do not have an overall problem with that, we are making amendments in this bill in relation to fit and proper persons in the Meat Industry Act. But the part that I would just put on record is my concern about this government – well, I will say Labor Party MPs in this house. We saw it back in the previous Parliament when they were particularly friendly and cosied up to the then-incarnation of the Animal Justice Party in the farm trespass bill that the Nationals brought to this house with the Liberals and pushed through and had legislation, finally, two years later.

The concern I have is with the government. I heard Mr Berger just then professing the greatness and importance of our agricultural sector, but there seems to be a disconnect between the messaging that we are hearing here today – I appreciate that message – and what is actually happening in inquiries. You have got the pig inquiry, and my colleagues Mrs Broad and Ms Crozier were participating members. But certainly it seems like there is a disconnect between the important work of our pork industry – it serves the community and serves to feed our state, our nation and even internationally – and the impact of the ever-tightening screws that the Animal Justice Party would put on our livestock industries, because ultimately their aim is to cut, suspend, squash and remove the livestock industry from Victoria and Australia, period. I do get concerned that there are members of the government,

MPs – yes, they are allowed to go on and listen to evidence and have their opinion, without a doubt – who will listen to some of those more extreme recommendations in their pig inquiry report, and some of that also goes to information sharing. I note that Mrs Broad was very much a party to the minority report. I ask the government and the ag minister to distance themselves from those extreme elements in that report.

In relation to the administrative updates in the dairy food safety industry, we are looking at removing some of the requirements and regulatory burdens and making that more streamlined, even to the effect of holding an annual meeting and enabling the selection committees to make decisions in a more astute and streamlined way.

But in terms of the fit and proper person test and the Seafood Safety Act 2003, certainly with Ms Kealy's driving of this, we have heard about grave concerns in the seafood industry in relation to associates of associates having to be of clear character, honesty, integrity and the like. I just want to put on record some of our praise and emphatic re-endorsement of our seafood industry. Eastern Victoria Region is half of Victoria's coastline, and we have a fantastic seafood industry. I was at the San Remo fishing co-op only a month ago talking with Wolfgang Platzer about the positive conversations he was having about his seafood industry and that co-op and the work they do down there and the 12 fishing fleets they have and the 30 direct co-op members that they have but also the importance of the food it generates. Again, if we look at the world and at being more mindful about carbon dioxide emissions and the like and the footprint on our society, eating local seafood in our local home state is very important without doubt. Lakes Entrance is another fantastic fishing co-op.

I want to put some things on record about the economic contribution that our seafood industry on my side of the state makes to our Victorian and local economies. In relation to East Gippsland, we know that whole eastern side contributes \$80 million of added value and provides around 800 full-time jobs in a variety of sectors and interesting occupations that facilitate that industry. In terms of the Gippsland, Mornington Peninsula and Bass area, there is roughly \$30 million in added value and it supports over 300 full-time equivalent jobs. I think it is important to just put on record our thanks for that.

In summing up in relation to the importance of the seafood industry, not only have we got the industry and not only have we got employment, we have also got the importance of eating local and fresh domestic fish and of respect for the cultural heritage of our fishing industry. Those who have been listening to me in this place will certainly know the importance of the New Haven jetty, which once was a commercial fishing jetty and is now locked off from society under this government – we are rallying against that from that part of the world – but also the tourism, and I think it is really important. People love to go in situ. We say this all the time and there are government ads in relation to 'go local' – go into our regions, taste our local produce. It is that whole paddock-to-plate, or in this case ocean-to-plate, experience that is so very important for our hospitality sector.

In terms of the fit and proper person test, we hope that the government is going to accept our amendments – and Ms Crozier has read those in – but it is going into that next layer. We are going to seek to have omitted from this piece of legislation whether an associate of the applicant or licensee has any business association with a person who is not of good repute – how do you define that? It is not defined – having regard to character, honesty and integrity. One very important point that my colleague the member for Gippsland East Tim Bull has asked we drill down into in committee stage is to discuss and ensure that the government is ruling this out: in relation to the amendments to the seafood act regarding a person who holds a relevant position in the seafood business, are skippers of trawlers and fishing fleets and crew of commercial fishing operations considered a relevant position in relation to the management of the business or its operations, and therefore will they be assessed as to whether or not they are of good repute? Could the minister at the table when she gets to that point discuss that? With that, as I said, it has been a convoluted but I hope very positive outcome – increasing oversight, but not too much, and improving the safety for Victorians, but also not putting that onerous burden on the seafood or livestock meat industry.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (17:51): I rise to support the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and I am pleased to speak on this legislation. It is an important step towards strengthening Victoria's food safety regulatory framework, amending several key acts: the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Seafood Safety Act 2003 and the Dairy Act 2000. The bill aims to streamline food safety regulation in Victoria, improving the operational efficiency of regulatory bodies such as PrimeSafe and Dairy Food Safety Victoria. It introduces new provisions to strengthen the oversight of high-risk products like raw milk, enables more effective information sharing among regulators and reduces administrative burdens on local councils and businesses. This will lead to a more transparent, consistent and effective food safety system, benefiting consumers and producers alike.

From a public health and safety perspective, particularly around, as I mentioned before, raw milk, it is going to help to prevent foodborne illnesses, ensuring that consumers can trust the safety of dairy products in Victoria. Similarly, the strengthening of licensing requirements for the seafood sector ensures that only those who meet high standards are entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the safety and quality of seafood products. From a regulatory efficiency perspective, it will allow regulators to work more effectively together, responding swiftly to any emerging issues that might affect the food supply chain. From an industry sustainability perspective, the necessary regulatory adjustments will support its growth and sustainability. It is the sustainability of the agriculture sector that is really important and is one of the key drivers in the government bringing this legislation and the government's consistent efforts in the space of agriculture.

We heard a bit of claptrap over there from the Nationals, trying to link the Labor Party to the Animal Justice Party. They like to conveniently ignore that most of their policies are driven out of Queensland by miners. If the Queensland National Party had their way, well, they would obviously be putting a nuclear reactor in prime agricultural land and ripping up farmland to frack it. We know that is where the Nationals' policies come from, if they want to throw mud. Four of the last premiers in this state came from regional Victoria and were Labor MPs. I know it grinds the Liberals that regional seats that used to be the Liberals' in the 90s – I remember growing up there when Kennett ripped the guts out of it all – are all Labor now. In Geelong, Ballarat – the Liberals want to sit there and say that they own rural communities and they own regional communities, but when I go out to somewhere like the lakes, they absolutely love what has happened with sport and recreational fishing there.

Melina Bath interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: I would love to invite Ms Bath, if she has heard of the peninsula. It is in her electorate – \$2 billion worth of agricultural products. Come to the peninsula, Ms Bath; see the agricultural products and the horticultural products; come and enjoy paddock to plate, as you discussed.

I want to commend this bill to the house. I want to stress that we historically and currently have strong, brilliant agriculture ministers in the Labor government. We have great regional representation in the government by Labor MPs, and I commend this bill to the house.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:55): I also rise to speak on the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, and I also note that the bill amends the Dairy Act 2000, the Food Act 1984, the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Seafood Safety Act 2003. We are very, very pleased that the government has said it has agreed to the coalition's amendments, and we are looking forward to seeing it vote with us on that since once again we have had to put a little bit of extra thought into a bill.

I do have to reinforce some of what my colleague Ms Crozier said about what has happened to the Cook family and their business and what an incredible disgrace it has been for a local man and a local business area to be impacted by a situation through no fault of their own. It makes me wonder then when we look at this bill and it includes the implication, which is very concerning to us, that we have

had people in the meat industry that were not fit and proper people. This is incredibly laughable when you consider the history and the track record of this government. I mean, how on earth is it going to discern what a fit and proper person is when it cannot even have proper transparency and accountability with the way it uses its money, when it does not understand what is okay and what is not okay, and when it is not prepared to do a full, thorough and transparent investigation into things like, for example, the workings of the CFMEU? I do not really think that this government should be putting these sorts of words into a bill when it cannot itself understand what a fit and proper person is. To simply imply that hardworking Victorians that are working in the industry with livestock, with seafood and with meat may not be fit and proper is simply insulting, particularly when we consider what happened to the Cook family. Why do we think Mr Cook continues to put his hand up for different levels of government? Because he has seen what has happened and he has experienced what has happened under this government, which really has no right to determine what is fit and proper. In fact it is incredibly laughable that they even think to put something like that into a bill, and one has to wonder where on earth they get their benchmark of what is fit and proper.

I do not want to say too much, because clearly I am losing my voice. I do want to say that we are not particularly happy with elements within the bill because of this, but we are very pleased that the government has said it is going to support our amendments, and we look forward to that with great delight. But I do want to say that we do support these industries. We are concerned that there are complete moves afoot that are constantly pushing on our farmers and on our industries, trying to make it incredibly difficult for Victorians to survive and to be able to provide for their families and indeed for the community at a cost that is affordable. We need meat. We enjoy our meat. I love seafood, and quite frankly I do not want anything to be impairing these industries or our farmers.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (17:59): It is my pleasure to speak on this bill this afternoon, the Agriculture and Food Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This bill amends the Meat Industry Act 1993 to enable Victoria's meat and seafood regulator PrimeSafe to more efficiently share information in specified circumstances. It strengthens integrity by introducing fit and proper person criteria – and I will address some of the comments from those opposite. It creates stronger protections for the sale of raw milk, makes a number of governance improvements and amends the Food Act 1984.

Just in terms of context, in south-western Victoria, like most regional communities in Victoria, my own home region of south-west relies on a clear, accountable and enforceable food safety regulatory framework. As we are one of the largest producers of food by value in the nation, this is important not only to our region in south-west Victoria but also to the state as a whole. Food and Fibre Great South Coast mention on their website:

South West Victoria is Australia's top agricultural production region, delivering over \$4.6 billion in output annually. The food and fibre sector is also the region's largest, contributing 60% of the region's GRP and 21.6% of all jobs.

The south-west region boasts a mature food-processing sector, including – and these are the kinds of businesses that can be impacted by these kinds of regulations – Saputo at Allansford, Midfield meats in Warrnambool, Bega in Koroit, Fonterra at Cobden, Australian Dairy Nutritionals, Australian Lamb in Colac and ProviCo in Dennington, just to name a few. In addition, the region includes significant agricultural education at South West TAFE and Glenormiston. There are many pre- and post-farmgate businesses that rely on the productivity and reliability of food products in our region. These new regulations are absolutely important for the south-west, given the centrality of agriculture and food processing in our regional economy. What is more, the farmers, fishers and food processors of western Victoria need assurance that their products will reach their market destinations in a compliant way, which is very important.

You can see that the smooth running of our agriculture and food production industries in Victoria is extremely important. Supply chain traceability and accountability are vital in the food industry. Our

regulatory framework provides accountability to consumers and supports the export market. We need to protect the value that our farmers, fishers and food processors create. We do not let dangerous products or rogue operators threaten the reputation of our industries. Most importantly, regulation must effectively protect the community. Victorians enjoy some of the highest quality fresh food in the world. We need to empower our local councils and food safety regulators to make sure that this can continue to be the case.

One of the examples that the bill addresses is the use of raw milk, and it will strengthen the ban on the sale of raw milk. Raw milk can contain organisms that cause severe gastroenteritis. Consuming it runs the risk of severe illness or death, particularly for children and the elderly. The ban is currently part of dairy licences, which makes it difficult to enforce, so creating an offence in the Dairy Act 2000 allows for stronger penalties that reflect the seriousness of the risk, bringing it into line with the penalties. As someone who was raised on raw milk – and I am sure if some of the people opposite were in the chamber they might say they were also raised on raw milk – I know the potential dangers of third-party sale of unpasteurised milk products. You simply cannot transport and onsell raw milk, and to claim that you can demonise processors, who use simple heating technology to pasteurise milk and to ensure that no bad bacteria are in the milk.

Before I close, I just want to address the fit and proper person test. I think there is a little bit of hysteria from those opposite in relation to that. The fit and proper person test is conducted for board appointments across many, many sectors in health, in water, in education and in the private sector as well. I am sure that if those opposite see it from that perspective, they will feel a lot more comfortable about the definition of a fit and proper person. There I will leave my contribution, and I support the bill.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:05): I rise today to speak against this bill, and I would like to begin by adding my support to Mr Limbrick's comments regarding the farmers and food producers upon whom we all rely and for whom I just will not support increasing the fines and over-regulating. But regarding the Liberal Party's amendments I will be enthusiastically supporting them. In fact I had a sense of *deja vu* when I was reading them. There I was reading about the idea of removing the idea that you can measure a person's character, their honesty, their integrity and their worthiness for a role not by their own actions but by the actions of their associates and their associates' associates. Where have I heard that before recently? Thus I was pleasantly surprised to see that the idea of guilt by association two or three times removed was called nonsense and ridiculous by the Liberal Party in this house. As I have been saying for about two years now, you cannot prove guilt by association, and to attempt to do so risks horrendous damage to innocent people. Reputation is very important, and it is unfair to seek to punish or damage a person of good character and repute for the actions of mere associates or associates of associates whom they happen to know. How should we measure a person's own good repute? Is a person of good repute if they bully and lie and defame others and get away with it? If a person has done nothing wrong but rather other people who they may happen to have interacted with have, then should leaders and bureaucrats feel free to destroy that innocent person's reputation, barring them from holding positions, from earning money for their family and from just interacting in society politely without being a pariah or even advocating for causes close to their hearts, even if it is just something as simple as seafood? Thankfully, this chamber appears to agree that the answer is no. I will finish with a quote that I read earlier today. Unfortunately, I cannot find its author. 'It's a weak, insecure and dishonest man who seeks to make himself look accomplished not through his own efforts but by defaming others.'

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

*Committee***Clause 1 (18:09)**

Georgie CROZIER: I might, if I may, just direct my questions through clause 1 in the interests of time, rather than going clause by clause. I am wondering, Minister, if you could provide an explanation. What is the current process to appoint to a vacancy in the membership of the committee or when a member is absent for any reason from the Dairy Food Safety Victoria (DFSV) board?

Jaelyn SYMES: For clarity, the board appointment process for DFSV is the same as for PrimeSafe. The minister must appoint a selection committee formed by nominations from key industry groups, which provides recommendations to the minister for appointment to the board. The minister must take into account those recommendations in appointing new board members. The minister must also take into account the balance of specific skills outlined in the act. The minister then makes the appointment.

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, thank you for that clarification. Could you also clarify: how will the government ensure that DFSV continue to report directly to stakeholders and engage in a meaningful way in the absence of an AGM or any AGM requirements?

Jaelyn SYMES: The Dairy Act 2000 currently requires DFSV to hold a general meeting with senior representatives of the dairy industry organisations within three months of submitting its annual report to the minister. This requirement is an overly burdensome and insufficient mechanism for industry engagement with, as reported, sparse attendance by industry representatives. Removing the requirement will enable DFSV to focus resources on more effective and inclusive mechanisms to engage with industry, such as the Dairy Industry Consultative Forum, the small business forum and the Dairy RegTech community of practice. It is our expectation that these measures are about facilitating and enhancing consultation as opposed to reducing it.

Georgie CROZIER: Could you also provide some clarity around whether raw milk will still be able to be sold for stock purposes without the addition of a bittering agent? Then I have got a couple of other questions in relation to raw milk. How many times have unlicensed operators been caught selling raw milk without a bittering agent and without having met other licensing requirements? And the final question around raw milk is: what has been the impact of unlicensed, raw or bath milk retailers on human health? How many cases have been brought to the attention of the government?

Jaelyn SYMES: I will deal with your first question because I have got the answer at hand in relation to a producer's ability to provide raw milk to pig producers for use as stockfeed: there is no change in this. Dairy producers that are dairy industry licensees will still be able to provide raw milk as stockfeed to pig producers. So I can confirm that there are no changes. In relation to the numbers of cases and the like, I might just seek some advice from the box to see how specific we can be in relation to that. We know that there have been a number of businesses selling raw milk, but it is rare, and I think the stat is only one prosecution.

Ms Crozier, I can confirm that in the last decade there has only been one case taken to prosecution. We know of one business in Victoria that is currently selling raw milk. We can draw from the experience in New Zealand, where there were 10 cases of raw milk being sold that were connected to outbreaks.

Georgie CROZIER: If I can ask in relation to compliance and enforcement: in relation to the removal of the 90-day limit to prosecute, can you give specific examples of where this cap has stopped the ability to prosecute or provide how many times this has occurred? I think that the shadow minister was told in the bill briefing that some food testing can take longer than 90 days. Could you give some examples of those tests? What were the requirements and where would they have been tested?

Jaelyn SYMES: In relation to the 90 days, in identifying a possible offence under the Food Act 1984, the department and councils do prioritise harm identification and reduction. A decision to institute a proceeding can often not be contemplated until after other compliance and enforcement

options have been exhausted and the source of any risk to public health contained. The department also needs to gather samples, analyse the samples and obtain other evidence to determine whether to institute a proceeding. Given this, 90 days, and even 189 days with an extension, is not a feasible timeframe to prepare for and institute a proceeding in these circumstances in every instance. That is the advice that I have received.

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, what requirements to display information related to food premises will be required for businesses not based in Victoria, such as those that are located on the Victoria–New South Wales or Victoria–South Australia border? And will online businesses be exempt from display requirements, including online businesses not based in Victoria? They might have an international presence, but they are still selling here. Could you provide some clarity around that?

Jaelyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, at a high level it is possible for entities based outside Victoria to commit offences under the Victorian Food Act. Victorian authorities can investigate and initiate proceedings against such entities. Alternatively, it may be more appropriate that offences be referred to the equivalent regulators in the relevant jurisdictions.

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, how will the government ensure that food businesses in Victoria are not unfairly burdened with additional licensing red tape or disadvantaged in comparison with businesses based outside Victoria?

Jaelyn SYMES: The bill will deliver more efficient and effective regulation by Victorian food safety regulators and therefore make it easier for Victorian businesses to engage with them. The amendments to the Food Act in particular are proposed on the recommendation of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office and are, as such, designed to reduce regulatory burden.

Georgie CROZIER: That is good to hear. Minister, the inquiry into pig welfare in Victoria recommended mandatory installation of CCTV, accessible by the relevant department. Under the legislative changes outlined in this bill, would CCTV footage be able to be shared once it is provided to the department?

Jaelyn SYMES: I note at the outset, in relation to recommendations of the parliamentary committee, that a response to that has not been required yet and it is under consideration. But to answer your question, PrimeSafe will only be able to share information, including information regarding animal welfare at the facilities they license, with specified persons and in the specified circumstances that are outlined in the act. Animal welfare groups are not specified persons, and sharing information with animal welfare groups is not within the specified circumstances. PrimeSafe will not be able to provide information in response to requests from media or animal welfare organisations, such as CCTV footage, from a business or audit reports. PrimeSafe will be able to pass on information to another regulator if breaches of other relevant laws or regulations are identified – for example, share CCTV footage collected during investigation with WorkSafe if the footage shows potentially unsafe workplace practices.

Georgie CROZIER: Just in that response to that last question I had, so PrimeSafe will be able to share that, as you pointed out, but not animal welfare groups or anyone else. But is there an obligation for PrimeSafe or the department to notify an affected business if that information was to be shared? Was that what you just clarified, or could you just clarify that for me, please?

Jaelyn SYMES: I can confirm PrimeSafe will not be required to share information about their regulatory activities with a business.

Georgie CROZIER: Why is that? Why are they not obliged to in circumstances where CCTV footage has been acquired from a business?

Jaelyn SYMES: In relation to their regulatory activities, it may form part of matters that they need to look into, so therefore they would not be required to pass on information that might jeopardise some of the work that they are doing.

Melina BATH: Minister, I have a question in relation to seafood safety. Are you happy if we ask it in clause 1?

Jaclyn SYMES: I sure am.

Melina BATH: This relates to a topic of my contribution, new section 14(4) of the Seafood Safety Act 2003, which is on page 17 and the top of page 18 of the bill. It is in regard to a person who holds a relevant position in the seafood business. Tim Bull particularly and people in his patch have raised this issue. Are both the crew and the skipper captured in that? Are they considered relevant positions?

Jaclyn SYMES: This question must have been well canvassed, because I have advice that has been prepared to specifically answer your question about skippers and crew. No, being a skipper or a crew member does not automatically mean you are in a relevant position to be considered as part of the fit and proper person assessment of the licensee. A relevant position in relation to a seafood business means (a) the position of director, partner, trustee, manager or other executive position or secretary, however that position is designated, and (b) any other person associated or connected with the ownership, administration or management of the business or its operations. Unless the skipper or the crew member also holds one of those above positions in the business or is themselves the licensee, they will not be considered as part of the fit and proper person assessment of the licensee. As an example, abattoirs as large businesses can employ up to 300 or 400 staff. Any convictions that these employees may hold or whether they are of good repute are not automatically taken into consideration in assessing whether a licensee is a fit and proper person under the Meat Industry Act – a similar application to the fish industry.

Melina BATH: That will give some separation and provide some comfort to them, not that they are not fit and proper persons, but it will just create that distinction in the bill.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 27 agreed to.

New clause (18:23)

Georgie CROZIER: I move:

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”.

As I outlined in my contribution to the debate, the Liberal–Nationals are moving this amendment, and I am very pleased that the government is supporting it, as explained in my contribution earlier.

Jaclyn SYMES: I thank Ms Crozier for moving her amendment. We are both vessels for colleagues who have spent some time working through those issues, and I would like to congratulate the work of Mr Bull and Minister Spence in relation to conversations in relation to this –

Georgie CROZIER: Ms Kealy.

Jaclyn SYMES: Sorry – all the friendly Nat people and Lib people over there. We are all supporters of the industry, and I understand that this amendment is something that is not bothersome to the government.

New clause agreed to; clauses 28 and 29 agreed to.

Clause 30 (18:25)

Georgie CROZIER: I move:

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)”.

As outlined in my substantive speech earlier, for the same reasons we are pleased the government has supported us in these amendments on the fit and proper person test, and I think that will be an enormous improvement to the bill.

Jaelyn SYMES: Same amendment, two different acts. This one is Bull; the other one was Kealy. Anyway, thank you for the conversations that have resulted in the ability for the government to accept the amendments as put.

Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clause 31 agreed to.

Reported to house with amendments.

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (18:26): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (18:27): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

Roads and Road Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (18:27): I have received a message from the Assembly in respect of the Roads and Road Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2024:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Road Safety Act 1986**, the **Melbourne City Link Act 1995**, the **EastLink Project Act 2004**, the **Road Safety Camera Commissioner Act 2011**, the **West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019**, the **North East Link Act 2020** and the **Marine (Drug, Alcohol and Pollution Control) Act 1988** and for other purposes’ the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Adjournment

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (18:28): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Community food relief

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (18:28): (1256) My adjournment is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers as the minister responsible for community food relief under the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The action I seek is for the state government to ensure a more equitable distribution of funds by Foodbank Victoria to ensure that smaller regional communities like those serviced by Moira FoodShare are not forgotten. The cost-of-living crisis has seen a huge increase in the number of people accessing food bank services across rural and regional Victoria. Moira

FoodShare provides emergency assistance through the distribution of free fresh and non-perishable food items to residents within the Moira and Berrigan shires. In the last financial year Moira FoodShare distributed the equivalent of over 200,000 kilograms of food through the support of one part-time coordinator and 50 passionate volunteers. I visited Moira FoodShare in Cobram last year with my Nationals colleague Tim McCurdy, member for Ovens Valley, and we saw firsthand the incredible work that James and the team do providing food and supplies to individuals and families who are in need. With the cost-of-living crisis, the need for food relief continues to grow, and while funds are being allocated to Foodbank Victoria, the relief is not filtering through to smaller rural communities. Unfortunately, not all areas are covered by the Regional Food Security Alliance and smaller areas like Moira FoodShare's are missing out. Moira FoodShare is now looking to raise funds to find 250 patrons to donate every month to help them buy much-needed supplies, and I commend them for the action that they have taken. But the state government also needs to take action to ensure that Foodbank Victoria delivers support beyond the big cities and provides a fair share to smaller communities in northern Victoria as well.

Remembrance Parks Central Victoria

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:30): (1257) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action that I seek is for the minister to appoint a new chairperson for the board of Remembrance Parks Central Victoria. The current chair of Remembrance Parks Central Victoria was appointed in September 2020, and since that time the board has lurched from scandal to scandal, demonstrated financial incompetence and failed to meet the legislated reporting requirements for a government board. The pattern of neglecting fiduciary and financial responsibilities demonstrates a need for the chair to be replaced. The most recent failure of this board proposes large increases to the cost of a plot and burial. The board used the cover of the Melbourne Cup to announce the review on cup eve, which also coincided with the Allan Labor government's announcement of a massive increase to probate fees. The cost of a plot will increase by 14 per cent or 15 per cent, typically going up by around \$345, and the cost of digging the grave will increase in some places by up to 21 per cent, or around \$530. It is irresponsible to suddenly add almost a thousand dollars to the cost of burying a loved one. Such a dramatic increase is completely out of step with community expectations.

Remembrance Parks Central Victoria wants to implement these big fee increases because it has been financially irresponsible for several years. In 2021–22 RPCV declared an operating deficit of \$390,000. The annual reports for 2022–23 and 2023–24 have not been released yet, but I understand that both years resulted in an operating deficit in the hundreds of thousands of dollars – and in one of those years the deficit got close to a million dollars. This is evidence of a pattern of financial irresponsibility, which the board is now trying to compensate for by making large and dramatic increases to their fees and charges, and it has chosen the worst time to do it, when Victoria is in a cost-of-living crisis.

In the last few years each year has begun with a controversial incident involving RPCV. In 2022 RPCV attempted to implement an exorbitant increase in the cost of burials; then in 2023 came the adornment scandal when RPCV removed cherished family mementos and memorials from graves without permission or warning, causing unimaginable pain to grieving families. Then later in 2023 came the scandalous change to the style of headstones at Pine Lodge Cemetery, again without any public consultation. The start of 2024 saw two controversial incidents in which graves were recklessly disturbed by maintenance crews. Amidst these scandals and controversies, proper and transparent governance at RPCV was completely neglected. Annual meetings were not held or were held many months late. Annual reports have not been published as they are required to be, and we still have not seen the 2022–23 report, let alone this year's, which means last year's AGM has not even been held.

The chair's term expires on 28 February 2025, and sadly I believe she has applied to be reappointed. With a track record of governance and financial failures during her tenure, the government should not reappoint her.

Mount Arapiles rock climbing

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:33): (1258) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Environment, although the issue is also relevant to the minister's other responsibilities in tourism, sport and outdoor recreation. In 2019 I attended the inaugural meeting of the Australian Climbing Association Victoria, who came together out of concern about the restrictions to climbing that were occurring in the Grampians. It was not just the restrictions that people were concerned about but the process. Climbers felt like they had been locked out of the process, and many felt that goodwill and collaborative conversations had been circumvented. The majority of people genuinely wanted to find a way to protect important cultural heritage sites while maintaining as much climbing access as possible. Instead, climbers were smeared as being reckless and destructive, with accusations they had damaged Aboriginal artefacts, when the damage was actually caused decades ago by well-meaning bureaucrats in a sloppy attempt to protect these areas. This was particularly hurtful to many people in the climbing community, as they tend to be very environmentally conscientious, and rather than damaging these areas, they treasure them with pride.

Now the same thing is happening at Mount Arapiles. The government have announced a plan to restrict about half of the climbing routes without any meaningful engagement with the climbing community. I have many emails in my inbox from people devastated by this decision. Their emails consistently reflect their respect for the local Indigenous community but also for the land. These are people who also have a deep connection to this land. Maybe it does not go back hundreds of generations, but they know in very deep detail the exact shape of the mountain, where the handholds are and what it looks like as you are clinging to the rock face part way through a challenging climbing journey. They reference specific climbing routes, such as the Punks in the Gym climb, which held the title as the hardest climbing route in the world when first established. These are people that volunteer in track upkeep, environmental work and community building in the local area. Indeed some are so connected to this place that they have established themselves in the local town of Natimuk. Some of these people have included photos of themselves on the mountain. They highlight that the proposed closure of half of the routes does not capture the full impact, as some people have noted that all of the climbs they have done in recent years would be closed and others highlighted that the majority of the easy and challenging climbs will be banned. Many of these emails contain suggestions of how this could be better managed.

My request for the minister is to refer this matter to a select committee for a full inquiry that examines the economic, sporting, tourism and cultural heritage issues.

Gendered violence

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:36): (1259) My adjournment is to the Attorney-General. The action that I seek is for you to put aside every other issue sitting on your desk right now and actually do something to protect women in this state. Last week Xiaozheng Lin was sentenced to a maximum of 14 years in jail for the murder of two women in Melbourne in December 2022. He could be eligible for parole in as little as seven years due to a deal he struck with the Office of Public Prosecutions to accept guilty pleas for manslaughter rather than them pursuing him as the murderer that he is. This is an absolute disgrace. I do not care what job these women had. I do not care about the fact that this criminal had not had a girlfriend. I do not care about the fact that he was self-conscious about his limp. I do not care that he was angry and had his feelings hurt before he decided to murder these women. This is not good enough, and the OPP should be ashamed.

Eighty-one women have been killed this year by current or former partners – the most in six years. I have got news for this government: appointing a Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change is not going to cut it. Enacting the recommendations from the Victorian Law Reform Commission on stalking might help, though, to improve woman's health, or how about ensuring that violent murderers do not get time off their sentences purely because they were locked up during COVID? This government sat on the VLRC report for more than two years, and they still have not had the decency

to enact these recommendations or to even formally respond. These actions send a message about the importance that this government places on women's safety.

I find it staggering to see what issues this government chooses to rush through and what decisions this government chooses to continually delay. You steamrolled the process to protect the government because of the Lawyer X scandal, but you will not bring legislation to improve personal safety intervention orders into the Parliament until next year. What about prioritising real changes that will improve safety as opposed to minimising the trauma of the court system after somebody has been assaulted? I am sure that the Attorney and the Premier will be at the Walk Against Family Violence next week, but I am certain that everyone at that walk would forgive them for missing it if they were actually busy doing some work and making some changes that would make a difference out on the streets. Attorney, I just want you to do your job, and it is not too much to expect.

Sikh community

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (18:39): (1260) I wish to extend our best wishes to the Sikh community in Victoria, who celebrated Guru Nanak's birth anniversary at Parliament recently. This is a very special and spiritual time for the Sikh community, and we send our best wishes for Diwali as well. The Sikh community in Victoria continues to make a significant contribution to the life of our state. However, many Sikh community members are reporting that they are feeling increasingly unsafe and surveilled. Community leaders across the world are being targeted, and in a grave escalation, Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar was killed in British Columbia, Canada, last year. The US Department of Justice has also claimed that an Indian government official directed the attempted assassination of a Sikh community leader on US soil. Human rights activists are especially vulnerable in the current climate.

Many Sikh community members have expressed that they also feel unfairly targeted and blamed for some vandalism at Hindu temples that occurred prior to the recent referendum. The community has been feeling increasingly threatened by reports of possible foreign interference, extreme violence and attempts to obtain sensitive information about trade relationships and defence technology from authorities and politicians. The community is also seeking more information about the police investigation into vandalism of the temples. A freedom-of-information request in Queensland yielded valuable information for the community about who may have been responsible for the incidents. The action I am seeking from the Minister for Police is to provide the house with an update on what the Victorian government is doing to work with federal intelligence and policing agencies to monitor and protect the safety of Sikh Victorians.

Marine and coastal conservation

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (18:41): (1261) My matter today is for the Minister for Environment, and I ask the minister: how is the Allan Labor government supporting groups to protect and enhance Victoria's marine and coastal environments, ensuring we sustain these invaluable partnerships for the benefit of all Victorians? I would like to draw the attention of this chamber to the incredible work being done to protect and enhance Victoria's marine and coastal environments by everyday Victorians. Last Thursday on Wurundjeri country I had the privilege of representing the minister at the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council Awards. These awards honour the dedication of so many individuals and organisations committed to the sustainable management of our precious marine and coastal areas. The awards ceremony brought together a broad coalition of traditional owners, universities, Coastcare groups, management committees, not-for-profit organisations, local councils, state government agencies and even private landowners. This collaboration reflects the unique way Victorians work together to safeguard our natural resources.

Victoria is in fact blessed with over 2500 kilometres of coastline and around 10,000 square kilometres of marine waters, with more than 96 per cent of this coast on public land. I think that is a really important point to make. Our marine and coastal environment is central to the Victorian way of life, offering substantial environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits, not to mention its

remarkable natural beauty. Traditional owners play a crucial role in this effort, bringing a deep, enduring connection to country that informs and enhances our land and water management practices. Their knowledge and involvement is integral, ensuring that natural, cultural, material and spiritual values are woven into our stewardship of these areas.

Now in its 25th year, the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council Awards highlight the vital role of community partnerships in maintaining and strengthening the values of our marine and coastal environments for future generations. These awards recognised the outstanding contributions from those who work tirelessly to preserve our coastline. I extend a heartfelt congratulations to all award recipients for their exceptional achievements and offer my sincere appreciation to everyone involved in the protection and preservation of Victoria's coastlines.

Freedom of speech

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (18:43): (1262) My matter is for the attention of the Premier, and it concerns the impact on Victoria and Victorians of the Communications Legislation Amendment (Combating Misinformation and Disinformation) Bill 2024 at the Commonwealth level. This is obviously a Commonwealth piece of legislation, but it directly impacts freedom of speech in Victoria. This has a serious impact indeed on freedom of speech. It provides powers for the Australian Communications and Media Authority. It has now passed the House of Representatives and is in the Senate.

I think one of the more careful contributions was by Lorraine Finlay, the then head of the Australian Human Rights Commission, about the increased powers that are involved in this bill. Concerns have been expressed by a number of organisations, including the Bar Council and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance – serious concerns across the political spectrum. There are a number of concerns. One of them is that it is overly broad, and there are real questions about the definitions of misinformation and disinformation. There is also a low threshold for decision-making on this. There are definition issues concerning government, but I understand that that has been improved in the bill since this was initially brought forward. But most importantly, it concerns the handing-over of power to regulate digital content being granted to digital platforms and providers and, I might add, indirectly to the communications and media authority. Because they will have the power to regulate those bodies, they will ultimately have some whip hand, but the day-to-day decisions will be made by these digital platforms.

Let us think about who they are: YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Reddit. Who trusts any of those organisations to regulate free speech in Victoria, in Australia, today? I certainly do not. I have encountered extraordinary regulatory impacts on materials that I have personally tried to put out there. Facebook is an absolute and utter shocker. They are not even handed; they are not fair. You cannot even communicate with them half the time when something is troublesome or when they are trying to say, 'You can't do that.' If it is religious, they will go after it, I can tell you that for sure. These are not even-handed bodies, and really we need to make sure that there are proper protections for freedom of speech. This is fundamental to our constitution, it is fundamental to our freedoms and it is fundamental to Victoria, and I call on the Premier to intervene, speak to the federal government and stop this bill.

The PRESIDENT: It is not within the Premier's remit or her power to stop a federal bill.

David DAVIS: There is no question that she could do that. There are national cabinet meetings where she is able to intervene, and there is a long history. I could go back to the 1990s, when I raised matters in this Parliament about broadcasting. Broadcasting is actually not in the federal constitution. It is actually a power taken by the Commonwealth, but it impacts on all Victorians.

The PRESIDENT: I think you are sort of adding to your adjournment. I will take it into consideration. I think an action that we probably would have been able to accept this term is 'advocate to a federal counterpart'. I do not think she is going to do an action to stop a federal bill.

Native grasslands

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (18:47): (1263) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment in the other place. Victoria's native grasslands were once so abundant they covered much of the state, stretching uninterrupted from the border of South Australia to the centre of Melbourne. These temperate grasslands were rich in flora and home to countless species of marsupials, reptiles and insects. Now all but 1 per cent of these magnificent grasslands has been lost, along with the rich diversity of flora and fauna they once contained. Many native flower species are on the brink of extinction. The Derrinallum billy button, for instance, has only a single population remaining. The CFA used to maintain diverse collections of native grasses in much the same way as First Nations people did for millennia – through regular burnings – but CFA roadside burns are becoming less frequent, further risking what little remains. Much of the remaining grassland is in my region of Western Metropolitan Melbourne, but this is a statewide issue.

A recent audit of the Melbourne strategic assessment (MSA) program by the Grassy Plains Network and the Victorian National Parks Association makes clear that the government's flagship grassland conservation program is failing. Dr Adrian Marshall from the VNPA warned that:

... weeds and mismanagement are combining to destroy the very biodiversity values supposedly protected by this deal ... developers thrive while nature and native wildlife continue to suffer irreversible damage from every risk the government was warned about.

Recently the Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority used federal funding to produce seeds for 17 local threatened species, essentially establishing a seed bank. Seed banks are critical for the remediation of the grasslands as local nurseries are unable to provide large quantities of those rare species that are vital for maintaining the diversity of the grasslands. Given the MSA's role in repairing the Western Grasslands Reserve it makes sense that they have a lead role in strengthening the native seed industry. So the action I seek is for the minister to meet with stakeholders such as the Victorian National Parks Association to discuss the creation of a native seed bank in partnership with the MSA to help meet their goals of revegetating and reviving the western grasslands.

Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:49): (1264) The action I seek is from the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. Box Hill's recent community forum on the Suburban Rail Loop attracted 400 residents, all deeply invested in the future of our local area. This is what happens when a community mobilises. The strong turnout highlights a community deeply concerned about how this major project will impact their neighbourhoods. It is clear they feel their voices are not being heard, but they must be heard in shaping the outcome. The forum provided critical space for discussion on the SRL's potential impacts. The forum saw constructive exchanges with urban planners, transport experts and environmental advocates who addressed local concerns. Most of these residents had never heard from the SRL and felt that the SRL did not bother to consult them or care about their opinion.

The lack of information at this stage of proceedings is shocking, and you would have to question what communication benchmarks the management and board of the SRL have weighed through. It resulted, though, in about 150 questions being submitted to the forum. Many attendees raised valid concerns regarding the project's transparency and timelines and the impact on green spaces and neighbourhood character. They expressed shock at the prospect of high-density development in residential streets, the loss of cherished open space and the erosion of local planning controls. There was sheer incredulity that six-storey flats could be built in their streets, that heritage controls were going to be removed and that there was no right to objection – it feels unbelievable in 2024 in Victoria just to be saying that. And it was evident that while there was support for improving infrastructure, there was a strong desire for it to be done in a way that respects and preserves the unique character of our area and that respects and considers local voices.

High-rise development and density were not endorsed at the last election. Let us be 100 per cent clear: there is no mandate for this, and there will be democratic consequences for the local member and for

Labor in Box Hill, in Blackburn, in Burwood and in Glen Waverley for this policy. Therefore the action I seek from the minister is to try, if he can, to explain why the \$200 billion Suburban Rail Loop is being forced down the throats of locals in Box Hill, Burwood and Glen Waverley, without a mandate, for this scale of population densification. Minister, listen to the overwhelming support for returning planning power to the community while ultimately pausing the destructive Suburban Rail Loop.

Avian influenza

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:52): (1265) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action I seek is for her to provide detail on the process, including before and after, of the use of firefighting foam to kill birds. For the past two sitting weeks I have asked the minister to explain the methods of killing millions of chickens and ducks affected by avian influenza across seven farms in Victoria. It resulted in the minister admitting the unspeakable: the government, against the advice of leading vets, approved the use of firefighting foam on at least one farm in our state. I then had to go further to be provided more information by asking in the following sitting week how many birds and what species were killed by this method, and the answer was a staggering 30,000 ducks – 30,000 ducks were suffocated to death.

How one can believe that this is a suitable method for ducks, when they can hold their breath, is beyond me. After struggling to stay clear of the foam, these animals died slowly and painfully from either heatstroke or organ failure. We saw footage of ducks desperately trying to climb on top of each other to avoid being completely covered in foam, grasping at the barrier, trying to escape. The minister said the foam is designed to minimise the stress and suffering of the birds, and I implore the minister to watch the footage and reconsider whether this alleged aim was achieved.

Far be it for this government to take a proactive approach to this problem. Instead the preferred option is to kill millions and millions of affected animals, only for the disease to resurface because the conditions they caught it in remain exactly the same – responding only to the symptoms and never the cause. The scientific evidence has long been laid out before us. It is high density and extreme close confinement in factory farming that poses the greatest threat to our biosecurity and is responsible for the spread and emergence of zoonotic diseases. I also asked the minister to explain the environmental considerations in using the foam, but the minister was silent on this, and it leads me to wonder what chemicals are in this foam and how the birds are disposed of, particularly at a time when the federal government is banning forever chemicals.

There is so little we know on the process of the use of foam, be it from getting the ducks into the area they need to be in and the time it takes until they are all dead to the disposal method – and we will be seeing this method used more and more in the future. So the action I seek is for the minister to explain in depth the full process of this heinous slaughter method being used in Victoria.

Housing

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:55): (1266) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing regarding the delay in accessing social housing due to extensive waiting lists. The action I seek is for the minister to consider my constituent's concern and ensure she will get into social housing and will not be homeless. I recently received correspondence from Rebekah Montana, a constituent who detailed her fear about her current housing situation. Rebekah has recently spent five months homeless, living on the street. She has two children, who are nine and three. The nine-year-old has special needs for autism. Rebekah is listed as being at the highest priority for social housing due to her situation. After being homeless for five months, through the support of the Melbourne City Mission she recently moved into a transitional home in Footscray. However, the transitional home lease is only for 12 months, and Rebekah and her kids only have 10 months left on the lease. She is extremely worried about the long waiting lists for social housing and that she could be facing homelessness once the lease expires. Rebekah has not received any communication from the department regarding a permanent social housing solution for her and her children, despite making constant calls and attempting to get in touch with housing support workers.

Unfortunately, Rebekah is not alone. Recent data released by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing shows that in the 2023–24 reporting period the housing waiting list time went up 20 months per applicant, nearly 88 per cent above the government’s target and a 33 per cent increase from two years ago. Additionally, social housing complexes across Melbourne are reported to have 40 per cent vacancy rates, with suburbs such as Prahran, Brighton and Flemington experiencing particularly high levels of vacancy. Minister, we have high vacancy rates across the state with this added pressure on social housing demand. What is stopping the department from providing my constituent and other people like Rebekah who are on the priority list for housing a roof over their head, as they deserve? We cannot have vulnerable people playing the waiting game for up to 10 years while their families are being torn apart. These people need closure now, so I ask the minister: when will this Allan Labor government listen to the concerns of Victorians like my constituent and get them into the social housing that they desperately deserve? Social housing is not just a right, it is a right that the government must deliver for all Victorians.

Middle East conflict

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:58): (1267) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Premier, and the action that I seek is for the Labor government to condemn the recent words of former Premier Daniel Andrews with regard to LGBTQIA+ pro-Palestine protesters. As a queer person I am disgusted by the assertion that queer people should not be standing against the violence being inflicted upon Palestinian civilians. Being a member of a marginalised community does not rob me of my empathy. It does not rob me of my humanity. If anything, it makes me more empathetic to victims of violence. Recently the former Premier Daniel Andrews said, ‘Try wearing that rainbow T-shirt in Gaza and see how that works out for you,’ a sentiment echoed by others in this place, I will add, some to my very face. To anyone who dares to belittle a queer person for standing in solidarity with Palestine I would like to state the obvious: the state of Israel is bombing homes, bombing hospitals and bombing schools right now, and many of those being killed are queer Palestinians. These civilians are dying together as Palestinians because Israeli bombs do not differentiate by LGBTQIA+ status. It is not for Daniel Andrews to speak on behalf of me and my community and tell us who we should stand in solidarity with. I stand in solidarity with the innocent families whose lives are being torn apart by crimes perpetrated by this Israeli government.

I stand in solidarity with the queer rights movement in the Middle East and with the queer people whose lives have been torn apart by this violence. Queer liberation cannot be achieved while people are suffering a genocide. The queer rights movement will always stand with peace and nonviolence and should never be appropriated to justify war crimes. The pro-Palestine movement is a place welcoming of anyone standing against genocide and for anyone who understands that civilians always pay the highest price in war. The Greens will always stand for peace and nonviolence, and while these comments were made by the former Premier, the actions of the current Labor government have made it clear it plans to continue his legacy.

Child protection

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:00): (1268) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Children, the Honourable Lizzie Blandthorn. It relates to the most vulnerable cohort in our society in Victoria, and that is children in the foster care, kinship care and child protection sector. We know from the Foster Care Association of Victoria – and indeed there is a newly formed Friends of Foster Care Association in this Parliament, showing the interest that MPs have in this region – from data from their recent survey, that new carer households are falling. Over the past 12 months there have been 12 per cent less. We know from that same survey that foster carers in the system are leaving the system at an alarming rate and not being replaced.

One of the foster carers who has walked the walk, talked the talk and lived the life – and lives her life for foster care and kinship care families and their children, the most vulnerable children – is A Better Life for Foster Kids’ Heather Baird. Heather is an angel. She is a good woman, and she hails from

Gippsland. She constantly raises the issues, and I would like to bring them to the attention of the minister. The minister has met with me and Heather Baird in the past, and the action I seek from the minister is to meet with her again, because again the system is suffering, the system is broken and the system must be improved, and Heather has that wealth of knowledge.

Some of the comments that Heather would like to discuss with Minister Blandthorn relate to the child protection system, and they look like this: there should be a mentoring system for all child protection workers for at least two years as they enter into the system so that they can actually gain experience. We hear horror stories about how families just feel that those caseworkers are not doing the right thing, are not well experienced and do not understand either the act, the child or the foster care family. When children enter the system there should be a respite carer for at least 48 hours so the child entering the system – or when a placement has broken down – is lodged and safe for at least 48 hours so that there can be proper planning to assess that child and their needs. Carers should be properly informed of the history of the child being placed in their care. For many placements the child is dumped on the carer's front doorstep and they do not have an understanding of that child's history or their medical needs. Also there should be specialised carers of victims of sexual abuse so that the children are really getting their needs met by the foster carers who take them on and support them to the nth degree. These are my requests: for the minister to meet with Heather Baird and have those fulsome discussions to better support our children in need.

Young mothers transition program

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:04): (1269) My adjournment today is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek from the minister is to sustain and increase ongoing funding for the young mothers transition program, the YMTP, which is set to fold at the end of this year when all funds to support it are gone. I recently had the privilege of meeting with the remaining educational case manager for the program, whose passion and commitment to her work and the local women was evident. The young mothers transition program has assisted young mothers from as young as 13 until they are about 22 or marginally older. Predominantly the dried-up funding focused on helping young women parents who are under the age of 18 years to continue their education. This has been happening in Melbourne's south-east region, for which I am a member of Parliament. Out of less than 50 programs in Australia the young mothers transition program is the only program – I want to repeat that: the only program – in the whole of Australia that combines wellbeing, emotional and practical support for new young mothers with educational support to empower future employment and to help them to finish school or get some sort of education. All of the other programs in Australia have identified they are working in silos and recognise the importance of having the opportunity to provide young parents with both school education and vocational employment support with transitional parenting support, which also includes wellbeing, emotional and practical support.

The south-east region experiences low year 12 completion rates, at 16.9 per cent, and in many areas the south-east has one of the highest unemployment rates. Many young mothers lack family and support networks for education and employment, and teenage mothers are a vulnerable population at risk of social and economic disadvantage. According to studies like Egan et al, 2020, unplanned pregnancies are associated with low educational attainment, and this can put families into a situation where it is difficult for them to be a parent when they are a teenager. Teenagers who choose to keep their babies struggle to continue their education and look after their babies, and their challenges compound if they do not have the appropriate support networks.

The young mothers transition program was launched in 2022 to bridge the gap between education and employment for young mothers. It has a case management model that works alongside the parents in the YPEP program – that is, the young parents education program. It aligns the education and employment goals of young mothers while also assisting with appropriate referrals and links to additional services. Case managers work with each young parent to identify their individual support requirements to help them as they need, and the support from the transition coach, the educator or the

teacher allows the young parent to focus on learning while they are also having someone helping them with their personal needs. I highly recommend this program continues, and it needs to be funded.

Loddon Shire Council mobile phone coverage

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (19:07): (1270) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Government Services. The people of Loddon have been let down by this Labor government. In the lead-up to the 2022 state election the now member for Ripon promised better mobile connectivity to the community. She said that a huge part of securing economic development for their towns rests on mobile connectivity, which is why the state Labor government is delivering Connecting Victoria, a \$550 million project to boost connectivity to over 700 rural and regional sites. She said this project will unlock economic growth in the region by improving mobile connection and internet speeds in Inglewood, Wedderburn, Bridgewater and many other areas across the Loddon shire.

I note with interest that it has been less than two years and we have seen a monumental backflip on this important election commitment. Last month a community meeting was convened in Newbridge. Locals were frustrated at the lack of action by the state government in providing mobile internet connectivity. The office manager of the member for Ripon attended the meeting and read out a statement. In part it read that based on recent updated analysis she was then advised that the projects do not provide the direct mobile improvements they had anticipated. Basically what this means is that Labor have broken their promise to provide better connectivity to the Loddon community, but is anyone actually surprised by this? Labor do not care about country people, they do not care about regional communities and they do not care when they break promises. It is this smug, arrogant approach that characterises Labor promises. They are all full of fluff and bluster, but when the rubber hits the road nothing actually happens, so the action I seek from the minister is this: do something to fix connectivity in the Loddon shire area.

But instead Labor spend big on city-centric projects – \$212 billion for the Suburban Rail Loop, and we cannot even get mobile connection in rural areas, let alone other broken promises. Where is the money promised for the old Beaufort Primary School? Nothing is there at all. Where are the improvements to the Western Highway? All we see are potholes. Country health services continue to suffer. CFA volunteers are deserting the service. You are even taxing people that are dying now – and dead. Locals continue to be slugged with tax after tax after tax after tax after tax. All Labor cares about is winning the election at any cost, and all Victorians pay for it. Well, one thing is clear: Labor only care about power, and they do not care about people, especially country people.

Health services

Georgie Crozier (Southern Metropolitan) (19:10): (1271) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health. Last week the quarterly figures finally were released by the government, the Victorian Agency for Health Information data, which is done every quarter, and they show that there is an ongoing crisis within the health system. Three out of 10 patients who presented to public hospital emergency departments were not treated within the recommended time. Planned surgery waiting lists are up 7 per cent, yet 9881 patients were removed from planned surgery waiting lists. Category 2 patients are currently waiting on average an extra 205 days for surgery, while category 3 patients are waiting an extra 340 days. Just 10.5 per cent of adults were transferred from an emergency department to a bed within 8 hours in some hospitals, and patients waiting for urgent dental care are waiting on average nearly an additional month compared to last quarter.

For the fifth quarter in a row the government has failed to report on the high and low risks of dental care in children, and they should be urgent priorities. Children should be urgent, because if you do not address those dental needs in children, the dysfunction, the damage and the ongoing pain and infection from dental caries and related symptoms can cause real distress for young people. It is incredibly important that they are dealt with. The Dental Health Services Victoria statement of priorities 2022–23 states that the statewide target waiting time for general care in dental care is 23 months. Twenty-three months is too long to wait for care, and that does not include the time people are required to wait to

put their name back on a waiting list. After a course of general care they might get a treatment plan. They are then deemed to be non-priority patients and they are put back on a waitlist, so their actual treatment is extended even further. They are on the bottom of the waiting list, adding an extra 12 months of waiting time which is not counted in the official statistics.

I am raising these issues because the government are out there spruiking that they are improving the health outcomes for Victorians. They just are not. It is clear that the situation is deteriorating further. There is real concern amongst health services, particularly those that are working in the area of dental care. The question I have for the minister is, as has been posed by the Australian Dental Association's Victorian branch: why does the government set wait-time targets that are clinically unacceptable, meaning people are waiting longer? They are put on the bottom of waitlists – they are extended waitlists – and they would like that question answered.

Mount Arapiles rock climbing

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (19:13): (1272) My adjournment is for the urgent action of the Minister for Environment, and it relates to the ill-considered and economically disastrous decision by the government, through Parks Victoria, to ban rock climbing at the world-famous Mount Arapiles in Natimuk. Under the cover of the Melbourne Cup, just like the death tax by stealth, this week Parks Victoria, at the direction of this Labor government, chose to announce a decision which has devastated the local community by putting at risk jobs in tourism, as reported, and the safety and viability of the town itself.

Climbing Mount Arapiles is a thoroughly enjoyable activity enjoyed by locals, Victorians and those from abroad. Hundreds of global tourists flock to the mountain to climb the reported 2000 unique routes. Many residents from across my electorate have contacted me, and I am sure have contacted Labor MPs as well, to express their concern about this ban and also to say how much they enjoy this great recreational activity. Even Parks Victoria's own website still states that Mount Arapiles is much loved and sees many thousands of visitors annually. The decision by this Labor government goes against the Premier's previous statements that national parks should be enjoyed by all. Conservation is important, as is respecting heritage and history, and the best way to do that is to find the right balance – not raise the white flag – between cultural claims and the needs of the community today to allow the economic and tourism benefits the respect that they deserve.

Another concern raised by locals, as reported by the *Herald Sun* last week, is a potential loss of professionals, including health professionals, who have moved to the region for the amenity and active lifestyle that access to national parks allows, who may move back to Melbourne. To quote the article:

Natimuk farmer Brian Klowss said he feared white-collar workers would flee, including several doctors and teachers.

'We can't afford to lose these people ...

The decision by Parks Victoria, an agency under the control of the Minister for Environment, has the potential to cost jobs and ruin livelihoods. Many constituents have written to me and called my office regarding this decision, including Nicholas Leong from Brunswick West in my electorate, who said:

The climbing community is ready to work alongside the Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria to create a management plan that honours both the cultural importance of the area and the unique climbing heritage that has developed over decades.

We have seen this before with duck hunting, where after my forum with 400 locals and an open letter to the Premier the Premier backflipped. I would like to see another backflip from the Premier, and I would like to let the minister know that we will not be letting this go but will continue to stand up for this community.

Mount Arapiles rock climbing

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (19:16): (1273) My adjournment matter is also for the Minister for Environment and concerns the devastating attack on climbers in Victoria announced in the Mount Arapiles management plan. Sadly, I do not have time tonight to do justice to the wideranging, sustained and hostile attack on rock climbing run by this government and its activist staff and agencies in recent years. I have raised it many times here before. They blame climbers for cultural heritage damage perpetrated by their own staff. They deny access to routes, fail to respond to questions, are dismissive of all dealings with the community, but – and I know this is what hurts climbers most – they fundamentally misunderstand, mischaracterise and demonise climbers. Climbers are cultural custodians; no-one is more aware of the landscapes they love.

This ban was cynically announced at 5 pm the day before a public holiday in the week of the American election. There is no way that timing was necessary or accidental. The consultation was non-existent. The peak body for climbing in Victoria, the Australian Climbing Association of Victoria, was blindsided. Parks Victoria claim that the Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network (GWRN) provided a climbing perspective, yet the Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network admit:

We did not act on behalf of the climbing community or claim to act as ‘consultation’ ...

There was the usual political spin: a one-off \$1.7 million investment in facilities, which will in no way compensate for the massive loss every single year when the 50,000 visitors dry up. This was worth \$12 million to the economy in 2019. With half the routes gone, including the internationally famous crags and the best climbs for beginners, it is a real root-and-branch attack. The government’s media release claims that the area will instead become a cultural destination. This is despite the fact that none of the cultural heritage assessments have been released. The fact is there are no pictures or images circulated and there is an extremely limited amount of visible examples of rock art. Some believe there is none at all. It is going to be the world’s most disappointing tourist attraction. Yes, there are extensive stone quarry complexes, but these are hard rock and have been there for decades undamaged by visitors. Route diversion, mitigation and limited closures would have been welcomed by climbers, but this ban is draconian, unnecessary, unjustified.

I ask the minister to order the immediate release of the cultural heritage assessments and the GWRN’s advice to Barengi Gadjin Land Council. These are not personal or commercially confidential. Moreover, they are publicly financed and have significant consequences for Victorians. They should be released for public scrutiny immediately.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the minister, I have a concern with Mr Puglielli’s adjournment. It falls within Mr Davis’s adjournment to some degree. I am going to review both of those adjournment matters. I am referring to a ruling of President Elasmir, which is actually a very good ruling as far as advocating to the federal government goes, which is that it is an acceptable action if the member can show a direct link to state services and state administration. Mr Puglielli, we are going to review it, but I reckon it is not going through. Mr Davis may have linked to state services, but I will review that.

Responses

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (19:20): Subject to your deliberations on those matters, President, there were 18 adjournment matters, possibly 16 after you review them, to 12 separate ministers. Written responses will be sought in accordance with standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7:20 pm.